In academic circles one of the commonest ways to begin an essay on *The Winter's Tale* is to raise the question of classification, to which one of the commonest answers is that the play is a kind of tragicomedy, more or less after the manner of Beaumont and Fletcher and very likely designed for performance at Blackfriars. This is at best only half an answer, of course, but probably as good an answer as the question deserves. It is certainly true that many things about *The Winter's Tale* remind one of the kind of tragicomedy which became popular with Jacobean audiences after 1610, and it is reasonable to suppose that the Jacobeans themselves, in retrospect at least, thought of Shakespeare's play as an early specimen of that form. Nevertheless, Shakespeare's startling restoration of Hermione in the last scene, together with his relegation of the reunion of Perdita and Leontes to a narration by three gentlemen, marks a shift of emphasis in the development of his plot that probably disturbed some members of the original Jacobean audience almost as much as it has worried modern scholars. We normally expect a tragicomedy to begin with a dubious situation, very much like the initial situation of a classical farce, then move through a series of situations more or less connected causally, in the general direction of disaster, and finally as the result of an unexpected intervention or revelation end in general happiness, or at least in a round of poetic justice. That is, we normally expect to find a large element of surprise in the denouement of a tragicomic plot; but we do not expect such a plot to move, as *The Winter's Tale* does, toward what promises to be a perfectly satisfactory denouement, bypass that lightly,
and then proceed to a gratuitous miracle so completely arresting that it overshadows everything that has gone before.

A look at Shakespeare's source for the play, Robert Greene's popular *Pandosto*, suggests no explanation at all for this seeming caprice in plotting. In Greene's novel the character who corresponds to Shakespeare's Hermione actually dies, and the narrative moves on without impediment to a climactic meeting between father and daughter. Greene, of course, represented this meeting as something considerably less than happy, having the ageing but lustful king, ignorant of the girl's identity, first woo his daughter with unbecoming ardor and then kill himself out of remorse. Shakespeare's efforts toward removing such unpleasant features as these from his own version of the story are understandable, and we can be grateful to him for making them. For that matter, we can be grateful to him for deciding to spare the lovely thing he himself made of Hermione; but our gratitude need not blind us to the fact that nothing in the plot required him to spare her. And nothing in Greene's narrative provides any real answer to the tantalizing question: Why did Shakespeare go out of his way to let Hermione return after being presumed dead for sixteen years?

The only halfway satisfactory answer that has been advanced so far is that Shakespeare somehow meant his play to be taken as a parable of sin and redemption with Hermione serving as a sort of vague symbol for divine grace. There is much in the play to support this thesis—for example, Hermione's identification of her acceptance of Leontes's suit with grace in Act I, Scene ii:

> My last good deed was to entreat his [Polixenes's] stay; What was my first? It has an elder sister, Or I mistake you. O, would her name were Grace! But once before I spoke to th' purpose; when? Nay, let me have 't; I long. *Leontes.* Why, that was when Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clap thyself my love, then didst thou utter,
"I am yours for ever."

_Hermione._ 'Tis grace indeed.

(I, ii, 97-105)

Admittedly, Hermione is being playful here, but there is at least
as much justice as playfulness in her remark. For if it was as
grace that she came to Leontes in his innocent youth and so re-
mained with him until he, blinded by his own wilful error, cast her
off, it was certainly as divine grace that she returned at last to
take him up again when his hope of justification had completely
melted away. At any rate, Leontes himself is prepared to call
her that when in the last act he looks at what he thinks is a statue:

_Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed
Thou are Hermione; or rather, thou art she
In thy not chiding, for she was as tender
As infancy and grace._

(V, iii, 24-7)

Grace, then, is the theme of the play, according to this thesis; and
Shakespeare’s last scene is necessary to complete the exploration
of that theme. Thus we have an interpretation that even the most
conservative of us can accept. We may suppose either that
Shakespeare began with his theme and shaped Greene’s tragicomic
fable to fit it, or perhaps that he simply set out to dramatize
Greene’s fable and somewhere along the way found that he had
been drawing unconsciously upon a doctrinal pattern so in-
extricably woven into the contemporary fabric of belief that even
the barest hint of it in the material he was working on could make
it operative. In any case, we can be confident that only a very
devious dialectician would ever attempt to disprove the connection
between Hermione and that Christian grace which comes not so
much as the result of man's deserving it as of man's contrition and willingness to receive.

The unfortunate thing about this conservative approach to *The Winter's Tale* is not that it heads in the wrong direction (the direction seems to be right), but that it betrays a timidity unworthy of its object, to say nothing of a willingness to stop short just as the exploration begins to get really interesting and profitable. There is something far more interesting in this play than a correspondence between Hermione and divine grace, and that something is her correspondence to the incarnation of divine grace, Jesus Christ. This does not mean that Hermione *stands for* Christ or serves as an allegory for Christ in the sense that an anchor in an emblem may, but rather that she has the status of a lesser incarnation. That is, the manifestation of grace in her is so discernible as an imperfect realization of that quality which is perfectly manifested in the Son of God that we are led to see in her simple acts of forgiveness the pale but unmistakable reflection of His mercy and redeeming love. We see this, moreover, not merely because true forgiveness is always Christlike, but because the whole world of the play in which Hermione appears is involved with her in this lesser incarnation: all the principal characters and events with which she is associated share her recognizable status and correspond analogically, though imperfectly, to characters, institutions, and events associated historically with the perfect Incarnation.

This is obviously not the same as saying that we are to look upon *The Winter's Tale* as the setting forth, conscious or unconscious, of an abstractly formulated theological pattern. It suggests rather that we look upon it in much the same way as many of Shakespeare's old-fashioned contemporaries still looked upon stories from the Old Testament, especially those from *Genesis*. For in sixteenth-century England many Christians were still able to regard the *Genesis* stories as lesser, anticipatory incarnations analogous to such events as Christ's sacrifice on the
cross, His resurrection, and His promised Second Coming; they could do this because they had not lost the habit of thinking of Old Testament history as an important part of God's whole revelation to mankind and hence could see in it a limited manifestation of that cosmic context which achieved maximum intelligibility with the Incarnation. In Shakespeare's time such an attitude towards Scripture was already becoming a bit antiquated, but it was by no means rare; and it tended then, as always, to incline those who held it to look in any narrative or event for an imperfect realization of something that professional theologians try to formulate—namely, the anagoge. Thus it also led them to consider a narrative or an event as significant in an ultimate sense only in proportion as they could think of it as somehow comparable to that perfect realization in the one complete point of contact between earth and heaven. The principal purpose of this essay is to show how such an attitude or habit of mind helped determine the shape of the fable in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and gave that fable a unified action and meaning. Before turning to the play, we might do well to examine the attitude itself a bit more closely and consider some of its implications.

II

Scripture itself provides abundant authority for looking upon the events of Old Testament story as a succession of foreshadowings (for example, the eleventh chapter of *Hebrews*); and upon that authority the early Church Fathers laid the foundations of an exegetical tradition which by the end of the twelfth century had produced numerous "systems" of interpretation and a fantastic amount of detailed commentary. It also became popular. In Tudor times one had only to be able to see or hear to be exposed to manifestations of "allegorical interpretation," as it was called—in church windows, in inexpensive block-books, and in sermons—even though this was an age in which professional
exegetes had all but abandoned the tradition that had brought such popular manifestations into being. The clearest exposition of the principles behind this tradition is to be found in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas (Pars 1, Q. I, Art. 10). The schema for allegorical interpretation presented there is the familiar fourfold one of letter, allegory, trope, and anagoge, which today even casual students of medieval literature know, if not from reading St. Thomas's version, at least from reading Dante's references to it (in the *Convivio* and the *Epistle to Can Grande*) or perhaps the little Latin quatrain sometimes attributed to Nicholas of Lyra:

> Littera gesta docet,
> Quid credas allegoria,
> Moralis quid agas,
> Quo tendas anagogia.

Several years ago William Troy suggested that the thing most in order for modern criticism was a "thoroughgoing refurbishment" of this schema as a tool. More recently Francis Fergusson, working with Shakespeare as well as Dante, and Allen Tate, working with a poem by Donne, have made ingenious and fruitful applications of it—though in so doing both of these critics departed somewhat from the strict metaphysical relationship which the schema represented for St. Thomas, who moreover limited his application of it to Scripture. Departures as fruitful as these, of course, are to be welcomed. There is no point at all in insisting that modern critics imitate historical scholars and go to school to St. Thomas before they attempt to use the fourfold method. When you come right down to it, the principle of *multiplex intelligentia* is neither Christian nor medieval in origin, and during its long association with Christianity it has found effective expression in many schemata. Even in the thirteenth century there were many versions of the one St. Thomas recognized. Nevertheless, there is a good deal to be said for St. Thomas's
beautifully precise exposition of the fourfold method as he understood it, especially as regards the clarity with which the concept of poetry implicit in it comes through; and it serves admirably to bring into focus that aspect of Shakespeare's plays with which we are dealing.

St. Thomas begins his discussion with the literal sense of Scripture, which he considers the subject of much misunderstanding. The literal sense, he explains, is not the text of Scripture but the concrete object, "that which is figured" by the text. (Drama, of course, avoids the difficulty of an intervening text, since the text of drama, unlike that of narrative, is itself an aspect of the concrete object.) "When Scripture speaks of God's arm, the literal sense is not that God has such a member, but only what is signified by this member, namely operative power." Thus upon what is signified, upon what is figured, pointed to, depend whatever spiritual meanings the passage may have. If we like, we may say that the literal meaning is that which exists in time or which is time—in short, history itself. At the other end of the scale, there is the anagogical sense, which, though it includes time, is not bound by time. This is the Logos that transcends time—being simultaneously (to use the time-bound adverb) Alpha and Omega. Mediating between these two is allegory, which is both in time and out of it, and is at once the means whereby the anagoge manifests itself in time and the means whereby time becomes significant. Allegory, as St. Thomas defines it, is the meeting place of the temporal and the eternal, the intelligible center, the Word made flesh. Thus through that allegory we know all that we can ever know of anagoge, or God in the person of the Father; and without that allegory even history would be meaningless for us. Without it, indeed, history would not exist at all.

Allegory in this sense is also the point from which Scripture derives its trope or moral sense. To go back to St. Thomas's explanation: "...so far as the things done in Christ, or so far as the things which signify Christ, are types of what we ought to do,
there is the moral sense.” We are not bound by the letter of the Old Law, for that law was fulfilled in Christ. We are bound instead by the allegory of the Law, which is the type of what we under grace ought to do. This is simply another way of saying that Christians live by Christ and reject utterly the attempt to live either directly by ultimate truth or by any other symbol of it. Allegory is the center for all we know or can ever know as human beings—the meaning of history, the pattern of right action, and the reflection of truth, which even yet we see but as in the dark surface of an ancient mirror.

This is why it is misleading, unless we happen to be talking about certain kinds of mysticism, to use the common phrase “four levels” to refer to the four senses. What St. Thomas has in mind is nothing like a stairway. A better analogy would be that of a single wheel rotating upon an axle. We might think of the axle as Scripture, or history, pointing to the hub and existing solely for the sake of the wheel. The hub can be said to be Christ or allegory, which reproduces the shape of the axle and bears upon it. Radiating from that hub are spokes, the multifarious ramifications of trope, deriving their force and meaning from the hub and leading to the rim, or anagoge, which encompasses the whole. Such an analogy is imperfect, certainly, but it is better than the customary one of four levels. At least it is better for us, who come to the whole schema with no understanding of the tradition behind it, no feeling for it, and little or no preparation in theology. And it has the advantage of putting the Incarnation at the intelligible center, the point of turning, where it belongs.

The unlettered audiences of our earliest vernacular plays, the fourteenth-century cycles, understood the substance of all this well enough. We may be sure that they did not concern themselves with the various twofold, threefold, and fourfold explanations of multiplex intelligentia. But they did know that the New Testament was written large in the Old and that future
glory was manifest in the Incarnation of the Gospels. In short, they understood that in the text “I am the way, and the truth, and the light,” is all that man on earth can know and needs to know. The secularization of the cycles, which, in their Old Testament plays at least, had employed allegorical interpretation of Scripture, provided an inadvertent but positive step in the direction of secular application of the schema. For here were popular plays, standing almost at the beginning of one of the greatest dramatic literatures the world has seen, asking to be looked upon as history, allegory, trope, and anagoge, all in one. It was inevitable, then, that with the increasing secularization of literature in the Renaissance some writers and readers should bring to a more naturalistic fiction, if not the formal schema of fourfold interpretation, at least the presuppositions upon which that schema rested. That is, it should become possible for some poets to look at a story from Greek or Roman myth or a story of Italian domestic life or an incident from history as potentially having significance, though perhaps not authority, analogous to the fables of Scripture—as being in some sense an incarnation of truth rather than an exposition of it.

One must be careful here to say some writers, some poets, and some readers. Admittedly, almost any Christian in any age will be willing to acknowledge that to some extent the events and objects of this world provide analogies with, or imperfect incarnations of, divine actions; yet it can hardly be said that writers generally even in sixteenth-century England went around looking for such things in the subjects of their poems, tales, and plays. The evidence that Shakespeare did, however, appears throughout his work, from first to last, and with increasing frequency in the things he wrote after 1600. G. Wilson Knight (in his Principles of Shakespearian Production, London, 1936) has gone so far as to say that in Shakespearian tragedy the “unique act of the Christ sacrifice can... be felt as central” and that “Shakespear’s final plays celebrate the victory and glory, the resurrection and re-
newal, that in the Christian story and in its reflection in Christian ritual succeed the sacrifice.” This is closer to the truth than a good many modern scholars are willing to acknowledge. Profitable as it is to consider Shakespeare’s plays as studies in human relations or as reflections of the Elizabethan world picture, we are lingering on the periphery when we limit our attention to such matters. Fundamentally Shakespeare’s plays are explorations of mythic fragments, whereby the movement of the fable at hand, whether from English history, Roman history, Italian novella, or English fabliau, is revealed as participating by analogy in an action which, from the poet’s point of view, is Christian, divine, and eternal. *The Winter’s Tale* is one of the most striking cases in point.

III

When an interpretation of a play is to turn upon allegory, the best place to begin is at some passage in which the allegory tends to become explicit. There are several such passages in *The Winter’s Tale*, but the most interesting is probably that in Act III, Scene ii, in which Hermione, replying to Leontes’s invitation to “feel our justice,” delivers this speech (the italics are, of course, my own):

> Sir, spare your threats.
> *The bug which you would fright me with I seek;*
> To me can life be no commodity.
> *The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,*
> I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
> But know not how it went. *My second joy*
> *And first-fruits of my body, from his presence*
> *I am barr’d, like one infectious. My third comfort,*
> Starr’d most unluckily, is from my breast,
> The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,
> *Hal’d out to murder; myself on every post*
> *Proclaim’d a strumpet; with immodest hatred*
> The child-bed privilege deni’d, which longs
Shakespeare's allegory

To women of all fashion; lastly, hurried
Here to this place, ’t’ th' open air, before
I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
That I should fear to die? Therefore proceed.
But yet hear this: mistake me not; no life,
I prize it not a straw; but for mine honour,
Which I would free,—if I shall be condemn’d
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
’Tis rigour and not law. Your honours all,
I do refer me to the oracle:
Apollo be my judge!

Reading these lines with special attention to those in italics makes it hard to avoid the notion that Shakespeare himself, either while working with the passage or on looking back at it afterwards, saw emerging from it the central analogy, or allegory, of the play. Hermione, refusing to fear the death that is offered her as a form of justice, proclaimed a strumpet on every post, and hurried into a place in the open air before she has her strength—all this should suggest readily enough, even to a modern reader, the familiar career of Jesus from Gethsemane to Golgotha. But what of the other details? What of Leontes, the crown and comfort of her life; Mamillus, the firstfruits of her body, from whom she is barred; and Perdita, her third comfort, innocent yet haled out to murder? If these cannot be linked to Hermione as part of the central allegory, there is not much point in pursuing our inquiry further. Merely to find a Christlike character, however interesting, in a play or story is not to find in it the kind of allegory we are dealing with here; for that kind of allegory requires that the fable as a whole, or at least the essential parts of it, participate by analogy with the Incarnation in a universal action. But Leontes, Mamillus, and Perdita do participate with Hermione in such an action; and they participate in it recognizably
for us, once we have accustomed our eyes to the only light which can enable us to see it.

There is some help available to that end in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, which deal with the historical realization of that course of redemption which constitutes the action, or anagoge, of this play. If we are willing to grant that Hermione the redeemer is St. Paul’s Christ who saves by grace (Romans, XI, 5-6), we shall have little difficulty in seeing that the appropriate allegory for Leontes is the Jew, whom St. Paul declared it was his heart’s desire to see saved (X, 1). It was Leontes, remember, who first paid court to grace and first on earth received it; and it was he who learned through the bitter process of stumbling, jealous fury, and alienation the meaning of that paragon he had previously taken for granted as his legal right. This is precisely the course that St. Paul predicted for the disinherited Jew: “And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (XI, 9-11). Following this line of interpretation, we arrive naturally at the following allegories for Mamillus and Perdita. Mamillus, who dies, suggests the Jewish church, beloved of Christ but ultimately denied to him, for—from the Christian point of view—that church died upon the cross; while Perdita, who is consistently referred to as the heir in the play, suggests the true Church, rejected, “hal’d out to murder” even in infancy, yet destined to survive, be grafted on to alien stock, and provide the occasion of that general reconciliation which precedes the general outpouring of grace at the end.

It is important to use the word “suggests” here. The kind of absolute correspondence, traceable point by point through every
line of a poem, that is sometimes used as a criterion by academic
allegory hunters is not a characteristic of this play—or, for that
matter, of any really respectable literary work. A play, after all,
is a literary symbol, not a mathematical equation; and such
 correspondences as may appear in the finished piece are at first
discovered rather than wrought—by the author as well as by the
reader. In fact, a reader may discover, quite properly, a good
many things in a work that the author himself has never seen.
The correspondences noted here, however, between the Pauline
outline of the course of redemption and the general pattern of
_The Winter's Tale_, were surely part of Shakespeare's own com-
prehension of the play. It is even conceivable that his recognition
began with that rough suggestion of Calvary in Hermione's
speech in Act III, and that it was his exploration of the impli-
cations in that climactic speech that led him ultimately to see the
whole allegory—to see even in the initial situation in Act I a neat
parallel to the situation of mankind at the time of Christ, when
in a world divided into Jew and Gentile the promised Messiah,
having come to the Jew first, made invitation to his brother also.

Be that as it may, in Act I as we now have it the parallel comes
pretty close to being explicit; and with the help of the insight
that enables us to see Hermione as a type of the Christ we grasp
it almost as soon as the principals make their entrance in Scene ii.
Here Polixenes's polite refusal of his hostess's entreaty to stay
provides the occasion. "I may not, verily," he says. And
Hermione's reply, playing upon that "verily" with its Biblical
associations, tap at our recollection until the door is ajar:

Verily!
You put me off with limber vows; but I,
Though you would seek to unsphere the stars with oaths,
Should yet say, "Sir, no going." Verily,
You shall not go; a lady's "Verily",
As potent as a lord's. Will you go yet?
Force me to keep you as a prisoner,
Not like a guest? So shall you pay your fees
When you depart, and save your thanks. How say you?
My prisoner or my guest? By your dread "Verily,"
One of them you shall be.

(I, ii, 46-55)

Thus, after Polixenes has delivered the following familiar description of himself and Leontes in their youth, the way is clear for the flood of recognition to begin:

We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' th' sun,
And bleat the one at th' other. What we chang'd
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, no, nor dream'd
That any did. Had we pursu'd that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
With stronger blood, we should have answer'd Heaven
Boldly, "Not guilty"; the imposition clear'd
Hereditary ours.

(I, ii, 76-74)

From this we proceed to Polixenes's description of their "fall," Hermione's identification of herself with grace, her successful persuasion of Polixenes to stay in Bohemia, and finally her pronouncement upon her own acceptance of Leontes's suit, "Tis grace indeed." Such hints as these must have enabled at least some members of Shakespeare's audience to grasp, at the start, the nature of the informing action of the play and to watch the progressive realization of that action unperturbed by one detail that frequently plagues a modern reader or auditor.

Honesty compels a good many critics who otherwise praise The Winter's Tale to admit a tendency to boggle at the suddenness with which Shakespeare has Leontes fly into a jealous rage. An early grasp of the action of the play precludes such a tendency. From the first appearance of Leontes's jealousy in Act I to that point in Act II (II, i, 36-7) where it settles into the undisguised
pharisaical pride of “How blest am I/In my just censure, in my true opinion,” it is understandable by analogy with St. Paul’s observation, “. . .salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them [that is, the Jews] to jealousy” (Romans XI, 11).

From this point on, Leontes becomes so obsessed with the legality of his unwarranted censure that we tend to think of it as his own special guilty stain. A perfect example of this perverted legality is the address he makes to Hermione in prison (II, i). His formal, point-by-point indictment of her is so patently false that refutation of it is impossible; and Hermione can only deny with dignity the charges he makes. Yet by the time she bids him farewell with the significant observation, “. . .this action I now go on/Is for my better grace,” her innocence is so manifest that old Antigonus is moved to say, “Be certain what you do, sir, lest your justice/Prove violence; in the which three great ones suffer,/Yourself, your queen, your son.” The legal business of the trial scene is, of course, natural and appropriate and does not call attention to itself; but Hermione’s remark at the end of her long speech there pinpoints the essential conflict of the play:

... if I shall be condemn’d
Upon surmises, all proofs sleeping else
But what your jealousies awake, I tell you
’Tis rigour and not law.

The trouble with Leontes is not that he does not love justice—no one accuses him of that—but that in his rigorous legality he cannot possibly know what justice is. Again St. Paul’s text happily provides a perfect gloss: “For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans X, 2-4). This of the zealous Jews. But it fits equally well the ignorant
zeal of Leontes, and it points to the nature of his salvation as well as that of Israel.

Before Leontes can be saved he must come to know the meaning of the oracle, which declares Hermione chaste, Polixenes blameless, Leontes a jealous tyrant, and the babe truly begotten, and concludes, "... the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found." That is, he must see his errors for what they are (and this means also recognizing Hermione for what she is) and learn to nourish a faith that Heaven may mercifully restore what he himself can never bring back. Fortunately, Leontes has a St. Paul to help him to that point of understanding; for this is precisely the function of Shakespeare's Paulina, who has no counterpart in Greene's narrative. As early as Act II, before the trial scene, it is she who undertakes the task of his conversion:

If she dares trust me with her little babe,
I'll show't the King and undertake to be
Her advocate to th' loud'st. We do not know
How he may soften at the sight o' th' child.
The silence often of pure innocence
Persuades when speaking fails.

(II, ii, 37-42)

After this attempt has failed and Leontes has gone on to make himself "scandalous to the world," Paulina slips quietly into the role of comforter, confessor, and guide and does her work there with more success. When we next see them, sixteen years later, Leontes is painfully penitent and completely prepared to accept Paulina's judgment on Hermione:

If, one by one, you wedded all the world,
Or, from the all that are, you took something good
To make a perfect woman, she you kill'd
Would be unparalleld.

(V, i, 13-16)

He is also quite willing to reject the advice of his official counsel-
lors, who would have him marry and get another heir, and take instead that of Paulina, who reminds him:

There is none worthy,
Respecting her that's gone. Besides the gods
Will have fulfill'd their secret purposes;
For has not the divine Apollo said,
Is't not the tenour of his oracle,
That King Leontes shall not have an heir
Till his lost child be found?
...Care not for issue
The crown will find an heir.

(V, i, 34-47)

He must not marry again, she tells him, till his "first queen's again in breath"—a remarkable condition in view of the apparent circumstances and one which imposes upon him a sturdy exercise of faith. Yet faith is always the condition essential to salvation. Even as she prepares to bid the statue step down, she reminds him, "It is required/You do awake your faith." And then she adds, with an oblique reference to the state of mind that brought about his downfall, "... those that think it is unlawful business/I am about, let them depart." This is intended for Leontes, of course, as is her remark a few lines later: "Start not; her actions shall be holy as/You hear my spell is lawful." But Leontes is no longer a zealot for legality, rigorous or otherwise. "If this be magic," he exclaims, "let it be an art/Lawful as eating."

Thus Leontes's twofold reconciliation, first with Perdita and then with Hermione, may be viewed as a literal fable with its allegorical center in regenerated Jewry's expected reconciliation to the body of true believers and subsequent reception into Heaven at the Second Coming. The objection that the allegorical center of the play as a whole (which includes also Jesus's rejection and crucifixion by the Jews) thus belongs in part to the province of eschatology need not prevent a Christian's treating
it as history. From the Christian point of view, the Second Coming is as much a part of history as the Creation or the Crucifixion; and it has the same historical relation to its anticipated literal correspondent as the New Testament story has to fables drawn from Genesis. Furthermore, the outline given here of events leading up to it has the authority of St. Paul. One may perhaps question whether Shakespeare himself saw such an allegory in *The Winter's Tale*, but the allegory is most assuredly there, whether he saw it or not. Moreover, there is evidence in Act IV which strengthens greatly the probability that Shakespeare not only saw this allegory but also was aware of the analogy between his fable and St. Paul's admonition to the Jews.

The long period of penance and instruction that follows Leontes's rejection of grace suggests only half of what happens between Calvary and Judgement, and it is not the half that Shakespeare's play gives most prominence to. That half so favored has to do with the preservation and fostering of the heir, or true Church, in Gentile Christendom—a matter which is reflected in the business of Perdita's preservation in a foreign land and her betrothal to a foreign prince. Shakespeare's execution is so deft and charming here in Act IV that we can perhaps excuse critics for protesting his shift of focus away from Perdita to Hermione in Act V. But in order to avoid missing the point of Act IV ourselves, we must keep in mind that while *The Winter's Tale* is neither a satisfactory tragicomedy nor a consistent moral allegory, it will bear considerable scrutiny as a partial realization of an ineffable divine action or anagoge, the allegory or perfect realization of which is described in St. Paul's prophetic account of the remnant in his *Epistle to the Romans*—and, in anything like a complete, explicit, and authoritative form, only there. Thus it is not surprising to find Shakespeare choosing as his central metaphor for the relationship between Perdita and Florizel the same metaphor of grafting that St. Paul used to refer to the union of the Gentile and Christ's representative on earth, the Church.
St. Paul was speaking sharply to Gentiles here, warning them against writing off the Jew entirely. The eleven verses in which he developed his figure (Romans XI, 15-25) need to be quoted in full:

For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

It takes very little imagination to see the action of Shakespeare’s play paralleled here in St. Paul’s metaphor of the wild olive branches grafted into the stock of a good olive from which some of the original branches have been temporarily cut off: the first-
fruit suggests Mamillus (as in III, ii, 98); the root and tree of good olive suggest Hermione and Perdita; the branches broken off, Leontes; and the wild branches grafted in, Florizel and Polixenes. The parallel would be striking enough even if Shakespeare had not used the same metaphor. But he did use it, of course, and he gave it appropriately to Polixenes, the “high-minded” Gentile of the play.

Perdita has just been explaining that her garden contains no gillyflowers, because they are hybrids, “Nature’s bastards”: “For I have heard it said/There is an art which in their piedness share/With great creating Nature.” To this Polixenes replies:

Say there be;
Yet Nature is made better by no mean
But Nature makes that mean; so, over that art
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art
That Nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend Nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is Nature.

(IV, iv, 89-97)

Polixenes, to be sure, uses the figure here with unconscious irony, thinking of his son Florizel as the “bud of nobler race” and Perdita as “bark of baser kind.” But we the audience, with our better vision, have already identified Perdita as the good olive tree in this grove and Florizel as the sprig of wild olive. We excuse Polixenes’s ignorance and perhaps pardon his pride; but we see his attitude (which is precisely that described by St. Paul) as something of which he must be purged, “lest he continue wise in his own conceit” and be himself cut off. Even so, we acknowledge that the blindness of Polixenes is necessary; for without that blindness there can be no return of the heir, no reconciliation of estranged friends in human brotherhood, and no
final outpouring of grace for anyone. As St. Paul sums it up in verse 32 of that same chapter in Romans, "... God hath concluded them all in unbelief that he might have mercy upon all." Blindness is for Polixenes, as for Leontes and for all of us, the prerequisite for mercy, and mercy crowns the end.

Indeed, mercy is the only possible ending for a play like this one—mercy and miracle. In the end those who survive are "precious winners all," as Paulina calls them; and they are that because the dead has come to life and because they have been granted grace to see the resurrection. *The Winter's Tale* makes no demands upon us beyond this—that we, too, see the resurrection. It offers no moral, no lesson, no paradigm for truth; such things as these are available to us, but we can find them only by going to the allegory to which the play points. To say that the play points to the allegory, however, is not to say that the play means the allegory. *The Winter's Tale*, like St. Paul's prophetic discourse, is in itself a realization, a legitimate object of knowledge; and to come to know it is to share some of the happiness of discovery that Shakespeare must have felt on seeing a meaningful shape emerge from the cloudy surface of Greene's tale. All that we really need to be able to share his vision is that "whole heart and free mind" which Mark Van Doren once wisely asked his readers to bring to their study of Shakespeare—that and an ancient habit of seeing which once caused St. Augustine to pronounce the whole world "a fair field, fresh with the odor of Christ's name."