

G. Wilson Knight

The Wheel of Fire

Interpretations of Shakespearian
Tragedy



THE WHEEL OF FIRE

INTERPRETATIONS OF SHAKESPEARIAN TRAGEDY

WITH THREE NEW ESSAYS

By G. WILSON KNIGHT

Emeritus Professor of English Literature
in the University of Leeds

Formerly Chancellors' Professor of English at
Trinity College, Toronto

*You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave:
Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.* KING LEAR, IV. vii. 45

*Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.* MACBETH, I, iii. 127

LONDON

METHUEN & CO LTD

Originally published by the Oxford University Press in

July 1930

Reprinted twice

*This (fourth) revised and enlarged edition first published
by Methuen & Co Ltd in 1949*

Reprinted with minor corrections six times

ISBN 0 416 50930 4

Published as a University Paperback 1961

Reprinted eight times

Reprinted 1977

ISBN 0 416 67620 0

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY

BUTLER AND TANNER LTD, FROME AND LONDON

This book is available in both hardbound and paperback editions. The paperback edition is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Distributed in the U.S.A. by

HARPER & ROW PUBLISHERS, INC.

BARNES & NOBLE IMPORT DIVISION

PREFATORY NOTE

THIS re-issue of what was—except for my monograph *Myth and Miracle* (lately reprinted in *The Crown of Life*)—my first book, contains the original text complete with only some insignificant, mainly typographical, alterations. My two original essays on *Hamlet*, 'Hamlet's Melancholia' and 'The Embassy of Death', are, for neatness, grouped as one. I have tidied up some mannerisms, but made no attempt at correction of matter, preferring to let the various essays stand as documents of their time 'with all their imperfections on their heads', while hoping that they may be found to have worn not too badly during the years since their first publication in 1930. Where there are additions, as with my 'additional notes' and my three new essays, I have dated them. Of these essays, the first, on 'Tolstoy's Attack', was originally published as an English Association pamphlet and is reprinted here by kind permission of the Association. The other two, '*Hamlet* Reconsidered' and 'Two Notes on the Text of *Hamlet*' are quite new. I give line-references to the Oxford Shakespeare.

On looking back over the last two decades I feel that a short retrospective comment may help to clear up certain misunderstandings. My animadversions as to 'character' analysis were never intended to limit the living human reality of Shakespeare's people. They were, on the contrary, expected to loosen, to render flexible and even fluid, what had become petrified. Nor was I at all concerned to repudiate the work of A. C. Bradley. Though Bradley certainly on occasion pushed 'character' analysis to an unnecessary extreme, yet he it was who first subjected the atmospheric, what I have called the 'spatial', qualities of the Shakespearian play to a considered, if rudimentary, comment. Indeed, my own first published manifesto concerning my general aims in Shakespearian interpretation, an article in the year 1928 in the old *Shakespeare Review* under the editorship of A. K. Chesterton, defined those aims as the application to Shakespeare's work in general of the methods already applied by Bradley to certain outstanding plays. It was, and is, my hope that my own labours will be eventually

regarded as a natural development within the classic tradition of Shakespearian study.¹

But here again a distinction is necessary. It has been objected that I write of Shakespeare—as indeed did Coleridge, Hazlitt and Bradley—as a philosophic poet rather than a man of the stage. That is, in its way, true: and it is true that I would not regard the well-known commentaries of Harley Granville-Barker as properly within this central, more imaginative and metaphysical, tradition. Nevertheless, my own major interest has always been Shakespeare in the theatre; and to that my written work has been, in my own mind, subsidiary. But my experience as actor, producer and play-goer leaves me uncompromising in my assertion that the literary analysis of great drama in terms of theatrical technique accomplishes singularly little. Such technicalities should be confined to the theatre from which their terms are drawn. The proper thing to do about a play's dramatic quality is to produce it, to act in it, to attend performances; but the penetration of its deeper meanings is a different matter, and such a study, though the commentator should certainly be dramatically aware, and even wary, will not itself speak in theatrical terms. There is, of course, an all-important relation (which I discuss fully in my *Principles of Shakespearian Production*); and indeed the present standard of professional Shakespearian production appears to me inadequate precisely because these deeper meanings have not been exploited. The play's surface has been merely translated from book to stage, it has not been re-created from within; and that is why our productions remain inorganic.

So much, then, for what this new 'poetic interpretation' is not. What, in short, can we say that it *is*?

A recent account by Mr. Lance L. Whyte of modern developments in physics, which appeared in *The Listener* of July 17th, 1947, can help us here. Mr. Whyte explains how the belief in rigid 'particles' with predictable motions has been replaced by concepts of 'form, pattern and symmetry'; and not by these as static categories only but rather

¹ Parts of my essay 'The *Lear* Universe' constitute an expansion under changed focal length of material first indicated by Bradley (1953).

by something which he calls the 'transformation of patterns'. For 'particles' put 'characters' and we have a clear Shakespearian analogy. Even the dates, roughly, fit: 'From about 1870 to 1910' these 'particles' were thought to hold the key 'to all the secrets of nature'; but since then the conception has been found inadequate. Rigidly distinct and unchanging atoms have become 'patterns' occupying certainly a 'measurable region of space' but yet themselves, as patterns, dynamic, self-transforming. The pattern itself moves; space and time coalesce; such is the mysterious 'design of nature'. But, as too with Shakespeare, the old theories are not to be peremptorily dismissed. They are merely to be regarded as 'less than the utterly complete explanations they were once thought to be':

They have therefore to be re-interpreted as part of some more comprehensive approach. The answer may be that we must not think of patterns as if they were built out of particles, but that what we have called particles, may ultimately be better explained as components of patterns.

The argument against excessive 'character' study could not be more concisely expressed.

Most important of all, however, is Mr. Whyte's stress on the 'development and transformation of patterns'. Though the 'causal analysis of detailed parts' must be continued as before, we are henceforth to 'pay more attention to certain aspects of phenomena which have been neglected till now, like pattern-tendency and transformation'. So 'the task before physics is to discover a new principle *which can unite permanence and change*'; and here, in the words I have italicized, we have our key to the literary problem.

Long before reading this article I had felt a certain similarity between the methods of what I call 'poetic interpretation' and what I vaguely understood by the theory of Einstein. Mr. Whyte observes that Einstein's relativity theory served to shift emphasis from individual entities to their observable 'relationships'; just as, in my early essays on *Hamlet*, I tried, at the risk of offending those who had (very reasonably) taken the play's hero to their hearts, to see that hero not merely as an isolated 'character' rigidly

conceived, but in direct and living relation to his own dramatic environment. That, too, has been my method with other plays; and it is precisely such a 'relationship' that lies regularly behind Shakespeare's use of symbolism as distinct from persons. As for Mr. Whyte's closely similar thought of uniting permanence and change, the analogies are yet more obvious. My own investigations have continually forced me to speak, directly or metaphorically, in terms of a space-time unity, which is yet only to be properly known as a unity in so far as it has first been accepted as a duality. It is, as it were, the space-time 'relationship' that is central and so all-important: as with the interaction of spatial atmosphere and plot-sequence in any one Shakespearian play; the single tempest-music opposition binding and interpenetrating the whole succession of plays; the 'dome' and 'river' symbolisms of the Romantics and all that this implies (especially for the understanding of Keats, whose peculiar artistry can be shown to mature from an exquisite fusion of these, or similar, impressions). When actual stage-production is our argument, we have the fitting of action to setting. Poetry itself may be defined as pre-eminently a blend of the dynamic and the static, of motion and form; and, at the limit, the perfectly integrated man, or superman, is to be conceived as a creature of superb balance, poise and grace. Interpretation is, then, merely the free use of a faculty that responds with ease, and yet with full consciousness of the separate elements involved, to this space-time fusion, or relationship, this eternity, of art, in which every point on the sequence is impregnated by the whole. It is, moreover, something which, once admitted, can be applied widely to literature of consequence: it is as much at home with the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus as with *Hassan* and *Journey's End*. There is nothing peculiarly Shakespearian about it.

Mr. Whyte himself sees the developments he describes as part of a general movement of the twentieth-century mind, noting similar tendencies in both biology and psychology. It would be sad were literary investigation to be allowed to lag too far behind these more virile sciences. Properly handled it might go some way towards meeting Mr. Whyte's expectation of a newly comprehensive system

of knowledge 'covering the organic as well as the inorganic world, and therefore relevant also to man himself'.

Exactly what started me, personally, on this quest it would be hard to say. I was whole-heartedly devoted to Shakespeare—especially to Shakespeare acted—from a very early age. Perhaps what Mr. Eliot calls the 'restless demon' to interpret dates from a question posed suddenly by my brother during a performance of *The Tempest* to which I had persuaded him to accompany me: 'What does it mean?' For many years I have been labouring at the answer.

This note must not be allowed to grow into an essay of reminiscence. Let me conclude by expressing my thanks to Messrs. Methuen & Co. for being willing, at so difficult a time as this, to offer me the privilege and advantage of their imprint.

Leeds, 1947

G. W. K.

Among the writings that appear in retrospect to have influenced my Shakespearian investigations I would list John Masefield's 1924 Romanes Lecture *Shakespeare and Spiritual Life*; and also the pages on *Macbeth* in the chapter 'On the Ghosts in the Tragedies of Shakespeare' in Edward Gordon Craig's *On the Art of the Theatre*, which I had probably read. My remarks on 'character' might be compared with Strindberg's similar arguments in his preface to *Lady Julia*.

My thoughts on the dramas treated in the following pages have been amplified in *The Golden Labyrinth* (1962), *Shakespearian Production* (enlarged 1964), *Byron and Shakespeare* (1966), and *Shakespeare and Religion* (1967). These contain much on *Timon of Athens*, and some new thoughts on the personality of Othello and on his handkerchief (for the handkerchief *Shakespearian Production*, pp. 100–101, and *Byron and Shakespeare*, p. 250). For *King Lear*, I would point to my articles 'Tragedies of Love', *Books and Bookmen*, February 1971 (Vol. 16, No. 5), and 'Gloucester's Leap', *Essays in Criticism*, July 1972 (XXII, 3).

I would draw attention to Harold Fisch's impressive

study, *Hamlet and the Word: the Covenant Pattern in Shakespeare* (New York, Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1972).

Exeter, 1972

An important acknowledgement was made to J. Middleton Murry in the preface, not since reprinted, to my first publication, *Myth and Miracle*, in 1929. Among the following essays, especially the second essays on *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, the influence of A. C. Bradley is clearly apparent. Of Bradley I shall say more in my forthcoming book *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge*.

Exeter, 1974

My *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge* has now been published by Croom Helm in London and Barnes and Noble in New York. It contains discussions of the spiritual and dramatic rise of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, with an amplified treatment of *Timon of Athens*. A video-tape will be marketed from Collegiate Productions, Yeovil College, Somerset.

The book may be grouped with my *Shakespearian Production* as necessary to the understanding of my stage work. To them may be added the still unpublished *Symbol of Man* and my *Dramatic Papers* lodged in the Shakespeare Library of the Public Libraries at Birmingham, and also important essays by the Editor, by Francis Berry, and by Linden Huddleston, in *The Morality of Art*, edited by D. W. Jefferson, 1969.

Exeter, 1977

INTRODUCTION

IT has taken me a long time to recognize the justification of what Mr. Wilson Knight calls 'interpretation'. In my previous scepticism I am quite ready to admit the presence of elements of pure prejudice, as well as of some which I defend. I have always maintained, not only that Shakespeare was not a philosophical poet in the sense of Dante and Lucretius; but also, what may be more easily overlooked, that 'philosophical poets' like Dante and Lucretius are not really philosophers at all. They are poets who have presented us with the emotional and sense equivalent for a definite philosophical system constructed by a philosopher—even though they may sometimes take little liberties with the system. To say that Shakespeare is not a philosophical poet like these is not to say anything very striking or important. It is more worth while to point out that my notion of Dante or Lucretius as providing the 'emotional equivalent' for a philosophical system expressed by someone else, is not to be pressed to a literal point for point parallelism, as in the old theory of mind and body. The poet has something to say which is not even necessarily implicit in the system, something which is also over and above the verbal beauty. In other words, the pattern of Cyrene or that of the Schools is not the whole of the pattern of the carpet of Lucretius or of Dante. This other part of the pattern is something to be found in the work of other great poets than those who are 'philosophical'—I say of other, not of all—for that would exclude Horace or Dryden or Malherbe. It is also to be found in the work of some (again, not of all) of the greatest novelists: certainly of George Eliot, and of Henry James who gave the phrase its currency. And of this sort of 'pattern' the most elaborate, the most extensive, and probably the most inscrutable is that of the plays of Shakespeare. For one thing, in Dante the pattern is interwoven chiefly with the systematic pattern which he set himself, and the mystery and excitement lies in trying to trace its relations and differences—the relation, and the personal variations in another mode, between for

example the Thomist doctrine of Love, the poetic provençal tradition, and the direct experience of Dante with its modifications under philosophical and literary influences. But the philosophic pattern is far more a help than a hindrance, it is indeed *a priori* a help. Furthermore, Dante in his kind of poetry was doing exactly what he liked with his own material; and the practical exigencies of a badly paid playwright, popular entertainer, sometimes actor, and sometimes busy producer, can only confuse us in our study of Shakespeare. Then again, with Dante the philosophic system gives us a kind of criterion of *consciousness*, and the letter to Can Grande confirms it; just as of a lesser writer, but no less genuine a pattern-maker, Henry James, we have some gauge of consciousness in his very nearness to us in time and civilization, in the authors he studied and the constant play of his criticism upon his own work. But with Shakespeare we seem to be moving in an air of Cimmerian darkness. The conditions of his life, the conditions under which dramatic art was then possible, seem even more remote from us than those of Dante. We dare not treat him as completely isolated from his contemporary dramatists, as we can largely isolate Dante. We see his contemporaries for the most part as busy hack writers of untidy genius, sharing a particular sense of the tragic mood: this sense, such as it is, merging into the mere sense of what the public wanted. They confuse us by the fact that what at first appears to be their 'philosophy of life' sometimes turns out to be only a felicitous but shameless lifting of a passage from almost any author, as those of Chapman from Erasmus. This, indeed, is a habit which Shakespeare shares; he has his Montaigne, his Seneca, and his Machiavelli, or his Anti-Machiavel like the others. And they adapted, collaborated, and overlaid each other to the limits of confusion.

Nevertheless, they do seem, the best of Shakespeare's contemporaries, to have more or less faint or distinct patterns. (I was tempted to use the word 'secret' as an alternative to 'pattern', but that I remembered the unlucky example of Matthew Arnold, who said much about the 'secret of Jesus', a secret which having been revealed only and finally

to Arnold himself, turned out to be a pretty poor secret after all.) In Marlowe, surely, we feel the search for one; in Chapman a kind of blundering upon one; in Jonson the one clear and distinct, slight but much more serious than it looks, pattern. There is something in the *Revenger's Tragedy*, but one play does not make a pattern; and Middleton completely baffles me; and as for Ford and Shirley, I suspect them of belonging to that class of poets not unknown to any age, which has all of the superficial qualities, and none of the internal organs, of poetry. But a study of these dramatists only renders our study of Shakespeare more difficult. The danger of studying him alone is the danger of working into the essence of Shakespeare what is just convention and the dodges of an overworked and underpaid writer; the danger of studying him together with his contemporaries is the danger of reducing a unique vision to a mode.

I once affirmed that Dante made great poetry out of a great philosophy of life; and that Shakespeare made equally great poetry out of an inferior and muddled philosophy of life. I see no reason to retract that assertion: but I ought to elucidate it. When I say 'great poetry' I do not suggest that there is a pure element in poetry, the right use of words and cadences, which the real amateur of poetry can wholly isolate to enjoy. The real amateur of poetry certainly enjoys, is thrilled by, uses of words which to the untrained reader seem prosaic. I would say that *only* the real amateur of poetry, perhaps, if this is not too presumptuous, only the real practitioner, can enjoy a great deal of poetry which the untrained reader dismisses as clever paraphrase of prose; certainly, to enjoy Pope, to have an analytic enough mind to enjoy even *second* rate eighteenth-century poetry, is a better test of 'love of poetry' than to like Shakespeare, which is no test at all: I can tell nothing from the fact that you enjoy Shakespeare, unless I know exactly *how* you enjoy him. But the greatest poetry, like the greatest prose, has a doubleness; the poet is talking to you on two planes at once. So I mean not merely that Shakespeare had as refined a sense for words as Dante; but that he also has this doubleness of speech.

Now it is only a personal prejudice of mine, that I prefer

poetry with a clear philosophical pattern, if it has the other pattern as well, to poetry like Shakespeare's. But this preference means merely a satisfaction of more of my own needs, not a judgement of superiority or even a statement that I *enjoy* it more as poetry. I like a definite and dogmatic philosophy, preferably a Christian and Catholic one, but alternatively that of Epicurus or of the Forest Philosophers of India; and it does not seem to me to obstruct or diminish either the 'poetry' or the other pattern. Among readers, probably both types, that of Dante and that of Shakespeare, suffer equal transformation. Dante will be taken as a mere paraphraser of Aquinas, occasionally bursting through his rigid frame into such scenes as Paolo and Francesca, but neither by his admirers nor by his detractors credited with anything like the freedom of Shakespeare. Shakespeare will be still worse traduced, in being attributed with some patent system of philosophy of his own, esoteric guide to conduct, yoga-breathing or key to the scriptures. Thus are the planes of order and pattern confounded.

It is also the prejudice or preference of any one who practises, though humbly, the art of verse, to be sceptical of all 'interpretations' of poetry, even his own interpretations; and to rely upon his sense of power and accomplishment in language to guide him. And certainly people ordinarily incline to suppose that in order to enjoy a poem it is necessary to 'discover its meaning'; so that their minds toil to discover a meaning, a meaning which they can expound to any one who will listen, in order to prove that they enjoy it. But for one thing the possibilities of meaning of 'meaning' in poetry are so extensive, that one is quite aware that one's knowledge of the meaning even of what oneself has written is extremely limited, and that its meaning to others, at least so far as there is some consensus of interpretation among persons apparently qualified to interpret, is quite as much a part of it as what it means to oneself. But when the meaning assigned is too clearly formulated, then one reader who has grasped *a* meaning of a poem may happen to appreciate it less exactly, enjoy it less intensely, than another person who has the discretion not to inquire too insistently. So, finally, the sceptical practitioner of verse tends

to limit his criticism of poetry to the appreciation of vocabulary and syntax, the analysis of line, metric and cadence; to stick as closely to the more trustworthy senses as possible.

Or rather, tends to *try* to do this. For this exact and humble appreciation is only one ideal never quite arrived at or even so far as approximated consistently maintained. The restless demon in us drives us also to 'interpret' whether we will or not; and the question of the meaning of 'interpretation' is a very pretty problem for Mr. I. A. Richards, with which neither Mr. Wilson Knight nor myself in this context can afford to be too narrowly concerned. But our impulse to interpret a work of art (by 'work of art' I mean here rather the work of one artist as a whole) is exactly as imperative and fundamental as our impulse to interpret the universe by metaphysics. Though we are never satisfied by any metaphysic, yet those who insist dogmatically upon the impossibility of knowledge of the universe, or those who essay to prove to us that the term 'universe' is meaningless, meet, I think, with a singularly unanimous rejection by those who are curious about the universe; and their counsels fall more flat than the flimsiest constructions of metaphysics. And Bradley's apothegm that 'metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct; but to find these reasons is no less an instinct', applies as precisely to the interpretation of poetry.

To interpret, then, or to seek to pounce upon the secret, to elucidate the pattern and pluck out the mystery, of a poet's work, is 'no less an instinct'. Nor is the effort altogether vain; for as the study of philosophy, and indeed the surrendering ourselves, with adequate knowledge of other systems, to some system of our own or of someone else, is as needful part of a man's life as falling in love or making any contract, so is it necessary to surrender ourselves to some interpretation of the poetry we like. (In my own experience, a writer needs less to 'interpret' the work of some minor poet who has influenced him, and whom he has assimilated, than the work of those poets who are too big for anyone wholly to assimilate. But I dare say that if one was as great a poet as Shakespeare, and was also his 'spiritual heir', one would feel no need to interpret him;

interpretation is necessary perhaps only in so far as one is passive, not creative, oneself.)

And I do not mean that *nothing* solid and enduring can be arrived at in interpretation: but to me it seems that there must be, as a matter of fact, in every effort of interpretation, some part which can be accepted and necessarily also some part which other readers can reject. I believe that there is a good deal in the interpretation of Shakespeare by Mr. Wilson Knight which can stand indefinitely for other people; and it would be a waste of time for me to pronounce judiciously on the two elements in Mr. Knight's work. For that would be merely a re-interpretation of my own; and the reader will have to perform that operation for himself anyway. But I confess that reading his essays seems to me to have enlarged my understanding of the Shakespeare pattern; which, after all, is quite the main thing. It happened, fortunately for myself, that when I read some of his papers I was mulling over some of the later plays, particularly *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*; and reading the later plays for the first time in my life as a separate group, I was impressed by what seemed to me important and very serious recurrences of mood and theme. The old theory, current in my youth, of a Shakespeare altering and deteriorating his form and style to suit a new romantic taste, would not do; or if Shakespeare did this, then it became a remarkable coincidence that he should be able in middle life to turn about and give the public what it wanted—if these strange plays could conceivably be what any public would want—and at the same time remain steadfast in such integrity of exploration. And the mastery of language, I was sure, was quite undiminished.

To take Shakespeare's work as a whole, no longer to single out several plays as the greatest, and mark the others only as apprenticeship or decline—is I think an important and positive step in modern Shakespeare interpretation. More particularly, I think that Mr. Wilson Knight has shown insight in pursuing his search for the pattern below the level of 'plot' and 'character'. There are plots and there are characters: the question of 'sources' has its rights, and we must, if we go into the matter at all, inform ourselves

of the exact proportion of invention, borrowing, and adaptation in the plot; and so far as possible we must separate the lines written by Shakespeare from those written by collaborators, or taken over from an earlier hand or interpolated by a later. This sort of work must be done to prepare for the search for the real pattern. But I think that Mr. Knight, among other things, has insisted upon the right way to interpret poetic drama. The writer of poetic drama is not merely a man skilled in two arts and skilful to weave them in together; he is not a writer who can decorate a play with poetic language and metre. His task is different from that of the 'dramatist' or that of the 'poet', for his pattern is more complex and more dimensional; and with the subtraction which I have noted above, that Dante's pattern is the richer by a serious philosophy, and Shakespeare's the poorer by a rag-bag philosophy, I should say that Shakespeare's pattern was more complex, and his problem more difficult, than Dante's. The genuine poetic drama must, at its best, observe all the regulations of the plain drama, but will weave them *organically* (to mix a metaphor and to borrow for the occasion a modern word) into a much richer design. But our first duty as either critics or 'interpreters', surely, must be to try to grasp the whole design, and read *character* and *plot* in the understanding of this subterrene or submarine music. Here I say Mr. Knight has pursued the right line for his own plane of investigation, not hypostasizing 'character' and 'plot'. For Shakespeare is one of the rarest of dramatic poets, in that each of his characters is most nearly adequate both to the requirements of the real world and to those of the poet's world. If we can apprehend this balance in *Pericles*, we can come to apprehend it even in *Goneril* and *Regan*. And here Mr. Knight seems to me to be very helpful in expressing the results of the passive, and more critical, poetic understanding.

My fear is, that both what I say in this prefatory way, and what Mr. Wilson Knight has to say, may be misunderstood. It is a little irony that when a poet, like Dante, sets out with a definite philosophy and a sincere determination to guide conduct, his philosophical and ethical pattern is discounted, and our interpreters insist upon the pure

poetry which is to be disassociated from this reprehensible effort to do us good. And that when a poet like Shakespeare, who has no 'philosophy' and apparently no design upon the amelioration of our behaviour, sets forth his experience and reading of life, he is forthwith saddled with a 'philosophy' of his own and some esoteric hints towards conduct. So we kick against those who wish to guide us, and insist on being guided by those who only aim to show us a vision, a dream if you like, which is beyond good and evil in the common sense. It is all a question of our willingness to pursue any path to the end. For the very Catholic philosophy of Dante, with its stern judgement of morals, leads us to the same point beyond good and evil as the pattern of Shakespeare. Morality, we need to be told again and again, is not itself to be judged by moral standards: its laws are as 'natural' as any discovered by Einstein or Planck: which is expounded by, among others, Piccarda. Well: we must settle these problems for ourselves, provisionally, as well as we can.

Without pursuing that curious and obscure problem of the meaning of interpretation farther, it occurs to me as possible that there may be an essential part of error in all interpretation, without which it would not be interpretation at all: but this line of thought may be persevered in by students of *Appearance and Reality*. Another point, more immediately relevant, is that in a work of art, as truly as anywhere, reality only exists in and through appearances. I do not think that Mr. Wilson Knight himself, or Mr. Colin Still in his interesting book on *The Tempest* called *Shakespeare's Mystery Play*, has fallen into the error of presenting the work of Shakespeare as a series of mystical treatises in cryptogram, to be filed away once the cipher is read; poetry is poetry, and the surface is as marvellous as the core. A mystical treatise is at best a poor substitute for the original experience of its author; and a poem, or the life's work of a poet, is a very different document from that. The work of Shakespeare is like life itself something to be lived through. If we lived it completely we should need no interpretation; but on our plane of appearances our interpretations themselves are a part of our living.

T. S. ELIOT

1930