***The Winter’s Tale***

Some professional critics on the subject of this play and its genre

Frank Kermode, editor of the Signet edition: “Now, the idea of romance, properly understood, implies passion and catastrophe, storm and violence; and Shakespeare’s romances not only contain such elements, but often enact them with much turbulence both in the action and in the language . . . . and neither Elizabethan nor modern punctuation can cope with its jolting syntax and distorted argument.” Notes appended to this quotation may be based on Kermode or may be my own contributions: (a) The 16-year break between the first and second parts of this play takes place at III.iii.113, in one sentence. (b) The heroine of the play is Nature; see Perdita’s rejection of gardening with Art and the statue’s transformation from a work of art to a woman. (c) Just as tragedies punish both the good and the bad characters, romances let both the good and the bad characters off the hook.

Baldwin Maxwell, editor of the Pelican edition: Tillyard views these late romances as “a natural development of the interests shown in his tragedies. The full tragic pattern presents three stages – prosperity, destruction, re-creation.” Maxwell quotes Tillyard: “the old order is destroyed as thoroughly as in the main group of tragedies, and it is this destruction that altogether separates them [the late romances] from the realm of comedy.” My notes following these quotations and including another one are presumably also based on Maxwell’s introduction: As spring comes after fall and winter, rebirth follows destruction only after gestation, and forgiveness follows sin only after repentance. The 16-year gap between sin, alienation, destruction, on the one hand, and forgiveness, reconciliation, and rebirth, on the other, is due to “insistence that sin be paid for before it be forgiven.”

Fowler: “*The Winter’s Tale* is a tragicomedy in kind, with parts that are pastoral or romantic in mode.”

Frye: The late romances “do not avoid tragedies but contain them.”

Some parallels between the two parts of the play

Leontes’ breaking up his marriage to Hermione / Polixenes’ breaking up Florizel and Perdita

The flight of Polixenes from Sicily to Bohemia / the flight of Florizel from Bohemia to Sicily

Two seemingly supernatural moments with opposite appearances and realities: the oracle should bring life, but death comes first / the statue should be dead, but then it is alive.