

〈論 文〉

Professor Prospero:

Lectures, Lessons, and Learning in *The Tempest*

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Stanley Wells, writing as general editor, makes the following worthy claim: “The Penguin Shakespeare series aspires to remove obstacles to understanding and to make pleasurable the reading of the work of the man who has done more than most to make us understand what it is to be human.”¹⁾ David Lindley makes a more pointed comment about the importance of the text we choose to read: “To read *The Tempest* is to enter into dialogue with it . . . but the point of repeated return remains the text itself in all its obstinate, Early Modern particularity.”²⁾ In fact, readers of Shakespeare are spoiled for choice these days, as various carefully edited editions, with their extensive essential notes and exhaustively (if not exhaustingly) informative introductions, are readily available.

Unfortunately, therein lies a problem. Because we usually encounter Shakespeare’s plays as texts rather than performances, we are initially obliged as readers to laboriously work our way through the text, making frequent use of the plethora of notes necessary to comprehend Shakespeare’s archaic, flexible, poetic language. In making this demand-

ing (but ultimately rewarding) effort, it is all too easy to slide past the stage directions, and I suspect it is a rare individual who can, while first reading one of Shakespeare's plays, actively imagine the physical situation of a staged performance, even though all those actions, gestures, and groupings can convey or emphasize important information. For instance, all the characters running on stage would certainly emphasize the thematic significance of haste in *Romeo and Juliet*, as the story of the lovers rushes towards its tragic ending, and all the characters sleeping on stage would underscore the importance of dreams and dreaming in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Even a brief stage direction can be important, as Shakespeare sometimes chooses to stage an important idea. There is a clear example in *As You Like It*, when Jaques' memorable but sour speech on the seven ages of man, which ends—

Last scene of all,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

(*As You Like It*, 2.7.162-165)—

is answered with an action indicated by the stage direction—“*Enter ORLANDO, with ADAM*”—for Orlando entering the scene while bearing the aged and exhausted Adam in his arms *demonstrates* “what ’tis to pity and be pitied” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.114), and Adam, having Orlando's love and care, is most definitely not “sans everything.”³

The Tempest has the feeling of a culmination. It is, by common agreement, the last play Shakespeare wrote alone, so it should be no

surprise to find *The Tempest* filled with echoes from his earlier plays.⁴⁾ It is also a remarkably compressed play, with the setting restricted to an island, the time limited to a few hours, and a central cast of just four: Prospero, the exiled duke and magician; Miranda, his daughter; Ariel, an airy spirit; and Caliban, a savage and deformed slave. This is a condensed version of the vertical social structure in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Prospero combining (with Ariel's help) the roles of Theseus and Oberon. Early in the play, however, Prospero identifies himself as schoolmaster and careful tutor to his daughter (1.2.172-174), and we find that after twelve years on the island, Prospero is still giving lessons to the other three.⁵⁾ Shakespeare's way of dealing with the necessary but extremely lengthy exposition of 1.2 is to have the information presented by means of lessons from a demanding teacher.

Professor Prospero's First Lecture:

The Dark Backward and Abyss of Time

Because Miranda has been distressed by the suffering and apparent drownings she has witnessed during the storm, Prospero assures her that no one has come to harm, that everyone has come through safely. Her father knows that he must now tell Miranda about the past—"Tis time / I should inform thee farther" (1.2.22-23)—and he proceeds to treat her as the daughter he has been tutoring: "The hour's now come; / The very minute bids thee ope thine ear. / Obey, and be attentive" (1.2.36-38).

Thus begins the lengthy but necessary revelation of what had happened in the past, but Shakespeare makes the exposition as interesting as possible by having Prospero act the schoolmaster. Within his lecture, Prospero employs some familiar pedagogical techniques: he

PROSPERO I pray thee mark me. (1.2.87-88)

PROSPERO Dost thou hear?

MIRANDA Your tale, sir, would cure deafness. (1.2.106)⁶

It is in this tutorial fashion, then, that Miranda and we learn the history behind the present situation, how Prospero was Duke of Milan and Miranda a well-attended princess until the usurpation and banishment by his brother Antonio, in league with the King of Naples. Rather than curing deafness, Prospero's extensive narrative might well induce drowsiness in a less attentive student than Miranda, but since she is still inquisitive and Prospero has other pressing concerns, he abruptly ends their session and causes her to fall asleep:

PROSPERO Here cease more questions.

Thou art inclined to sleep; 'tis a good dullness,

And give it way. I know thou canst not choose. (1.2.184-186)

The Second Lecture: The Forgetful Teaching Assistant

With Miranda asleep, Prospero summons Ariel, the spirit servant who is indebted and indentured to Prospero, and who has taken charge of orchestrating the storm. In now-familiar fashion, Prospero questions his assistant as to the management and result of their project: "Hast thou, spirit, / Performed to point the tempest that I bade thee? . . . Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil / Would not infect his reason? . . . But was not this nigh shore? . . . But are they, Ariel, safe? . . . Of the King's ship, / The mariners, say how thou hast disposed, / And all the rest o'th' fleet?"

CALIBAN You taught me language, and my profit on't
 Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
 For learning me your language. (1.2.364-366)

A Brief Lesson in Authority: The New Boy

With Caliban sent off to fetch fuel, the way is clear for Miranda to be presented with Ferdinand, a meeting arranged by Prospero and Ariel, who has led the grieving Ferdinand to the spot with the “sweet air” of his music. In pointed contrast to her reluctance to look upon misshapen Caliban, Miranda can scarcely believe the form she beholds is human. Despite her father’s assurance that it merely a “goodly person” that she perceives, Miranda is incredulous: “I might call him / A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble” (1.2.418-420).

For his part, the equally smitten Ferdinand assumes that Miranda must be a goddess and begs to know if she is mortal or not. Through his asides to Ariel, we learn that Prospero is actually delighted that the two have fallen in love at first sight—“It goes on, I see, / As my soul prompts it” (1.2.420-421)—but guided by the adage that the course of true love should not run too smoothly—“but this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light” (1.2.451-453)—he immediately adopts the pose of the obstructive parent. When Ferdinand, who believes his father to have drowned, identifies himself to Miranda as King of Naples, Prospero accuses him of being a traitorous usurper and uses his magic power to take Ferdinand prisoner. When Miranda pleadingly tries to intervene, Prospero goes so far in his assumed role as to speak harshly and lie to his daughter:

PROSPERO Silence! One word more
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What,
An advocate for an impostor? Hush.
Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,
Having seen but him and Caliban. Foolish wench,
To th' most of men, this is Caliban,
And they to him are angels. (1.2.476-484)

Miranda may have an inkling that her father is not himself at the moment, as she says in trying to comfort Ferdinand—"My father's of a better nature, sir, / Than he appears by speech. This is unwonted / Which now came from him" (1.2.497-499)—but Prospero shows his further approval of their scheme in a brief aside to Ariel—"It works. . . . Thou hast done well, fine Ariel" (1.2.494-495)—for Ferdinand has declared himself to be a true lover, one able to lightly bear the weight of his woes and the burden of his imprisonment if only he may be permitted a daily sight of Miranda (1.2.488-494). There is, however, a good deal of irony in his earlier request that the goddess Miranda "will some good instruction give / How I may bear me here" (1.2.425-426), for his lessons have scarcely begun, and it is the goddess' father who will be doing the instructing.

The Tempestuous Beginning: Where's the Master?

The short, noisy, spectacular first scene aboard the tempest-tossed ship is a uniquely dramatic beginning, but it serves three important functions. For one, it provides a vivid adumbration of all the confusion, inversion, and uncertainty to come. For another, it announces the theme

of authority when the Boatswain shouts, “What cares these roarers for the name of king?” (1.1.16-17), as the disorder of the storm is mirrored in the social disorder, with King Alonso in his cabin and the Boatswain taking charge. Here, the Boatswain’s courage and skill far outweigh rank and title, and, though he does not express his estimation in polite terms, Gonzalo can recognize the Boatswain’s value.

The storm also furnishes a brief but significant revelation of character, as the Boatswain has an inner worth that shines in comparison with the insulting Sebastian and Antonio. When they reappear on deck after being told to stay below, the harried Boatswain is blunt—“What do you here? . . . Have you a mind to sink?” (1.1.37-38)—but the heedless pair only respond with vile insults:

SEBASTIAN A pox o’your throat, you bawling, blasphemous,
 incharitable dog.

ANTONIO Work you, then.

SEBASTIAN Hang, cur! Hang, you whoreson, insolent noise-
 maker! We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art.

(1.1.39-44)

Safely, surprisingly, ashore, Sebastian and Antonio continue to reveal their ill natures. As Adrian and Gonzalo try to cheer the mournful and reticent Alonso, who believes his son has drowned, and the rest of their party, the two spoilers continually undercut and devalue anything positive:

ADRIAN The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.

SEBASTIAN As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
ANTONIO Or, as 'twere perfumed by a fen.
GONZALO Here is everthing advantageous to life.
ANTONIO True, save means to live.
SEBASTIAN Of that there's none, or little. (2.1.50-54)

The two “savage reductionists” are most definitely “sour-souled,” and soon enough they are agreeing to kill Alonso and Gonzalo as they sleep.⁸⁾

The Problem of Evil: That a Brother Should Be So Perfidious!

In his earlier *As You Like It*, Shakespeare had given us another tale of a duke banished by his younger brother, and the play includes a parallel story of another brother, Oliver, who hopes to cripple or kill his younger brother, Orlando. What is most intriguing about the murderous Oliver is that he declares that he has no idea why he hates his younger paragon: “I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul, yet I know not why, hates nothing more than he” (*As You Like It*, 1.1.159-161). From an external point of view, speaking of his malignant daughter Regan, Lear, driven to madness, howls the tormenting question: “Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?” (*King Lear*, 3.4.76-77).

The answer we find in the late plays is that evil may or may not have a direct cause, but it certainly exists and may arise if not actively resisted. In the first few lines of *The Tempest*, the Boatswain tells Gonzalo: “Use your authority [to command these elements]! If you cannot, give thanks that you have lived so long and make yourself ready . . . for the mischance of the hour” (1.1.23-25). This, as he confesses to Miranda,

(*Macbeth*, 1.4.25-26). Other echoes resonate. When the tempted Sebastian says, “I remember / You did supplant your brother Prospero,” Antonio replies, “True: / And look how well my garments sit upon me, / Much feater than before” (2.1.271-274). Antonio is deluded. When Macbeth is first addressed by a newly granted title, he responds: “The Thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me / In borrowed robes?” (*Macbeth*, 1.3.8-9). Once he has waded his bloody way to the throne, the same clothing imagery is used by Caithness—“He cannot buckle his distempered cause / Within the belt of rule” (*Macbeth*, 5.2.15-16)—and Angus—“Now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant’s robe / Upon a dwarfish thief” (*Macbeth*, 5.2.20-22)—to show how ill-fitting is the ill-gotten position.

Prospero has foreseen the danger and sent Ariel to intervene. Just as Antonio and Sebastian draw their weapons to kill the king and his councilor, the invisible Ariel “*Sings in Gonzalo’s ear*” (2.1.301 s.d.), waking him in time to wake the startled Alonso, who demands to know why weapons have been drawn in his presence. Sebastian and Antonio quickly lie that they had heard a threatening bellowing, “a din to fright a monster’s ear” (2.1.315), but the king remains safe to seek for his son, and in Ariel’s act of intervention Shakespeare has shown us the spiritual counterpart to the malevolent plotting.

Caliban’s Plot: Lead, Monster; We’ll Follow

Except for his being freckled or spotted (1.2.283), we are never told exactly what Caliban looks like. However, assuming that Prospero’s description of Caliban’s unfortunate parentage—got by the devil himself upon the foul witch Sycorax—is true, and judging from other evidence in the play, we can be sure that Caliban is not a pleasant sight to behold. No

one mistakes Caliban for a “spirit” with a “brave form,” a “thing divine” of “noble” appearance, as Miranda describes Ferdinand on first seeing him (1.2.410-412, 419-420). Of course, Miranda has good reason other than aesthetic ones to wish to avoid looking on Caliban (1.2.311), but even the courtly, normally reticent Alonso is later moved to remark on Caliban’s appearance: “This is a strange thing as e’er I looked on” (5.1.290).

Trinculo and Stephano, the drink-loving, bottle-bearing jester and butler, have the closest acquaintance with Caliban during the course of the action, and their opinion is clear, for they repeatedly call Caliban “monster” (sixteen times in 2.2, sixteen more in 3.2, a further ten times in 4.1), often in combinations such as “scurvy monster” or “abominable monster.”⁹ They also refer to Caliban as a “mooncalf” (three times in 2.2, twice in 3.2), a term for a misshapen birth supposedly caused by the influence of the moon, so Prospero’s late reference to Caliban as a “misshapen . . . thing of darkness” (5.1.268, 275) would seem to be quite accurate.

Banquo warns Macbeth against the “instruments of darkness” that lead us to harm (*Macbeth*, 1. 3. 124). Caliban proves to be such an instrument, but Stephano and Trinculo are too fuddled with sack to heed anything but their own greed. Encouraged by Stephano to keep drinking his “celestial liquor” (2.2.115), Caliban quickly swears his allegiance to him:

CALIBAN I’ll show thee every fertile inch o’th’ land,
 And I will kiss thy foot. I prithee, be my god. . . .
 I’ll kiss thy foot. I’ll swear myself thy subject.

(2.2.145-146, 149)¹⁰

With delusions of dominion in mind, Stephano and Trinculo follow the drunken, howling monster.

Still intent on drinking up the entire butt of sack he has salvaged, Stephano soon agrees, in mock courtly language, to listen to Caliban's plot. Caliban claims to be subject to a tyrant who has used sorcery to take the isle from him, but Caliban swears he can lead Stephano to an unaware Prospero: "I'll yield him thee asleep, / Where thou mayst knock a nail into his head" (3.2.58-59). As befits his nature, Caliban's plan is direct and brutal:

CALIBAN Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him
 I'th' afternoon to sleep. There thou mayst brain him,
 Having first seized his books, or with a log
 Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
 Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember
 First to possess his books, for without them
 He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
 One spirit to command. They all do hate him
 As rootedly as I. Burn but his books. (3.2.86-94)

He even offers Miranda to Stephano—"She will become thy bed, I warrant, / And bring thee forth brave brood" (3.2.103-104)—and Stephano is delighted with the plan: "Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be king and queen . . . and Trinculo and thyself shall be viceroys" (3.2.105-107).

It should come as no surprise to find that Caliban is a liar, for it is abundantly apparent that Ariel does not hate Prospero. In fact, the

invisible Ariel has been present throughout, overhearing the entire plot. He has caused some comical mischief by using his voice to make Caliban and Stephano think Trinculo has been calling them liars, with Trinculo being cursed and slapped as a result, but Ariel intends to tell his master about the plot (3.2.114), and the scene ends with Ariel distracting the plotters as they follow the sound of his mysterious music.

Aside from the comic relief in the Caliban plot, what purpose is served by having *two* parallels to Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's rightful position? It seems clear that Shakespeare, like Prospero with Miranda, wants to emphasize his point through repetition, for in *The Tempest* we see two examples of the free-floating evil that can corrupt. The echoes of *Macbeth* are surely no accident, and whatever else he may be, Caliban is not an unjustly deposed innocent.

The Assistant's Supervised Lesson:

Excellent Dumb Discourse; The Harpy Harshly Grades

Wearied from wandering, Gonzalo asks permission to rest. Alonso, his spirits dulled and giving up hope of finding his son, agrees to sit and rest (3.3.1-10). Antonio and Sebastian are still plotting in asides to each other, but just as they agree to strike that night while the others will be tired and unwary, there is a dramatic intervention:

Solemn and strange music, and PROSPERO on the top (invisible). Enter several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet, and dance about it with gentle actions of salutations, and inviting the King etc. to eat, they depart. (3.2.17 s.d.)

The reactions are typical, with Sebastian and Antonio rather mocking, but Gonzalo perceives the important point of the performance. Although he mistakenly supposes they may have been “people of the island,” he intuits the significant way they differ from Caliban: “though they are of monstrous shape, yet note / Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of / Our human generation” (3.3.30-33). The increasingly voluble Alonso has also been struck with wonder that “Such shapes, such gesture and such sound, expressing / (Although they want the use of tongue) a kind / Of excellent dumb discourse” (3.3.37-39).

Their pleasure in the performance is fleeting, for Ariel, heralded by thunder and lightning that recalls the opening storm, enters as an accusatory harpy, and his first harsh words are directed at the usurpers: “You are three men of sin” (3.3.53). As the harpy, Ariel goes on to say that destiny has brought them to the island, where, “Being most unfit to live—I have made you mad” (3.3.58). In case there is any confusion, Ariel reminds them of their crime—“that you three / From Milan did supplant good Prospero,” exposing “Him and his innocent child” to the sea, and it is for that “foul deed” that Alonso has been bereft of his son and faces “Ling’ring perdition” (3.3.69-77).

As Ariel *vanishes in thunder* (3.3.82 s.d.), Prospero praises his performance, which has perfectly followed Prospero’s instructions, and which has had a profound effect on the transfixed Alonso, provoking his longest speech:

ALONSO O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
 Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;
 The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder—

That deep and dreadful organpipe—pronounced
The name of Prosper. It did bass my trespass.
Therefore my son i'th' ooze is bedded, and
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
And with him there lie mudded. (3.3.95-102)

As the guilt-stricken Alonso leaves to seek his son by drowning himself in the same depths, soon followed by Sebastian and Antonio, Gonzalo equates the three: “All three of them are desperate: their great guilt, / Like poison given to work a great time after, / Now 'gins to bite the spirits” (3.3.105-107). Alonso seems sincere in his grief and guilt, but Sebastian and Antonio exit while swearing to fight any ministers of Fate (3.3.103-104), not sounding repentant at all.

Professor Prospero's Power-Point Presentation: Some Vanity of Mine Art

Miranda and Ferdinand are literally and figuratively at the center of the play. In her very first lines, Miranda is linked with the virtue of pity—“O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer” (1.2.5-6; see also 15, 27, 63, 132, 354)—and her compassionate nature is significant because it shows that she is instinctively able to sympathize with and value someone other than herself. When the two are brought together, they are immediately smitten with the other's physical beauty—Miranda beholds a “thing divine,” Ferdinand addresses a “goddess”—which elevates them in appearance as far above the misshapen Caliban as, in his own later idiom, greatest surpasses least (3.2.101-102).

The two fall in love at first sight, which pleases Prospero, but he

wants to test the strength and purity of Ferdinand's love for his daughter, so he uses his powers to take Ferdinand prisoner, assigning him the burdensome task of carrying logs, which had been Caliban's onerous chore. In 3.1, the central scene of the play, Prospero secretly observes a brief meeting between the couple. For Ferdinand, his "mean task" becomes a pleasure if it serves his mistress, and the sympathetic Miranda urges him to rest while she bears the logs, even projecting her sympathy to the pile of logs: "When this burns, / 'Twill weep for having wearied you" (3.1.4-7, 18-19, 24).

Infected with love, as Prospero puts it (3.1.31), Miranda for the first time goes against one of her father's commands when she tells Ferdinand her name (1.3.36-37). They are completely in love, so all the references to bondage, servitude, and slavery are to the eagerly willing subjection of one love-filled heart to another. Prospero knows he is witnessing a "Fair encounter / Of two most rare affections!" (3.1.74-75), so he rejoices in secret when they pledge to marry, but he has other business to perform.

That business is the masque he presents for the edification of the couple. Prospero may seem overly protective of his daughter's virginity, as he severely cautions Ferdinand of the dire consequences of any sexual union before the couple has been joined by ceremony:

PROSPERO If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
 All sanctimonious ceremonies may
 With full and holy rite be ministered,
 No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
 To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
 Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew

The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both. Therefore take heed,
As Hymen's lamps shall light you. (4.1.15-23)

Despite Ferdinand's assurance—"the strong'st suggestion / Our
worser genius can, shall never melt / Mine honour into lust" (4.1.26-28)
—which clearly evokes for us the instances of Antonio and Sebastian
easily succumbing to the suggestions of their own worser spirits,
Prospero cannot refrain from offering another warning just before the
big performance, "Look thou be true . . . The strongest oaths are straw /
To th' fire i'th' blood" (4.1.51-53), and Ferdinand once again reassures him,
answering Prospero's fire-in-the-blood image with a familiar one of sexual
purity: "I warrant you, sir, / The white cold virgin snow upon my heart /
Abates the ardour of my liver" (4.1.54-56).

There have been a few allusions to unchaste love earlier in the play,
as when Gonzalo makes the surprising (for him) comparison of a sinking
ship being "as leaky as an unstanched wench" (1.1.46-47) or when
Stephano sings of sailor-disdaining Kate: "Yet a tailor might scratch her
where'er she did itch" (2.2.52). In much more delicate language, Miranda
acknowledges her physical yearning, as she tearfully refers to her
"unworthiness that dare not offer / What I desire to give, and much less
take / What I shall die to want" (3.1.77-79), but she immediately upbraids
herself—"Hence, bashful cunning, / And prompt me, plain and holy
innocence!" (3.1.81-82)— an act of self-control and self-reproach that sets
her in shining contrast to Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, and Caliban.

Miranda becomes more than a daughter for Prospero, as she
becomes, for him and for us, an ideal, a living emblem of chastity and

purity. From the beginning, Miranda has appeared to exist slightly above mortal status, as is shown when she seems to be the embodiment of pity and when Ferdinand assumes she must be a goddess, not a mere maid. When Ferdinand apostrophizes her "(O, you wonder!)" (1.2.427), he may unknowingly be evoking the Italian source of her name, *mirando*, 'wondrous,' or its Latin root *miror*, 'to wonder at,' but both in the alliteration and amphibrachic rhythm, Miranda's name calls to mind that of Minerva, the virgin goddess of wisdom.¹¹ As Ferdinand exclaims of Miranda on their second meeting, "But you, O you, / So perfect and so peerless, are created / Of every creature's best" (3.1.46-48).

In his concern for his daughter's chastity, Prospero is preserving her as an ideal model of propriety, elevating her to nearly mythical status, but we have had ample examples of what happens when models of propriety and decorum are not followed. We might harken back to Shakespeare's Ulysses when he warns:

Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark what discord follows. Each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy. . . .
And appetite, an universal wolf . . .
Must make perforce an universal prey
And last eat up himself.

(*Troilus and Cressida*, 1.3.109-111, 121-124)

And Lear is driven to the depth of madness by his overwhelming disgust at seeing the world as a morass of ravening lust, which leads to his shocking eruption of revulsion: "Then kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill!" (*King*

Lear, 4.6.111-131, 183). In *The Tempest*, it is the misshapen Caliban who embodies the image of sexual disorder in his unrestrained appetite. When reminded of his thwarted attempt to rape Miranda, he shows not the slightest sign of remorse—

O ho, O ho! Would't had been done;
Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans. (1.2.350-352)—

just lingering enthusiasm for the attempt and regret it had been prevented, and later he offers Miranda to Stephano as a prize for killing Prospero (3.2.103-104).

In speaking to Ariel, Prospero may deprecatingly refer to the masque as “another trick . . . Some vanity of mine art” (4.1.37, 41), but the masque is Prospero’s educational gift to the betrothed pair. We have seen other plays-within-plays in Shakespeare, ranging from the ludicrous but thematically important performance of ‘Pyramus and Thisby’ by the rude mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to Hamlet’s use of the travelling players to trap the conscience of the king, but Prospero’s masque is pointedly didactic, and he again plays the pedagogue, insisting that Ferdinand and Miranda pay strict attention: “No tongue, all eyes. Be silent!” (4.1.59).

The masque presents a paradigm, a pattern to follow, one that emphasizes order, propriety, and the resultant harmony. Ariel and other spirits embody Iris, Ceres, Juno, and Nymphs and Reapers in the spectacle. Iris, the goddess of the rainbow and hope, is the messenger of the gods, and in this office she calls down Ceres, goddess of earth and

harvest. When Ceres asks why she has been summoned to earth, Iris informs her that the purpose is to celebrate “A contract of true love” (4.1.84), and a later repetition—“Come, temperate nymphs, and help to celebrate / A contract of true love” (4.1.132-133)—helps to emphasize the formality of the marriage rite as a pattern that must be followed to ensure and bring into being a harmonious union.

When Ceres apprehensively asks about the possible attendance of Venus and Cupid, the themes of abduction and lust are again called to mind, but Iris assures her that the disruptive pair have gone on, so there is no longer any threat of a “wanton charm” on the couple (4.1.95). At this point in the presentation, Juno, queen of the gods and goddess of childbirth, descends “To bless this twain that they may prosperous be, / And honoured in their issue” (4.1.104-105). As Juno and Ceres conclude their songs of blessing, Ferdinand breaks in with his admiration for the production and producer—“This is a most majestic vision . . . so rare a wondered father and a wise / Makes this place paradise” (4.1.123-124)—but again Prospero calls for silence: “There’s something else to do. Hush and mute, / Or else our spell is marred” (4.1.126-127).

Using Juno’s authority, Iris now summons “temperate nymphs” and “sunburned sicklemen” to crown the celebration with a graceful dance. Suddenly the dance is interrupted by a reverberation from the opening storm, as, “*to a strange hollow and confused noise,*” the masque vanishes (4.1.132-138). Prospero’s earlier “There’s something else to do” hushing of Ferdinand has contained a double meaning, for, just as twelve years earlier, when Prospero was so “rapt in secret studies” that he was unaware of his brother’s ambition, so now he has been so wrapped up in his masque production that he has nearly forgotten the threat posed by

having lost their bottles in the pool. Caliban proves more single-minded, repeatedly urging quiet and dedication to their task, but just as Stephano begins to focus—"I do begin to have bloody thoughts" (4.1.220)—in yet another echo from *Macbeth*, Trinculo notices the attractive wardrobe there for the taking. Despite Caliban's insistence on taking care of the most important business first—"What do you mean / To dote thus on such luggage? Let't alone / And do the murder first" (4.1.231-233)—Stephano threatens Caliban—"Monster . . . help to bear this away where my hogshead of wine is, or I'll turn you out of my kingdom! Go to; carry this" (4.1.250-252)—and the two continue to heap Caliban with the stolen finery. The scene ends in noisily comic fashion, as the three conspirators are literally hounded from the stage by spirits in the shape of dogs

Prospero's Last Lessons: Which Must Take the Ear Strangely

At the end of Act 4, Prospero is pleased to acknowledge that the progress of his project has left him in complete control: "At this hour / Lies at my mercy all mine enemies" (4.1.262-263). In the final act, with the court party standing charmed within his magic circle, Prospero is poised to deliver his lecture to a captive audience. Speaking once again as a schoolmaster, Prospero hopes the solemn music provided by Ariel will prove to be an effective aid, "the best comforter / To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains, / Now useless, boiled within thy skull" (5.1.58-60). Earlier, Prospero had told Ariel of his intention—"their senses I'll restore; / And they shall be themselves" (5.1.31-32)—and now, as his "charm dissolves apace," the process of their mental restoration begins: "so their rising senses / Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle / Their clearer

reason" (5.1.66-68).

Their newly clearer reason is soon challenged, however, as they are confronted with wonders and amazements, even miracles, as those apparently dead are restored to life and others experience a rebirth. Indeed, *The Tempest* is filled with transformations and symbolic rebirths. The story began with the banished Prospero and his infant daughter being sent to their deaths in "A rotten carcass of a butt," at the mercy of "th' sea that roared" (1.2.146, 149), and when they providentially came ashore on the isle, Prospero freed the cruelly bound Ariel (1.2.289-293). Among the court party, Gonzalo speaks of the miracle of their preservation from the sea, which seems to have freshened rather than stained their garments (2.1.6-7, 62-65, 69-70).

At the end of the play, such wonders appear one after another. Prospero assures Alonso that he is "a living prince" (5.1.108), and the astonished Alonso—"But how should Prospero / Be living, and be here?" (5.1.119-120)—declares that the affliction of his mind is now amended from the madness that held him (5.1.115-116). Prospero comforts Alonso on the loss of his son by saying he lost his daughter in the tempest (5.1.141-153), only to reveal the wonder of Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess in his cell (5.1.170-171), and, surprisingly, it is Sebastian who hails the revelation as "A most high miracle!" (5.1.177). The same motif is voiced by Ferdinand when he praises Prospero, "of whom I have / Received a second life" (5.1.194-195), to his father, and the Boatswain reports that all the mariners "were dead of sleep," only to be awakened by "strange and several noises" to "freshly" behold their gallant ship (5.1.230-237). It is, fittingly, Miranda who achieves the greatest vision, as she emerges from the cell with Ferdinand to encounter a world newly born:

MIRANDA

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world

That has such people in't. (5.1.181-184)¹²⁾

The theme of transformation is announced early on in Ariel's song as he leads Ferdinand to Prospero and Miranda:

ARIEL [*sings*]

Full fathom five thy father lies,

Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes,

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange. (1.2.397-402)

Despite the supposed death by drowning of Ferdinand's father, the sea change of which Ariel sings is a positive one, but transformations may be positive or negative, and the sea can provide either. Immersion in the sea, even death by drowning, can lead to a rebirth following purification. The sea can also represent chaos (as in the tempest), death (by drowning), and the descent into a lower level of consciousness. Caliban is associated with the sea as the "strange fish" that Trinculo finds (2.2.24-27), and he represents a low level of consciousness. The only benefit he acknowledges from being taught language is that he can curse, and he tried to rape Miranda, the Minerva-figure who was trying to elevate him through education, leading Prospero to describe his degenerate nature as a lost

cause:

PROSPERO A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains
Humanely taken—all, all lost, quite lost!
And, as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers. (4.1.188-192)

It is no surprise, then, that Caliban so quickly adopts the drink-sodden Trinculo and Stephano as his new masters, for their “book” is a bottle of sack (2.2.127, 139), and it is only fitting that their drunken descent is into a filthy horse-pond (4.1.181-184). On the other hand, Caliban’s final utterance is utterly unexpected. When Alonso remarks of Caliban that “This is a strange thing as e’er I looked on,” Prospero repeats his blunt assessment of Caliban’s form and nature: “He is as disproportioned in his manners / As in his shape” (5.1.290-292). Prospero then speaks directly to Caliban, instructing him: “Go, sirrah, to my cell; / Take with you your companions. As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely” (5.1.292-294). Prospero’s polite “sirrah” is certainly unexpected in the circumstances, but Caliban’s response is a complete shock:

CALIBAN Ay, that I will; and I’ll be wise hereafter
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
Was I to take this drunkard for a god,
And worship this dull fool! (5.1.295-298)¹³

It comes as a surprise that Caliban is even aware of the idea of grace, and a bigger one that he intends to seek for it hereafter. The term “grace” is used various times, but in Caliban’s hearing it has mainly been ironic, as used by Stephano and Trinculo in referring to each other: “save our graces! . . . Thy grace shall have it . . . an’t like your grace” (3.2.106; 4.1.230, 239-240). The more usual and more significant meaning of the term is used by Prospero when, in consoling Alonso, he refers to the “soft grace” of patience (5.1.142), and more particularly when he asks for heaven to “rain grace” on the growing love between Ferdinand and Miranda (3.1.75-76). It is hard to know where Caliban might seek for grace, but perhaps he hopes it will rain down on him, as was suggested in his dreaming: “The clouds methought, would open and show riches / Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked / I cried to dream again” (3.2.141-143). Of course, Caliban at first thought that Trinculo and Stephano were gods that had dropped from heaven bearing celestial liquor (2.2.115, 134), but now that he realizes he was a fool to abase himself before the drunken pair and is better than them, perhaps the filthy pool has worked its own sea change on the monster.

In Milan, Prospero had devoted himself to private study, and through his efforts he had acquired (or compiled) a book of magic that enables him to control elemental spirits. He has employed these powers while he and Miranda have been on their isle of banishment, and, while he may exaggerate his achievements, we have seen him, through the agency of Ariel and attendant spirits, call into being a tempest that delivers his enemies into his power. But Prospero, the schoolmaster to Miranda and Ferdinand, has a final lesson to learn, and in this he is instructed by Ariel, who provides an object lesson in what it means to be

find the sympathy to pardon his enemies, thus finding and freeing the innate grace within himself, freeing himself as he frees Ariel and his enemies. Only now, with Ariel's prompting, is Prospero able to seek within himself that inner and immanent grace that enables one to be fully human.¹⁴⁾

Near the end of his drunken song of false freedom, Caliban howls his defiance of Prospero: "get a new man" (2.2.180). Prospero has done so, in a sense, for he has, in effect, become a new man, which is why he is able to give up his "rough magic" (5.1.50-57).¹⁵⁾ This inner change is shown in an outer one, for when his captive audience does not recognize him, Prospero requests his new/old garb to appear as Duke of Milan: "Ariel, / Fetch me the hat and rapier in my cell; / I will discase me and myself present / As I was sometime Milan" (5.1.83-86). The "new" Prospero can even find it in himself to forgive his brother's "rankest fault" (5.1.132), although since Antonio had "Expelled remorse and nature" (5.1.76), he is the only member of the court party left unregenerate. He only speaks once more, and that only briefly to describe Caliban as "a plain fish" (5.1.266).

With the exception of Antonio—and, perhaps, of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, who at least are paying the penance of returning their frippery and trimming Prospero's cell handsomely (5.1.292-300)—*The Tempest* ends as a Shakespearean comedy should, with a dukedom restored and a wedding to celebrate. Gonzalo encourages all to "rejoice / Beyond a common joy" for all that has been found, and particularly for "all of us ourselves / When no man was his own" (5.1.206-207, 212-213). Perhaps the only bleak note is that Prospero is planning to take part of their remaining night to tell his guests the story of his life, and we must

feel a touch of pity for the graciously unsuspecting Alonso, who says: “I long / To hear the story of your life, which must / Take the ear strangely” (5.1.312-314).

The Epilogue: The Strangeness of This Business

The first time our revels end is when Prospero’s timely recollection of Caliban’s plot brings the masque to a sudden clamorous ending. Blaming his vexation on an infirmity of his old, troubled brain, Prospero assures Ferdinand that he need not be dismayed:

PROSPERO Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
 As I foretold you, were all spirits and
 Are melted into air, into thin air;
 And—like the baseless fabric of this vision—
 The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with sleep. (4.1.148-158)

Significantly, Prospero again uses the “melting” and “dissolving” terms just after his abjuration speech when he addresses the charmed court group. Now, it is his own charm that “dissolves apace,” hence “Melting the darkness” that has cloaked their reason (5.1.64-68), and not long after, Alonso is aware that “Th’ affliction of my mind amends” (5.1.

115). But what about our minds? Our little lives are certainly bounded by the sleep of death, but we *are* “such stuff / As dreams are made on,” for we are the source of dreams. The vision of the masque may have been a “baseless fabric” and the entirety of our existence an “insubstantial pageant,” but we have the magical capacity to give airy nothings a local habitation and a name within our imaginations. And, as our imaginations are amended and begin to amend, our understanding should begin to swell.

The final time our revels end is in the Epilogue, when Prospero, alone on stage, addresses us directly, and the Epilogue raises a question: Who is speaking, the character or the actor? Is it Prospero, asking us to break our own spell, releasing him from the island as he freed Ariel, with our applause and cheers providing wind for the sails that will carry him to Naples and the wedding? Or is it the still-costumed actor, perhaps already envisioning a restorative pint to follow, making a rather conventional appeal for applause? The quality of the verse, which is doggerel compared to Prospero’s earlier revels-ending speech, suggests the latter, but in any case the question indicates our continuing active involvement in the play.

Gonzalo’s utopian commonwealth may have been comically flawed (2.1.148-176), but his joyful summary of what has transpired on the island—“and all of us [have found] ourselves / When no man was his own” (5.1.212-213)—contains more promise. Like the mariners who have been dreaming away for the length of the play, we, in witnessing (or reading) the performance, have been bounded by its dream. Yet if we are, indeed, such things as dreams are made on, we can hope that *The Tempest* will not only help us to find ourselves, but to find our better selves by looking

within to that accessible, transformative inner grace that could make us worthy of inclusion in Miranda's brave new world.

Notes

- 1) General Introduction, Penguin Classics *The Tempest*, xvi.
- 2) Introduction, New Cambridge Shakespeare *The Tempest*, 101.
- 3) Of perhaps incidental interest, Jonathan Bate uses the seven ages of man as the organizing scheme for his magisterial *Soul of the Age* (4).
- 4) See, for example, Peter Ackroyd, who states that "*The Tempest* has the distinction of being the final work he wrote alone" (*Shakespeare: The Biography*, 487).
- 5) See Bate's chapter 8, "The School of Prospero," in *Soul of the Age*: "His style is that of the schoolmaster" (131).
- 6) Rather reductively, Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, finds the prompts to be just "some bad-tempered admonitions to Miranda, of which the primary purpose is to prevent his having to deliver an unbroken monologue . . ." (287). Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare After All*, is perplexed—"Why does he do this, when, as she protests, 'Your tale, sir, would cure deafness,' and when the audience in the theater, too, listens almost as if spellbound?" (858)—but, judging from the praise of her Shakespeare courses that covers the dust jacket, Professor Garber may never have experienced an inattentive student.
- 7) As in the claim by Stephen Orgel, Introduction, Oxford Classics *The Tempest*. "From Caliban's point of view . . . Prospero looks very much like Sycorax. The rage, the demand for unwilling servitude, the continual threats of constriction and painful imprisonment are characteristic of both" (20). Well, no, and I doubt that even Caliban would equate Prospero's brief bout of bluster with Ariel's twelve years of painful confinement in a cloven pine. Disappointingly, though, even Tony Tanner, *Prefaces to*

Shakespeare, suggests an equivalence: “and Prospero in *his* ‘most unmitigable rage’ threatens a rebellious Ariel with a punishment almost identical to the one visited on him by Sycorax” (814).

- ⁸⁾ Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, 667; Tanner, 816. One is also obliged to acknowledge Coleridge’s perception: “Shakespeare never puts habitual scorn into the mouths of other than bad men, as here [2.1] in the instances of Antonio and Sebastian” (*The Romantics on Shakespeare*, ed. Bate, 533).
- ⁹⁾ Stephano’s final comradely “bully-monster” (5.1.258) encouragement of his companion in crime rings rather hollow when we recall the “bully Bottom” (3.1.7) and “O sweet bully Bottom!” (4.2.19) with which Quince and Flute refer to that embodiment of essential goodness in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
- ¹⁰⁾ In his eagerness to be free of Prospero’s control, Caliban eagerly subjects himself again, offering to abase himself in a way Prospero would never demand. Though certainly unpleasant, the “torments” that Caliban endures seem more akin to the tricks of Puck as Robin Goodfellow than to the vile tortures so lamentably prevalent in Shakespeare’s day. Cramps, stitches, urchins, and pinches (1.2.326-331), however painful, are a far cry from racking, maiming, and burning. That Prospero threatens Caliban with pinches suggests that they may be intended as a last-resort means of correction and control, but in no way close to a life-threatening flogging. Moreover, when Caliban refers to the possible punishment of pinches just after urging murder—“And do the murder first. If he awake, / From toe to crown he’ll fill our skins with pinches” (4.1.233-234)—pinches seem a pretty mild response.
- ¹¹⁾ See Martin Butler, Commentary, Penguin Classics *The Tempest*, for the likely derivation of Miranda, a name invented by Shakespeare (94).
- ¹²⁾ Another problem in dealing with Shakespeare as a text is the matter of

tone, for a reader is compelled to supply the voices in all their various moods. A modern writer can make use of typography—italics and caps, for instance—as well as verbs and modifiers to help the reader, as J. K. Rowling does in the following three lines:

“Kept *what* from me?” said Harry eagerly.

“STOP! I FORBID YOU!” yelled Uncle Vernon in panic.

Aunt Petunia gave a gasp of horror.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone, 42.

Shakespeare’s text is bare, in that sense, and the four monosyllables of Prospero’s response to Miranda’s moment of wonderment—“’Tis new to thee” (5.1.184)—can be taken in different ways. Butler, in his Introduction, notes that the utterance can be given as a disillusioned counterpart to Miranda’s optimism (xxii), and Garber harshly labels it as “the most paternal of put-downs” (864). I choose to read Prospero’s brief line as positive and supportive, in the vein of “Indeed, it *is* new to you, and aren’t you fortunate,” rather than an uncharacteristic sour and cautionary “It may be new to you, you ninny, but there are a lot of bad dudes out there.”

- 13) On this point, I fully agree with Bloom: “When a chastened Caliban submits to Prospero at the close, his use of the word *grace* initially startles us” (668).
- 14) Prospero at times calls Ariel “my spirit” (1.2.215; 5.1.6) and “my diligence” (5.1.241), so it does not seem much of a stretch to regard Ariel, in his counselling aspect, as an airy representation of Prospero’s conscience or higher spirit.
- 15) A number of critics, including Bate, *Soul of Age* (139), Peter Holland, Introduction, Pelican Shakespeare *The Tempest* (xxxviii), and Lindley,

Introduction, New Cambridge Shakespeare *The Tempest* (8), express concern about the potential blasphemy in Prospero's abjuration of his magical powers when he claims to have raised the dead: "graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, ope'd, and let 'em forth" (5.1.48-49). Surely this is boasting rather than blasphemy. For one thing, we never see (or hear other report of) Prospero doing this, but we have heard a similar claim from the bombastic Welshman, Owen Glendower: "I can call spirits from the vasty deep." Since Prospero is speaking alone, there is no one to challenge his extravagant claim, as Hotspur immediately does with Glendower: "Why, so can I, or so can any man; / But will they come when you do call for them?" (*1 Henry IV*, 3.1.52-54).

For another thing, Shakespeare is clearly borrowing Medea's speech from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as nearly every critic points out, and if Shakespeare is permitted this bit of creative plagiarism, why should Prospero be denied some hyperbole in his farewell to his art, particularly when no one seems upset about the love-struck Ferdinand's claim that Miranda "quicken what's dead" (3.1.6). Prospero may not have actually raised the dead, but Shakespeare, as Tanner notes (825), has used his art to that end, and not long before in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

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