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From Tempest to Epilogue: Augustine’s Allegory in Shakespeare’s Drama

Alonso.

Irreparable is the loss, and Patience
Says it is past her cure.

Prospero.

I rather think
You have not sought her help, of whose
soft grace
For the like loss I have her sovereign aid
And rest myself content. (5.1.140–44)

I

It is a commonplace that The Tempest concerns and, by implication, illustrates the limits of language, specifically the inadequacy of words to make articulate the depths of the heart’s meaning. Some critics, however, while acknowledging the theme of verbal insufficiency, find compensation in the play’s imagistic and dramatic richness, its “excellent dumb discourse,” which does convey what is in the heart of silence (see, e.g., Jewkes and Greene). From this perspective, the play fails to embody its meaning in language but succeeds by nonverbal means: through its enthralling procession of scenes, its variety of characters, its sounds and music, its spectacular stage effects, and its wondrous masque, it finally approaches the presence and plenitude of meaning that belong to the artistic symbol. Although “discourse” fails, Prospero’s skillfully directed “theater” communicates immediately with the inner recesses of the other characters; and by analogy, the argument continues, Shakespeare’s theater speaks as immediately to the entranced and knowing audience.

It is probably true, as a contemporary man of the theater remarks, that staged performances have a unique power:

Theater is the most direct of all the arts. All the others use other materials, such as words and paint, to create. Only the theater uses the living presence. The actor becomes an instrument alive enough and real enough and true enough to create reality—by means of reality.

Because of this special quality, the theater holds a mirror up to nature in a way that the other arts cannot. In the theater, creativity takes place at the same moment that the public is literally there. It offers a totality of experience that cannot be accomplished in any other way.

(“Conversation with Strasberg”)

In contrast, words by themselves function only in a region of difference, a middle space among things, thoughts, speakers, hearers, and code; they yield their fullest meaning only through a mediation, or perhaps remediation, of interpretive work, which remains, even when most effective, at a distance from the thing itself. Words lack the force and amplitude of spectacle, whose immediacy convincing and moves us before self-conscious questions of thought, irony, and analysis can undermine our apprehension. Moreover, because words written in a book do not even provide an echo of life, they are inherently less capable of representation.

It would be too easy, however, to set aside the problem of language in Shakespeare by considering him essentially a man of the theater, a director and sometimes an actor in plays he made to please his audiences. He did write his plays, and someone must read and interpret them before they can be turned into the solid visibilia of performance. There is no Shakespeare unless some readers confront the abyss of linguistic signs; and if they are careful readers, they will not ignore the poet’s continuous preoccupation with the limitations and powers of all signs, particularly those written, spoken, and theatrical. That Shakespeare anticipated the interpretive work of his reading audience and reflected it in his plays is a possibility worth examining.

1
My thesis has four major components. First, in renewing poetic imagery that Shakespeare received from Genesis through Augustine's Confessions, The Tempest provides an allegory of the interpretive process, uncovering the modes, conditions, obstacles, and means involved in understanding signs. Second, by revealing the limitations and distortions of theatrical spectacle, as well as of language, in relation to truth, the play questions the very possibility of human understanding. Third, in its dramatic structure, and especially in the choices that characters make at the end, it indicates a means of overcoming the abyss of meaning in all signs; thus, by analogy, it instructs its viewers and readers about their problematic relation to its own signs. Finally, in the Epilogue Prospero's peculiar position vis-à-vis the completed play and his historical audience solicits reflection on the relation between aesthetic faith and eschatological faith: poetic illusion is justified by the social function it serves, a function akin to, but not identical with, that of prophecy.

II

The opening of The Tempest emphasizes the work of language, although in a context of sense data so striking that spectators at a performance easily miss the fact. In "A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard" (stage directions), a ship's master orders, "Boatswain! . . . speak to th' mariners! Fall to't yarely, or we run ourselves aground." But immediately, before the Master's commands can effectively organize the crew for concerted action, a passenger, King Alonso of Naples, intervenes with a second command: "Good boatswain, have care. Where's the master? Play the men" (1.1.1-10). Alonso's interference repeats an event of twelve years earlier, his intervention in unstable Milan to unseat a legitimate ruler, Prospero, and install a usurper obligated to pay homage and tribute to Naples.

Alonso had the political cunning and power to defeat his human adversary in that earlier time; but in the present scene, ironically directed by Prospero, Alonso is helpless against a greater adversary, Nature. The Boatswain, warned to "remember whom thou hast aboard" (1.1.19), lays bare the King's impotence with his prolix, impudent response to the King's counselor:

What cares these roarers for the name of king? . . . if you can command these elements to silence and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap. . . . Out of our way, I say.

(1.1.16-27)

In this sheer oppugnancy of elemental and human noise, the forms governing human society prove hollow, because in a crisis of nature they are essentially powerless to command order in the universe. Impiously, but accurately, the Boatswain characterizes the King's orders: "A plague upon this howling! They [the king's spokesmen] are louder than the weather or our office" (1.1.36-37).

While Shakespeare's tempest reenacts the tempests of the emblem books drawn to figure a primordial chaos near the center of temporal life, the fate of language in this scene evokes another traditional emblem, the Tower of Babel. Symbolizing humanity's corrupt striving for self-sufficient power against the heavens, Babel resulted in a confusion of linguistic difference that alienated a unified people from being and from one another. Gonzalo's cry, "We split, we split!" (1.1.59), describes the recurrence of that condition in the time of The Tempest, many years after Alonso and Antonio's grab for power. Nevertheless, the aged counselor Gonzalo, the play's exemplary interpreter, trusts in a divine intention working within the changes of the moment and claims, against the Boatswain's avowal of a "chance" universe, to read signs of a destiny in the Boatswain's expressions: "Me-thinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows" (1.1.29-30). Consistently it is Gonzalo, the man of patient faith, who endures trials equably and who discerns through the surface of seeming insignificance the remnant and promise of a just order.

Prospero, also, is a person of faith who once endured a violent sea and subsequent trials, which he describes for Miranda when he recounts their expulsion from Milan:

There they hoist us,
To cry to th' sea that roared to us; to sigh
To th' winds, whose pity, sighing back again,
Did us but loving wrong. . . .  

(1.2.148-51)
In retrospect, if not at the time, Prospero can read the displacement of himself and his infant daughter to an almost deserted island as a sign of "providence divine" (1.2.159) operating through a sympathetic nature. This initial evidence of his faith suggests that he is not demonic, vengeful, or senilely irascible when he first appears in the play. Although his faith cannot keep him from later experiencing a natural temptation to revenge, his first words to Miranda reveal that his twelve years on the island have tempered his soul to a care, humility, discipline, and clarity of purpose that it previously lacked. Thus his magical control of Ariel and of "all his quality" (1.2.193), symbolic of his broad power to bring forth things, qualities, and persons into more articulate being, is a product and a reward of his patient effort, not the sign of a vice.

The Tempest is unusual among Shakespeare's plays in that its title calls first attention, not to a great personage or to some human mood or effect, but to a natural phenomenon. This phenomenon, moreover, is placed in conjunction with several others of tremendous metaphorical resonance: the sea, human exile, human conspiracy, an island, a ship, and a society rejuvenated. If The Tempest has few metaphors in which "something abstract (e.g. an intellectual quality or attitude), is interpreted by an image" (Clemen 192), the reason is that metaphor has become more structural in this play and is less obvious as a rhetorical embellishment. Chosen for their powerful natural appeal to the imagination and their authority in the tradition of allegory, the figures that establish the setting, oppositions of characters, and progression of plot in The Tempest make visible certain archetypal desires, states, and actions common to the experience of Christian pilgrims. In the words of G. Wilson Knight,

Here the poetry is preeminently in the events themselves, which are intrinsically poetic. Now just as in Dante a visionary conception is expounded, as Mr. T. S. Eliot has observed, by an unmetaphoric and "transparent" style, so The Tempest will be found peculiarly poor in metaphor. There is the less need for it in that the play is itself metaphor. (224)

I cannot overemphasize that these structuring allegorical figures derive their power from their source in common experience; they can represent invisible qualities and truths chiefly because, as images in real life, they initially shape consciousness and help situate it in space and time. It is thus natural, not arbitrary, that they become signs of intangible human intentions and tendencies. As Richard Wilbur aptly states in "Advice to a Prophet," a poem about the need for a language of images, they are a "live tongue"—"things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken," things that "call / Our natures forth" (6). Particularly in The Tempest, Shakespeare exploits the suggestive potential of a paysage moralisé, a physical scene that allegorically figures forth the spiritual substance of its inhabitants. Not only does this insular landscape figure their inward spirits, it induces them into self-revealing and self-summarizing action in the world, so that, like Dante's damned and redeemed souls, they experience their spiritual conditions in a physical way.

This special world gains some of its poetic resonance and philosophic depth from the tradition of allegorizing scriptural motifs that Augustine skillfully practices in books 11-13 of The Confessions, where he attempts a complete figurative reading of the story of Creation in the first verses of Genesis. Shakespeare must have been familiar with at least some of Augustine's works, and there is good evidence that The Tempest self-consciously addresses some of the autobiography's concerns, but in the poet's way of concrete realization. In this sense, Shakespeare's play revises Augustine's more abstract reflections on the work of Providence in human life. Whereas in the final books of the autobiography Augustine allegorically interprets an ancient text, disembodying its spiritual truths from their physical images in the light of a fuller revelation, Shakespeare reincarnates the same allegorical figures by incorporating them into a mimetic image of life. Augustine directs his exegesis toward overcoming his carnal intellects, both of God and of his own soul, but Shakespeare directs his art toward refurbishing and fully knowing carnal intellects, toward sense knowledge of the created world as the proper human means of knowing self and God. Augustine interprets Moses' words in Genesis as "figuratively spoken" to provide meaningful visibilia for the weak understanding of carnal
human beings. He makes this assumption chiefly out of respect for Moses, whom he imagines as capable of writing in the perfect polysemous mode (227). Especially relevant to The Tempest are Augustine’s exegeses of the imagery of “the darkness upon the face of the deep,” the movement of God “upon the face of the deep,” the “firmament in the midst of the waters,” and God’s “gathering together of the waters called the Seas” to separate them from “the dry land Earth.”

According to Augustine, the first lines of Genesis, referring to “the darkness upon the deep,” figure a primitive “spiritual matter, before it underwent any restraint of its unlimited fluidness or received any light from Wisdom” (217); it differs from “heaven,” the created wisdom that cleaves to God for eternity, and from “earth,” an unformed invisible matter from which God makes all visible things. The darksome deep is, in Augustine’s words, an “inchoate spiritual creature” made to “ebb and flow darksомely like the deep”; its life is characterized by the “wandering instability of its spiritual deformity,” which causes it to fall continuously, like a weight, away from enlightenment and rest, toward the “gates of death.” When the Spirit of God, “borne above the waters,” said, “Let there be light” (not after any interval, since time was not yet created), a grace formed the spiritual creature as with a “garment of light” (230–33). The operation of this grace is told in the words of the psalmist, quoted by Augustine: “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts, all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me” (42.7). The “deep” calling is the mysterious grace and judgment of God; the “deep” responding is the alien, wandering spiritual deformity. Thus, in a passage that seems to foreshadow The Tempest, Augustine imagines God’s Spirit coming as a storm to disturb the darksome deep and raise its spiritual creature to the enlightenment of grace.

As Augustine discourses on the deep, he characterizes its flaw more particularly as forgetfulness; although God’s waterspouts call out to it, “it is sad, because it relapseth, and becomes a deep, or rather perceives itself still to be a deep” (235–36). Thus the figure is expanded from a metaphysical principle to a psychological one: it subsists as a dimension of the creature’s soul even after the gift of form-giving grace. The embittered souls of Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian fit this psychological archetype in The Tempest.

Augustine next expounds the “firmament” that God made to divide “the waters from the waters” (Gen. 1:6). The waters above the firmament are the supercelestial beings, his angels, who announce God’s will in time; the waters below, now the formed being of the deep, are embittered souls weighed down by “love of cares” and “uncleanness of . . . spirit” (232). The firmament itself is God’s authoritative scriptures, stretched out like a scroll over the waters and the earth, to raise forgetful human beings from the deep; the firmament is like a skin of signs stretched across the heavens, and it is a corollary to the skins with which God clothed his human creatures when sin made them mortal. Dependence on signs, and on language, is thus conceived as evidence of humanity’s alienation from grace, although God’s Book, wisely shaped of “harmonizing words,” serves as a life-giving instrument for those who read it with faith. The firmament, Augustine suggests, is both a cloudy veil that can obscure light and a “glass” that can transmit light.

After creating the firmament, according to Genesis, God gathered the “waters” into one place and let the “dry land” appear—figures, Augustine says, of two societies, one embittered in infidelity and the other righteous in continence (238). Since both live under the firmament, each is restrained by Law; but the effect of the Law on “the society of the sea” is only to increase conflict by the bounds it imposes on their impatient and wicked desires, causing “their waves [to] break one against another” (238). This figure functions to make carnal, selfish human beings see and feel the quality of natural antagonism among them. In contrast, “the dry land” is the society of the virtuous, who are zealous for life-giving gifts of God; their works of mercy, firstfruits of the Spirit, are a “sweet spring” irrigating the land and bringing a rich harvest. In The Tempest Prospero, Miranda, and Gonzalo, who “would fain die a dry death” (1.1.66), fit this archetype. Their society, too, is constituted of carnal human beings under the firmament of God’s Law and Scripture and is incapable of its own redemption, as Caliban (“Thou earth”) plainly proves, because it is
always threatened by “spreading thickets of covetousness” (240).

To protect the dry land from its potential barrenness, God has “Let the waters bring forth . . . the moving creature having life, and the fowls that fly above the earth” (241). In perhaps his boldest allegoresis, Augustine interprets the moving creature as God’s sacraments, which “have moved amid the waves of temptations of the world [the ‘sea society’], to hallow the Gentiles” in baptism; and he interprets the fowls as God’s prophets, who also derive from the waters. The turbulence of the waters represents the “necessities of the people estranged from the eternity of Thy truth” (241), which call forth God’s judgment, and also the sacraments instituted by God’s mercy; in Augustine’s words, “the waters themselves cast them forth, the diseased bitterness whereof was the cause, why they were sent forth in Thy Word” (241). It is the “tempestuously swelling” human race flowing like a brackish sea out of Adam that requires the sacraments, as well as “dispensers to work in many waters, after a corporeal and sensible manner, mysterious doings and sayings” (242). The sacraments issuing from the waters below the firmament are signs of the same Spirit that is figured by the sea in The Tempest, and the voices of God’s prophets resounding in the open firmament of God’s Book are a type of the “heavenly music” that will aid Prospero in working on the senses of the conspirators to renew their minds and bring out of their earth a “living soul.”

Throughout The Confessions Augustine emphasizes the infirm condition of those who must rely on signs such as sacraments, miracles, and verbal pronouncements for their approach to God. He implicitly deprecates a life subject to signs when he gives two answers to the question of what it is that God commanded to “multiply into multitudes”: on the one hand, God commanded “the offspring of waters” to multiply the multitudes of corporeal signs made necessary by “the depth of the flesh” (the image is of waters bubbling into signs visible to the forgetful); on the other hand, God commanded human beings to generate “things mentally conceived” (247), an activity belonging more properly to the society of earth, where human reason is more concordant with spiritual authority. The first form of generation, Augustine suggests, corresponds to a mode of translation in which one idea, or “thing mentally conceived,” begots many signs; the second form corresponds to a mode in which one sign begets many ideas. By implying the superiority of the second mode, Augustine assigns relative values to the work of making signs and the work of reading them. Interpretation of the type Augustine is doing at the end of his Confessions represents the second, higher mode because it moves from a fleshly beginning in many signs to a more unitary intellectual and spiritual conclusion.

Augustine does not say what the first mode is, but it seems to conform to the work of the poets; for their intimacy with the waters of human passion and the desires that ebb and flow and their use of manifold sense images to move their audiences make them assuredly creatures of time and flesh intent on finding the high in the form of the low.

I have summarized parts of Augustine’s allegory in detail because I think it compares significantly with Shakespeare’s profound look in The Tempest at the poet’s ability to redeem a world degenerated in the imaginations of the degenerate. Moreover, Augustine’s implied ranking of interpretive and poetic productions can help explain the disparagement of poetic drama in the play, expressed puzzlingly in Prospero’s occasional guilt, his allusion to “Some vanity of mine art,” his promised abjuration of his “rough magic,” and his Epilogue. Shakespeare seems to agree with Augustine about the dangerous vanity of shows, yet the poet finds a perspective that can transform spectacle into a potentially restorative activity.

Augustine’s exegesis of Genesis should enrich our understanding of the court party’s relation to the storm that opens The Tempest. The play begins in the realm of allegory, not only because the powerful images of the first scene have a wealth of significance developed naturally by tradition but also because the vehicle conjoining the signs and making them effective is the tempest arbitrarily imposed on nature by Prospero’s magical art. Insofar as Prospero has manipulated the stage and the effects, we are in the presence of allegory’s arbitrariness as well as its naturalness, in a region of dissimilarities as well as a region of potential meaning (on allegory’s
arbitrariness, see Benjamin 232–33). The evil insubstantiality at the core of moral nature threatens to negate the promise of fulfillment to human intellection and desire. Gonzalo can still read the “miracle” of their “preservation” and of their garments, which, though “drenched in the sea, hold, notwithstanding, their freshness and glosses, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt water” (2.1.64–67); but most of the others are made more bitter by their passage through the storm. Alonso, nagged by forgotten guilt and thus hopeless of any redeeming miracle, wants to be let alone to grieve for his missing son and declining political fortune. Antonio and Sebastian cynically insist that the sea is still with them, even though their clothes appear fresh: “If but one of [Gonzalo’s] pockets could speak, would it not say he lies [to say we are renewed and saved]?” (2.1.68–69). While some critics regard the tempest as a total illusion projected by Prospero’s magic, the assumption that the survivors have passed through a storm is one we must accept in aesthetic faith, just as we accept the appearance of the Ghost in Hamlet.

Gonzalo’s efforts to cheer the King imitate the devices of poets. Beginning from one idea of the survivors’ miraculous rescue, he brings forth “more islands” by evoking parallels to “widow Dido’s time,” only to inspire Antonio’s sarcastic rejoinder, “Widow? A pox o’ that!” (2.1.79). This exchange introduces a central concern the play shares with Vergil’s Aeneid, the value of premarital chastity. Gonzalo next draws a theme that Montaigne developed out of book 1 of Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the human dream of a golden age: “I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries / Execute all things. For no kind of traffic / Would I admit; no name of magistrate . . .” (2.1.152–54). This famous speech, Gonzalo admits, is a bit of “merry fooling” intended to humor Alonzo; it is especially interesting, however, since the contradiction Antonio so quickly pounces on—“The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning” (2.1.163)—discloses a basic problem in the relation of human language to desire.

Shakespeare borrowed the passage almost verbatim from Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s essay “Of the Caniballes,” which purports to defend the natural reasonableness of precivil life (164). Shakespeare’s only significant addition to Montaigne’s description of that life is Gonzalo’s statement “I would by contraries / Execute all things” (2.1.152–53), words calculated, it seems, to bring out the peculiarity of Montaigne’s romantic vision. It is a vision of the good constructed out of negations of a series of “evils”; problematically caught in linguistic difference and the binary oppositions of human thought, the vision is thus necessarily distanced from its object. It attempts to find its object by the indirect and mediate path of linguistic formulas established by an authoritative literary tradition; but in the process, Montaigne founders in all the embellishments of civilized prose, graced with numerous tags from Latin poets, and forgets his initial purpose.

Gonzalo, also, loses his object in the temporal pursuit of it, but he is made to speak a pun that clarifies his problem: he would, as authority but not as magistrate, “by contraries / Execute [that is, put to death in the mind] all things.” Under the rule of formal language and an aggregate of artful devices the good that the heart desires tends to evaporate from vision, as Augustine was fully aware. Involvement in the many, in the order of language as well as in the order of things, can ensnare the mind and obscure its memory of its starting point. But Gonzalo, for all the faults he is heir to as a practitioner of traditional rhetorical eloquence, gets the final word in the witty repartee in which Antonio attempts to undermine Gonzalo’s “poetry.” Though verbally false, Gonzalo’s speech is the product of goodwill, which can go far toward overcoming the defects of linguistic communication; and it is consistent that his playful eloquence is echoed in the chastened courtly wit of Ferdinand and Miranda at chess in the play’s final “wonder.”

The obscuring potential in language is illustrated further in the next episode, after the somnolent influence of Ariel’s magic causes all but Antonio and Sebastian to fall asleep. In the play sleep serves as an accurate measure of a character’s faith in being; just as the viewers’ own “irritable searching after fact or reason” is put to sleep through their faith in the illusion of the play, within its boundaries Gonzalo and his trusting friends doze first, before the bitter Alonso gives in. Sebastian almost falls asleep, but Antonio’s “nimble” spirits deter him from
that defenseless condition. Antonio's pat explanation of the strange coincidence of all the others dozing off at once—"It is the quality o' th' climate" (2.1.204)—expresses his literalist reliance on a materialistic psychology. One of Shakespeare's Machiavellians, Antonio is especially interesting in revealing a connection between practical action and a certain conception of time. Believing that time is governed by fortune, he assumes, like Machiavelli, that "it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if one wishes to hold her down, to beat her and fight with her" (215). Consequently, to cure the "standing water" of Sebastian's lethargic spirit, Antonio offers, "I'll teach you how to flow" (2.1.226), combining in his statement Machiavelli's interest in riding the waves of fortune and, ironically, the figure of Augustine's "society of people yet in the bitterness of infidelity" (247).

By playing on the unconscious desires beneath Sebastian's stated sentiments, Antonio uncovers a "hope" the pupil would not dare admit himself. When Sebastian innocently declares, "I have no hope / That he's undrowned" (referring to Prince Ferdinand, who is believed dead), Antonio quickly translates his confederate's shallow grief into an opportunity:

O, out of that no hope
What great hope have you! No hope that way is
Another way so high a hope that even
Ambition cannot pierce a wink beyond,
But doubt discovery there. . . .  (2.1.243-47)

In these uncharacteristically direct words Antonio unconsciously displays his tendency to be blinded by his own sophistical rhetoric: what is ultimately in view he cannot see; yet his present discontent drives him forward. Beneath his ambition is his bitterness at emerging a subordinate from his plotting against Prospero, although in Sebastian's undiscriminating eyes Antonio enjoys political success. In an elaborate poetic metaphor Antonio articulates completely his view of time and its attendant rule of action:

We all were sea-swallowed, though some cast again,
And, by that destiny, to perform an act
Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come,
In yours and my discharge.  (2.1.255-58)

In the perspective of Shakespeare's more inclusive poetry, the verb "cast" in the passage binds together in one image the senses of fortune (cast of the dice), nature's tumult (regurgitation), human alienation (cast from Eden), and human plotting (casting of the play that comes after the prologue). If fortune governs time, including the temporal ebb and flow of private human passions, then the plotting that Antonio recommends, if not justified, is at least inevitable, and the old tragedy must be repeated. This necessity is the truth that ambition cannot "pierce to" as Antonio deludes himself and Sebastian about the immediacy of their freedom. Antonio is the victim of the emptiness that draws his libido dominandi, while Sebastian is about to become an unwitting slave to Antonio's passion, to be bound in the future to pay Milan the homage and tribute Antonio has resentfully paid Naples the past twelve years.

The epistemological implications of Antonio's desire to project an entirely new plot in time "Whereof what's past is prologue" shed more light on his condition. There is a sense in which the only certain knowledge we can have is of those things we create ourselves, although we may not fully know why we create them; it is thus possible that Antonio's compulsion to be a creator is simply the correlate of his desire for perfect and immediate knowledge. His impatience and bad faith, however, suggest to him an action that can only carry him further from his object.

Antonio's plot is only one of several attempts by characters in The Tempest to make a new society based on a "new man." This project, in fact, is the central theme of the play, uniting by counterpoint episodes quite unrelated by cause and effect. While Antonio plots on one part of the island, Caliban plots on another; and, more innocently, so does Ferdinand after he discovers Miranda, only to have his eros subsumed within Prospero's more inclusive "project." All the lesser plots are marked by degrees of impatience and forgetfulness, whereas Prospero's depends specifically on his attained powers of patience, verbal precision, and memory working under the rigor of a narrow time limit. Prospero finally enjoys a measure of success in his creative endeavor, but in each of the other plots the "new man" in view only too readily discloses an un-
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avoidable legacy from the old Adam, from whom pours “the brackishness of the sea . . . the human race so profoundly curious, and tempestuously swelling, and restlessly tumbling up and down” (Augustine 242).

The suggestive device Stephano uses in trying to entice Caliban into his service illustrates the plot of the three low characters in the play and its elaboration of themes I have discussed: holding up a bottle of wine rescued from the shipwreck, Stephano commands, “Here, kiss the book. . . . Come, swear to that; kiss the book” (2.2.130, 142). He uses the bottle as an ersatz scripture, a new basis of authority in his regime. Of course at the moment he is merely acting out the comic antics of a drunken butler; but his gesture, following his remark that the wine will “give language” to Caliban, is a reminder of humankind’s problematic relation to language. Stephano’s solution is the simple one of drink; instead of the laborious approach to meaning through signs, he chooses the quick ecstasy of liquor applied directly to the pain of living.

Stephano is a postcivil naturalist, as he indicates in the sailor’s ballad he enters singing:

But none of us cared for Kate. . . .
She loved not the savor of tar nor of pitch;
Yet a tailor might scratch her wher’er she did itch.

(2.2.49-53)

Like the cannibals Montaigne admires, this “valorous” man, who says “the sea cannot drown me,” prefers immediate gratification of his needs to the civil indirections of land life. His naturalism, however, has been corrupted by a bogus civilizing that inspires his notion of using Caliban as an instrument for political advancement in the city. In most respects, Caliban is better than his city comrades because of his experience with nature—“all the qualities o’ th’ isle, / The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile” (2.2.339-40); and such things as berries and fish, pignuts, jay’s nests, marmosets, filberts, and “Young scamels from the rock” (2.2.161-74). He is capable, thus, of hearing the island’s wonderful sounds that induce him to dream of “riches / Ready to drop” (3.2.144-45). Additional evidence of a natural integrity is his remembering the goal of the plot against Prospero when the other conspirators, distracted by the lure of flashy garments hung on a line, stumble into a bog. The basis of Caliban’s particular strength is his literalism, which impedes any transformation of purpose.

Some commentators on The Tempest believe that Prospero waxes dangerously heartless until the last part of the play, when Ariel moves him to pity and mercy for the usurpers (Abrams 58, Egan 177). As the still legitimate ruler of Milan, Prospero is, rather, being wisely merciful as he rightfully attempts not simply to punish the criminals but to restore them to good faith and conscience. His early success is evident when the court party reappear after having stumbled for a time “Through forthrights and meanders.” Their resultant “madness”—“even with suchlike valor men hang and drown / Their proper selves” (3.3.58-59)—is a type of Augustine’s sea society, in which souls, like waves, “break one against another” (238) and sink toward the gates of death. In the words of Ariel, however, “destiny . . . the never-surfeited sea / Hath caused to belch up you” (3.3.53-56).

Prospero’s chief work regarding these sinners is to use the island’s intrinsic power to bring hidden motives into the open and to restore memory, for to have their lives made whole, the conspirators must imaginatively reexperience crucial moments when their natural feelings and consciences were insensible. Only thus can moments lost in the “dark backward and abyss of time” (1.2.50) be redeemed and the coherence of the story line be restored in hope. Thus, Prospero directs Ariel to put before the court party a banquet that tantalizes their hunger and greed; when Ariel in the guise of a Harpy retrieves the banquet, they are forced to experience the illusoriness of the things they have desired and consequently to feel what they themselves are. The device is directly effective, for Alonso exclaims:

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 organ pipe, pronounced
The name of Prosper; it did bass my trespass.

(3.3.95-99)

As Alonso suddenly remembers not only his trespass but also the justice of the universal order, he makes an appalling connection: “Therefore my son i’ th’ ooze is bedded.” His
consequent impulse to “seek him deeper than e’er plummet sounded / And with him there lie mudded” (3.3.100–02) expresses the paralyzing remorse pulling him downward and figures the spiritual state to which his greed and treachery have brought him.

Clearly, Prospero, though once at fault for his idolatry of the liberal arts and of theoretical wisdom, has learned to justify his private study of books by turning it to a human and public purpose. Further proof of his achievement is the masque he has Ariel enact for Miranda and Ferdinand. A figural embodiment of his attained wisdom and art, this lovely vision displays in content and form the temper of Prospero’s maturity. It presents Iris, goddess of the rainbow—properly played by Ariel (see Smith 213–16)—mediating to bring together Ceres, who haunts the sea marge, and Juno, who inhabits the sky, in a “donation” of dance and song for the “blessed lovers.” Prospero remarks that they are “Spirits, which by mine art / I have from their confines called to enact / My present fancies” (4.1.120–22). In the allegory, their “confines” are simply the natural phenomena in which they dwell and Prospero is a poet-magician whose personifying art calls them forth to make them more articulate for their audience. Through language, gesture, music, and theme, the masque speaks of a providential regularity in nature as the source of our daily bread and reminds us of God’s continuing creation. Its chaste, processional diction and ceremonious tone displace the diction of irony, immoderate emotion, dalliance, and prettiness that characterizes the tale in Ovid:12

Ceres.
Hail, many-colored messenger, that ne’er Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter, Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flow’rs Diffusest honey drops, refreshing show’rs, And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown My bosky acres and my unshrubbed down, Rich scarf to my proud earth. . . .

Juno.
How does my bounteous sister? Go with me To bless this twain, that they may prosperous be And honored in their issue. (4.1.76–105)

The regularity of the heroic couplets that art imposes on the language of these presences of nature, together with the clear theme and concrete diction of their speech, has the effect, above all, of seeming natural. Some critics find the language flat and uninteresting, perhaps because they are looking for a poetry of concrete dramatic embodiment instead of the formal cadence and style met with here; but in the context of honoring a betrothral, this decorous language is right. Appropriate for its time, it shows Prospero’s improved sense of timing. W. B. Yeats has more abstractly recognized the fitting graces of occasion in his “Prayer for My Daughter,” a poem with multiple echoes of The Tempest:

How but in custom and in ceremony Are innocence and beauty born? Ceremony’s a name for the rich horn, And custom for the spreading laurel tree. (185)

The poetic images of Prospero’s masque enhance nature by ceremoniously revealing its essences and, in the process, unveiling a wonderful variety in a single harmony. This vision, requiring silence and stillness in the viewers, approaches through imagination Augustine’s “intellectual vision,” a pure apprehension of the eternal forms sustaining material substances; according to Patrick Grant, the tenor of this vision is God’s providence for his human creature (8).12

For the lovers, the gifts of the goddesses—spiritual gifts of honor and joy from Juno, material gifts of plenty and fertility from Ceres—imply a possible unity of human personality to be realized in married sexual love. It is consequently also fitting, in view of the sophistical rhetoric of courtly love, that Venus and her son are excluded from the ceremony. Ceres’ final words, “Spring come to you at the farthest / In the very end of harvest,” not only bestow a blessing but also focus nature’s reminder of mortality, a truth that imparts to human action an urgency and a peculiar rhythm. This meaning is repeated and amplified in the dance that Ceres and Juno arrange for the Naiades and the “sunburned sicklemen, of August weary”: the silent gestures of these dancers make manifest in emblem the quality of harmony possible between mythic presences in nature and human workers at harvest. The sign of the reapers’ toil may tell
of antagonism between nature and humanity, but the reapers' festive mood expresses a grace received when labor is spiritualized by responsiveness to nature's sacred life.

For literary criticism, one of the most controversial parts of *The Tempest* has been the abrupt anger that makes Prospero cut short the masque, sending the confused revelers back to their confines. Obviously upset, he exclaims, "I had forgot that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates" (4.1.139–40). Prospero's outburst has at least two causes: the villainy of Caliban and his troop, which thwarts the temporal realization of the poet-magician's lovely vision and provokes a just anger, and Prospero's disappointment with himself for almost repeating the mistake that lost Milan its sovereignty. At that earlier time Prospero had yielded to the temptation of beautiful ideas, now he momentarily allows the beautiful masque to seduce him from reality.

"Excellent dumb discourse," Shakespeare makes his play suggest, poses peculiar dangers for its audience, just as words can obfuscate understanding. The immediacy of the spectacular illusion can so short-circuit reflective capability that viewers mistake the theater's world for the "living presence." The "totality of experience" that spectacle seems to offer can make them forget both the past and the future and thus the need to return to the contingencies of actual temporal experience. That spectacle by itself is no remedy for limited minds seeking understanding is suggested in the earlier scene when the court party observe the banquet: instead of having their understandings cured by what they see, they are left maddened, with their reasons "devoured"; the effect is not merely deleterious, however, in men who have been impatiently rationalistic in their desire to impose a meaning on providentially granted experience.

The separate failures of language and spectacle to provide adequate illumination for the mind seeking full understanding suggest a third means the poet may have thought to offer his audience: a mediation between words and images through the play of imagination striving to free itself of the error imposed by different corporeal sign systems and to achieve an interior resolution of the word and the image. In other words, Shakespeare may have imagined his audience as comprising both readers and viewers and created his works for both. The most persuasive means of inspiring aesthetic faith, spectacle wins our assent at once by speaking directly to our hearts, as do the world and our immediate sense of it. It convinces us as nothing else can. But we need freedom of movement to follow out anything so persuasive, to find its limits of veracity, its implications, and its blind side. A text preserves the critical distance required for interpreting significance, since the low profile of its signs forces us to ask questions and the privacy of reading encourages us to compare the fiction with our own experience. In sonnet 23 Shakespeare states the word artist's dependence on readers:

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own heart;
So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's right,
And in mine own love's strength seem to decay,
O'ercharged with burden of mine own love's might.
O, let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast,
Who plead for love, and look for recompense,
More than that tongue that more hath more expressed.
O, learn to read what silent love hath writ.
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.

The speaker's "fear of trust," syntactically ambiguous, looks two ways at his audience: it is a fear of too little trust from those who withhold their imagination's full participation in the ceremony of love's exchange, and it is a fear of too much trust in those who become spellbound by the ceremony's vehicle. Reading, hearing with eyes, is one way for the audience to preserve that common sense which knows what it sees. The poem implies, also, Shakespeare's agreement with Augustine that charity is the root principle of true interpretation.

Like Prospero, the lovers are enthralled by the masque, as they must be if it is to draw their imaginations to a full sense of its meaning. But his interruption initiates their transition from the exalted vision of art to temporal responsibilities:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
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. (4.1.148–56)

As Prospero once again cautions his audience about the insubstantiality of the masque, he broadens the compass of his larger plot to include speculation on human destiny. In a vast sweep, he foresees a conclusion for all temporal being—specifically, for all symbolic vessels of political power, religious worship, and artistic creation (“the great globe” puns on Shakespeare’s own stage, where no “racks,” or theatrical scaffolds, will remain). Viewed in the light of eternity, for which human life is created, all mortal being is essentially spectacle: “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (4.1.156–58)—not annihilated, but “rounded” according to the cyclic progressions of nature “with a sleep” that anticipates, the general tone and outlook of the play’s conclusion imply, a consequent awakening.

The vision Shakespeare attributes to Prospero at this moment bears further comparison with Augustine’s: while for the theologian our loves and desires determine what we essentially are, for the poet-playwright our “dreams,” or visionary apprehensions invested in images, shape in us the only enduring substance. Temporal things—and the word “rack” binds together the senses of storm, wreckage, instrument of torture, mental or physical torment, dregs of wine, exorbitant rent, wisps of cloud, frame for holding cases of type, as well as theatrical scaffold—are all means through which we shape our souls to an order of love. Shakespeare echoes a passage in the final pages of Augustine’s Confessions:

O Lord God, give peace unto us: (for Thou hast given us all things;) the peace of rest, the peace of the Sabbath, which hath no evening. For all this most goodly array of things very good, having finished their courses, is to pass away, for in them there was morning and evening. (254)

Augustine also implicitly uses a sleeping-waking figure when he contrasts the “sleep” of the faithful, who see darkly in this world, with their waking in the resurrection to a sabbath of eternal life that “hath no evening.” In Shakespeare, however, the emphasis is slightly different, for he shows more concretely—for example, by his unfolding of water metaphors—that natural things, like sleep, play a temporal role in providential fulfillment. Although the “revels ended” speech suggests a potent strain of medieval contemptus mundi, this motif coexists in Prospero’s vision, and in Shakespeare’s, in a tension of paradox with profound love and careful regard for the beauty and creativity of temporal things.

It is natural for Prospero, as he sees his project ending, to experience flashes of revenge against those who made it necessary; but he does not lose sight of the just purpose he framed from the beginning and for which he has continued to study his books. Therefore he can confidently tell Ariel that “Time / Goes upright with his carriage” (5.1.2–3), implying his own attunement with a providential march of time. Near success, he reviews the agents who have performed the acts he has directed:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrumps, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew. . . . (5.1.33–40)

These spirits of nature are all “Weak masters,” subordinate to Prospero’s power to direct them. Evidently they are all of pagan vintage, as indicated by their mention in Ovid’s story of the witch Medea and their association with Neptune and Jove (Metamorphoses, bk. 7). When Prospero wishes to wake “sleepers” from their graves, he may use these spirits as assistants; but their effect is limited, for they enact the directives of a “rough magic” proportioned to carnal mortals and tempestuous seas. Prospero’s “potent art” thus works in an element that is entirely natural.

Therefore when Prospero confronts the conspirators and requires “Some heavenly music . . . To work mine end upon their senses” (5.1.52–53), he must turn to more radical means. Paradoxically, he must “abjure” the very power that has brought him near the end of his project. His new aid of “heavenly music”—whether it cor-
responds to the prophets Augustine saw figured as “fowls of the sky” or to angels figured as “waters above the firmament” or simply to divinely granted grace—is a force explicitly beyond the direct control of Prospero’s magic. Still, Shakespeare’s verse implies, Prospero can summon it by his humble gesture of emptying himself of his instruments and arts of earthly control.\textsuperscript{18}

The “staff” and “book” that he intends to sacrifice are, of course, the ordinary trappings of a magician; but his peculiar art of transformation in \textit{The Tempest}, wrought through Ariel, whom he controls by language “To th’ syllable” (1.2.505) and by thoughts the dainty spirit “cleave[s] to” (4.1.164), has continually linked Prospero with poetry. Thus, in making him declare,

\begin{quote}
I’ll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I’ll drown my book \ldots  
\end{quote}

(5.1.54–57)

Shakespeare is acknowledging not only the limits of poetic art but its origins in the ebbing and flowing waters of natural emotion and passion that issue into signs. “Staff” perhaps conveys writing instrument as well as king’s scepter and magician’s wand, while “book” suggests both Prospero’s own book and the tradition of literature from which Prospero has learned.

Only by his humility, faith, and charity, moving him from self-reliance to prayerful petition for others, does Prospero assist the essential harmony of the watery voices with the earth’s power of generation in the souls of the conspirators:

\begin{quote}
Their understanding  
Begin to swell, and the approaching tide  
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore,  
That now lies foul and muddy.  
\end{quote}

(5.1.79–82)

This passage brings forth positive connotations of the tempest figure that have for the most part been hidden. After erupting into violence in the first scene, the sea remains a haunting power, lying just under the play’s language, imagery, and action, at times swelling into visibility to remind us of change. Its waves correspond especially to Prospero’s “beating mind,” where a tempestuousness continues in his life; and the masque, in which that beating rhythm finds the form of visionary poetry through the magician-poet’s craft, is a temporary meeting of his own sea’s tide with its reasonable shore. The sea seems to be the very spirit of the play, wrecking the old and gathering the new in nature and history. Prospero implies its function when he tells Miranda about their first abandonment to the sea:

\begin{quote}
To cry to th’ sea that roared to us; to sigh  
To th’ winds, whose pity, sighing back again,  
Did us but loving wrong.  
\end{quote}

(1.2.149–51)

Ferdinand comes later to the same realization: “Though the seas threaten, they are merciful. / I have cursed them without cause” (5.1.178–79). Shakespeare’s allusions to the sea gradually merge to clarify an increment of meaning that Augustine left largely undeveloped. For the poet, this great sympathetic chastising and sustaining body of water figures a Spirit at work in the very process of nature and history to return the creation to its Source.

\section*{III}

\textit{The Tempest} thus develops a psychological imagery that allegorizes many distinct voices in the soul. The clear voice of reason expresses itself in categories of conceptual thought and forms of discursive language; but other, more ambiguous voices speak from a dark depth of the soul that cannot be fully articulated in language, although spectacle, music, and poetic image can convince an audience of their reality. In Caliban’s words,

\begin{quote}
the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again. \ldots  
\end{quote}

(3.2.138–43)

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

In the pattern of this imagery, if the soul’s darker region is a sea of life, then human reason—with its language, its ethics, and its institutions—is an island’s shore in that sea. The island is the orderly world we form out of the darkness by reason and art; and its achievement is always precarious and desired, since the dark sea is always within us. To add another figure, the island of true civilization is a map drawn over that vast sea enabling us to navigate there without ever totally losing ourselves. Hence, Prospero, after using his learning and art to help his fellows find and know their true selves, can, depending on Ariel’s aid, “promise . . . calm seas, auspicious gales” for the homeward voyage (5.1.315).

Ariel’s place in the allegory remains a mystery, although it seems right to consider him, as many do, a spirit of poetry, commanded by Prospero’s language and thought. Freedom to play in nature and time is his proper state: “Where the bee sucks, there suck I” (5.1.88). Perhaps more than natural, he is a principle of unbinding and rebinding, unbounding and re-gathering, release from stale habit, mere natural causality, or rationalistic reason and reintegration into living wholes. He is like the principle of metaphor as he breaks old semantic identities and forges new ones with surprising reservoirs of meaning:

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.  
(1.2.399–404)

In this imagined transfer, which makes “coral” signify a natural and spiritual metamorphosis and “pearl” signify eyes that shed their literalist film to see with faith, Ariel spiritualizes parts of matter and gives them voice. His method, however, is not to negate the physical order; para-

doxically, he uses the linguistic and imagistic means of poetry to substantiate the material world, giving it a new richness of meaning. Through such a “tricky spirit!” the poet equates things thought to be disparate and thus shocks his audience into recognizing in their world a likeness and a unity that they had missed.¹⁹

As a coda to the multiple meanings in The Tempest, Prospero’s Epilogue fits a definition of the form by Hugh of St. Victor:

The things we have analyzed in the course of learning and we must commit to memory we ought, therefore, to gather. Now “gathering” is reducing to a brief and compendious outline which has been written or discussed at some length. The ancients called such an outline an “epilogue,” that is, a short restatement, by headings, of things already said. . . . The fountainhead is one, but its derivative streams are many: Why follow the windings of the latter? Lay hold upon the source and you have the whole thing. . . . the memory of man is dull and likes brevity, and, if it is dissipated in many things, it has less to bestow upon each of them. We ought, therefore, in all that we learn gather brief and dependable abstracts to be stored in the little chest of memory, so that later on, when need arises, we can derive everything else from them. (93–94)

Prospero’s final words are an epilogue in this sense, although the perspective is somewhat complicated by the speaker’s having stepped out of a concluded fiction to address an actual audience. In this movement outward, foreshadowed in earlier parts of the play, the Prospero of the Epilogue is caught with one foot in fiction and one in history. Having finished his fictional “project,” he initiates a more direct project that assumes a diminished distance between art and reality and a specific effect in his audience. It is a temptation for viewers and readers to think of Prospero, especially in the Epilogue, as Shakespeare in artful guise; but they can learn more from the Epilogue, and remain truer to its poetic character, if they continue to have full aesthetic faith in Prospero in his new double situation. Because he is still Prospero, his viewers and readers are still with him inside the imagined world of fiction; in fact, because he speaks so directly to their historical selves, they are there in an intimacy of listening that perhaps no other fictional character inspires:
Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;
And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

Having regained his dukedom and passed his most difficult test as a poet, Prospero now wishes to rectify his relation to a broader audience as he has rectified his relation to his subjects and fellow rulers. The spell of his earlier charms may have enfeebled his viewers, and his intrinsically successful project may prove extrinsically a failure. Their temptation repeats the temptation that once defeated Prospero in his study and caused him to lose his dukedom; also, their enthrallment and pleasure in theatrical entertainment echo Prospero’s earlier fascination with the masque. Just as progress from that moment required Prospero to sacrifice his “airy charms” and resort to “heavenly music,” now the need to disenchant the audience requires Prospero to step out of that seeming totality of experience and make his more direct address.

Specifically, he asks his audience to act by assisting his voyage to Naples, where in his public roles as father and as Duke of Milan he will approve his daughter’s marriage and thereby dispose the political future of his dukedom. His future, however, awaits the will of his audience consciously to return, renewed by his art, to their “Naples,” the places of their private and public actions. Their transformation will be manifest in “the help of [their] good hands” and in their “Gentle breath.”

Prospero’s request, of course, imitates the actor’s conventional appeal for face-saving applause from the audience; but in view of Shakespeare’s inclination to transform conventions while using them by the polysemy of words and the emergent qualities in things and events, it would be wrong to rest in the common interpretation of these phrases. Throughout The Tempest, “hands” are prominently instrumental in gestures and deeds of both treachery and friendship, as a look at a Shakespeare glossary can confirm. “Breath,” of course, is the sign of life and spirit and the means of speech. Prospero, then, is petitioning his audience not merely for applause that will help rupture the illusion but also for better deeds and gentler speech as they make their transition from spectators to citizens.

Strangely, he asks them as well for prayer, whose very effort can move Mercy, much as he earlier assumes divine assistance merely as the result of his desire for it. Sins requiring forgiveness, the play has shown, are his past inordinate attraction to human wisdom and created beauty and his tendencies to revenge and presumption, perhaps typical occupational hazards for the poet. That a fictional character should ask a real audience for prayer is most strange, unless one remembers that Prospero is still Prospero, that despite his breach of his world’s boundaries he still holds his audience in the domain of poetry. He is asking them, then, not immediately to pray but to imagine prayer and openness to grace as a possible means to human freedom from guilt and sin. Making this plea is as close as he can come to the stance of a prophet and still remain a poet.

In the eschatological perspective that joins the aesthetic one in the Epilogue, all human words, deeds, and creations depend for their final meaning and their only substantiality on their subordination to the work of Mercy. Hence the poet-prophet must release the audience from the confines of the play’s beauty in itself and move them to use their freedom to realize all the meanings of what they have witnessed. By interpreting the play in their consequent thought and through their deeds of love, the audience win a freedom that is identical with Prospero’s freedom to renew every traveler to his isle.

The Tempest, I have argued, is an allegory of the process of interpretation. Allegory calls attention to signs as signs and examines their adequacy to represent truth. The method emerges historically against a backdrop of symbolic con-
sciousness that involves assumptions about artistic embodiment and organismic of form and content. Whereas the symbol attempts to be congruent with its meaning in a world of natural proportion ("part of the totality that it represents" [de Man 176]), the direction of allegory is counter, demystifying the perceived symbolic unity to uncover a depressing difference between signifier and signified. But allegory also seeks to heal itself by striving to signify a more than natural plenitude of meaning. Allegory both deflates signs by calling attention to their failure and inflates them by charging them to carry more truth of experience than they properly can.

Shakespeare's play opens in the realm of allegory's arbitrariness. And just as Prospero's great arbitrary imposition of art on nature, the storm he creates, disorients the habitual thought and belief of other characters in the play, Shakespeare's spectacular vehicle of ostranenie possesses the streams of consciousness of his audience, taking viewers into the illusion of his allegorical world.21 Gradually, however, in the dramatic resolution of the various conflicts in the play, the spectators, with the characters, begin to see a design emerge: a personal design of Prospero's that they are made to believe is consonant with Providence. Through Prospero's achieved "nobler reason," "potent art," "care," and patient faith, they are all brought gradually from a Babel of emptied forms, happenstance, ambiguity, confusion, and noise to a world where signs fill more and more with significance. They finally arrive in a place that Miranda sees as a "brave new world" and at a conclusion that Gonzalo would set down for all time in unambiguous "gold on lasting pillars." This innocent view, in which the unfamiliar is becoming gratifyingly familiar, is not quite pure, however, including as it does Miranda's naivety, Gonzalo's rhetorical exaggeration, Antonio's silence, Caliban's incredible conversion, and Prospero's emphasis on "These happened accidents": at the moment Prospero seems to be the only one to remember that in the scheme of Providence, though "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8.28), we can never read with certainty the sentence of the present until we know the final word.22 The symbolic unity of life suggested in the play's conclusion, then, is an expression more of desire and promise than of realization. Even in the imagined world, which mirrors essentials of the historical world, it is clear that freedom of the human will continues to guarantee history's problematic openness.

As if to remind his audience of this truth, Shakespeare makes Prospero rupture the fictional world and insist in the Epilogue on relating its imagined truth to their historical lives. Instead of allowing viewers to continue in purely ideal speculation, Shakespeare uses another device of ostranenie, this time turned against the habits and seductions of their aesthetic consciousness, to release them back into history to perform a task in the light of an eternal design. Because the design is seen only through a glass darkly, they continue in a middle region with Prospero, no longer and not yet in the home of their deepest desires, but more sure of what they desire and of how to go there.

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Notes

1 Burckhardt appropriately stresses the importance of "patience to read Shakespeare, down to the minutest detail" (vii-viii).
2 In spite of a host of negative interpretations of the early Prospero, Rockett argues convincingly that Prospero has already "learned from his previous misfortunes . . . the efficacy of an active spiritual vigilance" (77). Egan finds an excessively rigid moralism in Prospero before the conjurer forswears his magic. Abrams sees Prospero in the early stages of the play as a type of the Renaissance Machiavel engaged in a "revenge plot" against Antonio and Alonso. Apart from this emphasis, Abrams' article is full of persuasive suggestions.
3 Battenhouse finds many specific instances in which Shakespeare's moral vision derives from Augustine.
4 Vance explains Augustine's spiritualistic hermeneutic as a means of winning a "victory over his own desiring flesh" (626). Vance's suggestion that the final books of the Confessions constitute a coda to Augus-
tine's entire work compares interestingly with Knight's description of The Tempest as Shakespeare's coda re-
newing and reworking all the major themes and char-
acters of the earlier plays (203–08).

5 Discerning Thomistic rather than Augustinian paral-
lels, Devereux analyzes the persistent imagery of bap-
tism, penance, communion, and matrimony in the play. He suggests that the isle's "heavenly music," a tradi-
tional figure of ordering grace, assists Prospero as he
leads the court party through the "figurative Baptism"
of the tempest, by which they all become regenerate.
6 Augustine comments on this topic in a passage in
which he draws an analogy between a lost soul found
and the extreme joy of sailors on surviving a storm at
sea: "It is also ordered that the afflicted bride should
not at once be given, lest as a husband he should hold
cheap whom, as betrothed, he sighed not after" (119).
Rokett provides an excellent discussion of Ferdinand's
position with regard to this theme (80–82).
7 This habit of mind is temporarily stilled in "Negat-
ive Capability," defined by Keats in a letter to George
and Thomas Keats, 21 Dec. 1817.
8 Peterson suggests that the "past is prologue" state-
ment applies to Prospero as well as to Antonio (222).
This idea, I think, obscures the important differences
between Prospero's play and Antonio's; Prospero in-
tends not so much to project a total self-made order as
to find an order existing in his story, which he promises
to tell his listeners at the end. His experience as a di-
tector has taught him the extent to which he must
always be an actor; consequently, for him "what's
past" is the first act begun back in Milan, from which
consequences have followed. His story unfolds a unity
that Antonio's, which edits some parts to nonconse-
quential prologue, does not.
9 Coleridge, in his ninth lecture on Shakespeare and
Milton, says that Caliban is "in some respects a noble
being . . . a man in the sense of the imagination: all
the images he uses are drawn from nature, and are
highly poetical" (142).
10 I essentially agree with Tillyard that Prospero, al-
ready essentially changed, "does not change funda-
mentally during the play, though, like Samson's, his
own accomplished regeneration is put to the test"
(126).
11 In working with the court party Prospero func-
tions somewhat like the Freudian psychoanalyst whose
aim is to help clients fill "the gaps of remembrance"
to complete their narratives (see Ysseling 109–10). In
the story Aeneas tells Dido about his crew's experiences
on the shores of the Strophades (The Aeneid, bk. 3),
the lesson of the Harpies descending to befoul a ban-
quet seems to be about patience and humility, about
not presuming to build new worlds without first seek-
ing the will of the gods in the matter.
12 Brower persuasively documents Shakespeare's pro-
gression from a "sweet witty Ovidianism" to the meta-
phorical design of The Tempest, "which gives philo-
sophic meaning to a drama of Ovidian metamorphosis"
(95–122). In carefully accounting for the way that dif-
ferent, changing strands of metaphor are caught up
into a single metaphorical design that ultimately trans-
forms all those metaphors to a new consistency of
meaning. Brower effectively answers Kott's argument
that the law of repetition is implicit in the play's struc-
ture. Kott is correct that The Tempest "re-thinks" the
old myths of Vergil and Ovid, but he fails to see that
it also transcends them by incorporating them within
a biblical perspective that is truly historical.
13 Grant makes the valuable observation that medi-
eval authors believed in their images, while Shakespeare,
writing after "a critical rift has opened to check the
traffic of free correspondence between the forms of
nature and visions of the mind," believes his images
(88). Although Grant's emphasis on two rhetorical
styles, allegory and drama, differs from my emphasis
on two audiences, viewer and reader, his differentiation
relates to and substantiates mine. I found his terms so
apt that I borrowed them for my title.
14 I am purposefully echoing phrases from the Stras-
burg interview because it seems to overstate the value
of "theater" to cultural vitalization, unconsciously sug-
gest ing spectacle's potentially stultifying effect on
audiences.
15 In Gayle Green's view, The Tempest is about a
grace that operates primarily through nonverbal means
and "devour's reason and language," as the dialectic
of words and realities "is not so much resolved as
transcended" in the silence of wonder (196, 203). This
reading perhaps overemphasizes the mysticism in
Shakespeare, who had more faith than Augustine did
in the ability of language to produce understanding.
Though silence is essential to the receptivity of readers
and viewers, as Prospero instructs Ferdinand and Mi-
randa before the masque, the artifact itself is a mediator
composed of words until its conclusion.
16 Henry James makes some interesting observations
on the play from the perspective of a reader.
17 Grant attributes the "richness of Prospero's speech"
to an ability to "accept the images while knowing
they are transient" (71).
18 Peterson finds evidence in The Tempest for a new
Renaissance concept of time as duration, whereby the
"patient man" assists "great creating Nature's" renewal
of social and natural orders by accepting "as purposeful
whatever time bestows" (28). He maintains that in the
play love is immanent in nature, but while this view
is correct as far as his romantic formulation admits,
it fails to connect the generative principle of love with
its transcendent source and therefore attributes to Pro-
pero's art more control over the transformation of the
other characters than seems consistent with the magi-
cian's resort to a higher grace.
19 Burckhardt uses Ariel's song in a fine explanation
of how poetry "corporalizes" language to make readers
attend more closely to the powers of language to dis-
tort and recreate (27–30). While Empson argues that
one word in a poem can have many meanings, Burck-
hardt insists "on the converse, that many meanings can
have one word," thus indicating how poetry recovers
pristine unities of meaning.
20 Some essential sources on allegory in relation to
symbol are Benjamin, de Man, Mazzotta, and Cowan. See Jameson 50–54 for a discussion of Victor Shlovsky’s concept of astronienie, art’s technique of defamiliarizing objects as a way of breaking through deadening and mechanical habits of conduct to restore conscious experience and allow us “to be reborn to the world in its existential freshness and horror.”

Grant discusses Augustine’s fondness for comparing the condition of human existence in time to the process of a spoken sentence (6–8).

Works Cited


