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TEMPEST

BY STEPHEN J. MIKO

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in’t!

Many ironies sit here. Except for the most obvious one, residing in the gap between Miranda’s innocence and our knowledge that some of these beauties are attempted homicides, there is little agreement either about what they are or how far they go. Miranda speaks from a tableau, just revealed by a magician to those who astonish her, and who have just been released by the same magician from a charmed circle. They are astonished too. The language of miracle and wonder is appropriate on both sides; a father is reunited with his son, gains a daughter, reconciles himself with conscience. Yet the magician who managed all this says almost nothing about the “strange maze” which he has led these wanderers through. He calls their miracles “accidents,” which he promises to make “seem probable,” along with the story of his life. Later, after the play is over. To clear the way for thinking (“every third thought”) of his grave. The ironies I speak of multiply as these elements are heightened into contrasts.

To harp on ironies is to harp on (possible) problems. The range of disagreement as to how to take this play is itself astonishing. If Miranda’s world is, demonstrably, neither brave nor new, what degree of mockery may be lurking here? To complicate matters further, this last scene, especially by virtue of being a last scene, has given rise to talk about mystery. That has in turn led to talk of
symbol, allegory, and mysticism. Something cryptic appears to most critics to be going on, and the usual (but certainly not universal) response has been to fill in Shakespeare's meaning with religious and moral hierarchies. Yet anything thought cryptic may also be an invitation to ask questions about explanations, to wonder, finally, whether explanation itself may be mocked in Prospero's promises to tell all some other time some other place.

What we have just noticed is at least an obvious manipulation of most of the characters into a position where they must be astonished, and, further, must behave themselves. Moral correction is another matter. So is forgiveness. The new world is most obviously new in being rearranged; rearrangement took place in careful isolation, on an island, with the help of a lot of magic and tricks. Yet the trickster is willingly giving up his magic powers to return, without notable enthusiasm, to rule Milan by conventional methods. He takes with him two unredeemed villains, one redeemed villain, a loyal retainer, two humiliated buffoons, and a wholly conventional romantic couple. He leaves behind both his magic emissary and his enslaved monster, probably, after Prospero himself, the two most intriguing characters of the play. There is not much agreement about what these final groupings mean, and very little sense that Prospero has solved anything. Both his future and Caliban's seem open questions—it is not even clear that Caliban will remain. What is clear is that Prospero has succeeded in his manipulations of bodies (if not destinies) and that he is packing up his tricks. Perhaps the playwright is also packing up his tricks, completing his play by completing its island actions, rounding them out but not (because of their very nature) fully resolving them. Once one looks at what finally happens to the various characters and the themes they embody, it is difficult to accept either Prospero's or Shakespeare's manipulations as a series of exalted gestures, part of a symbolic package that points toward (even if it doesn't actually show) a grand, coherent, or transcendent completion of Shakespeare's highest art. Neither is it possible to read the play as "just a play," without meanings of various symbolic kinds, in fact many kinds. I propose, then, to look at the play as if it is, in a stronger sense than is usually conceded, experimental. Shakespeare may be experimenting with the very assumptions that lead us to expect poetic justice, symbolic neatness, and "resolved" endings for plays. I think, in fact, that he is demonstrating the limits of all three sets of expectation.
II LOOSE ENDS

Does this play have loose ends or not? Those who lean toward heavily symbolic readings tend to think not; those who favor character analysis and even moral analysis tend to think it does. I belong to the second group, though my reasons perhaps differ from those most often given or implied. The neatness of this (and possibly any) work of art largely depends on how strongly one insists on details that seem to violate a defined, usually conventional pattern. For example, isn’t Antonio an embarrassment to the dominant moral pattern of the play? Unlike Alonzo he shows no repentance whatever, and some question the sincerity of Prospero’s forgiving him. In the same vein, does Caliban’s intention to “seek for grace” represent a lurch upward toward moral stature? Both show stubborn resistance to redemption, or even to claims that the tone of the ending is grandly affirmative. Yet one can always insist that exceptions prove the rule: Antonio and Caliban only show us that moral ideals exist in an imperfect world—all the more are just, forgiving, philosopher-magician-kings required. And from a certain comfortable distance this may do; why should we want to find a loose end in what can be seen as a reflection (though inverted) of the need for grace, or help, or even a civilized culture to keep evil (both natural and unnatural) in check? One ready answer is that these reflections just as easily suggest something very different, though not exactly contradictory. In these stubborn characters we may also see limits: to Prospero’s power and all that it may represent, including Shakespeare’s power in art, or the power of art.

Probably more than any of Shakespeare’s other plays, The Tempest leaves “reflection” a live metaphor. It has even been read as a kind of cypher to contemporary biographical, political, or religious events, quite beside the theories of more general symbolic construction alluded to already. I do not propose another attempt to sort these theories out, but to note that this variety must mean something—not, I think, some hinted idea to which the variety can be subordinated, but something about the multiplicity and possibly the deliberate inconclusiveness of Shakespeare’s last plays. However we evaluate these many interpretations, we can consistently infer that the play which occasions such riches must itself be rich and strange. Both the richness and strangeness are functions, it seems to me, of Shakespeare’s testing, or at least playing with, the limits of his—and maybe anyone’s—playmaking, including pow-

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erful gestures of affirmation while affirming, in Sidney’s sense, nothing. In short, there are loose ends indeed, of the most fundamental sort: the art and magic of playmaking questions both its matter (the themes) and its own power, affirming only in understood, limited ways.

What, then, are these affirmations? Beside the usual “romance” themes of forgiveness, reconciliation, and regeneration I would put a list that has a negative cast, because it derives from ironic perspectives: men and their desires need checking and ordering, a process which makes (limited) fulfillment of desire possible, and may even transform coarse emotion into something higher (or at least more interesting); “natural” is a profoundly ambiguous term, but all good (and, less clearly, most evil) is an art that nature makes; true love requires civilizing (another kind of limiting); plays and the art of making them are special, deliberately artificial distortions of the “real” world, meant less to teach than to present interesting, sometimes heartening, analogies; art is no avenue to higher realms but a modest (yet at best very impressive) image of man’s desires reflected back through his intelligence, which shapes and approves selectively; and even spectacular magic art has very little consequence in the world “outside.” I think all these points are made by the play—are, in fact, its central affirmations. I don’t see how such things could be asserted in a play without, at least in the most conventional senses, loose ends. The failure to carry out fully the pattern of moral correction may be seen, then, as just the most obvious refusal to make this play neat. If my list is accurate, the cast of mind dominating the play is neither tragic, nor, in the celebratory sense, comic; it is skeptical, yet genial.

III PROSPERO: THEURGIST, MAGE, GOETIST, TRICKSTER, STAGE MANAGER

This is Prospero’s play, with no very close parallel in Shakespeare. Whatever symbolic freight we make visible, Prospero is either carrying it or managing the carrying. It is no doubt obvious already that my emphasis will drift from left to right on the scale listed above: although we are surely impressed by Prospero’s ability to disintegrate and reassemble ships, quick-dry (and even freshen) costumes, cast spells, put on spirit-masques, and pinch out punishments, there are hints throughout the play that invite us—quite inconclusively—to subordinate this power, this Art, to something approaching hypnosis, the creation of dream states for moral
psychotherapy. The magic lore that creeps into the play is capable of causing embarrassment both to those who prefer the notion that they all just dreamt the tempest and the transportations and those who say magic is magic, usually invoking John Dee and insisting that at least it’s white. To be very short on this issue, transportations are not likely dreamt if you actually end up in other places, alive when you thought you had drowned, and we can hardly doubt that Ariel and company exist. On the other hand all this power results in only one indisputable conversion (Alonzo), the tempest is also obviously inside most of the characters, the magic shows are dispensable and vanish without trace or consequence, the selves everyone finds when released from trance are much the same as they were earlier, and we can’t be sure that Prospero isn’t embroidering a little—the Ovidian list including raising the dead (V,i,41-50) embarrasses almost everyone. We seem to be put repeatedly in the position of trying to decide what the magic means before we can say what it is. And that meaning, or those meanings, are all extensions of Prospero.

It may be helpful to descend for a while into the unambiguous. Although I think that Prospero’s magic tricks shift in emphasis from magic to tricks, and that this shift is emblematic of much else in the play’s movement, some solid “facts” about Prospero are given us, mostly in the usual first act history, and much also follows from them.

Besides an enormously powerful magician—the play begins, of course, with the ship disintegrating in Prospero’s tempest—Prospero is an overprotective father and an uneasy, apparently disillusioned idealist. His exile is a consequence both of the natural evil in his brother and his own retreat from ducal responsibility into studies—magic and the liberal arts. He takes blame for his condition, claiming to have brought out the evil in Antonio and to have lived too much in his mind (his dream?). Once the initial hardship of the journey was overcome, his magic books and powers made him a god of his island, displacing Caliban. So for a dozen years Prospero has been running everything, even, it would appear, the local weather. He has not seen fit to tell his daughter her own early history or his, and he has failed only in redeeming—making human, more-or-less—his “devil-whelp.” His child at fifteen is the very type of virginal virtue, full of sympathy for fellow creatures she has never seen but has apparently learned of from books and paternal instruction. The preservation of her innocence—of evil, especially
sexual evil—has been a central concern, nearly foiled by Caliban’s attempted rape. Now that the outside world must again be confronted (Prospero cannot neglect this providential opportunity to master his enemies), Miranda gets her history in careful doses, with considerable solicitousness for the shock to her delicate system and to her credulity.

A few obvious inferences follow easily from this list: first, we can expect no real trouble in any plans Prospero has to control the movements of his enemies; if he can do tempests, he can do most anything. Second, the single but striking failure with Caliban gives basis for a more fundamental sort of anxiety: Prospero’s power does not extend to minds or souls, so we may wonder how much external manipulation can touch natural evil, which we soon discover also continues in Antonio and Sebastian. What effect, then, can Prospero’s external powers have on internal (moral, spiritual) states? The whole plot seems to hinge on this question, yet it is begged early on. What in fact transpires is a series of scenes illustrating Prospero’s control, especially of two kinds: the testing of goodness and the interruption—not the correction or extinction—of evil. In short, a series of magic shows allowing the characters to show themselves. The metaphor of “finding” a self is, I believe, ironic well before the end of the play.

How we take these shows inevitably depends on how much we take them, either in themselves or by various allusive procedures, to have symbolic or allegorical meanings—and, in turn, whether these meanings arrange themselves into consistent pictures, or lessons, or larger “wholes.” Even more fundamentally, what we construct as interpretation depends directly on how serious we think Shakespeare was in presenting his shows, or, more narrowly, what sort of seriousness is appropriate to them.

What follows will reveal at least two assumptions about this seriousness: first, that the easiest way to encompass the divergent earnestness of so many critics is to assume that their earnestness led to their divergence; second, the play’s failure to achieve an unambiguous resolution, its resistance to any available version of a neat, closed form, suggests that games with closed form may be going on, and the mode of these may be playful (yet not without seriousness). The Tempest is more like a comedy than a tragedy, neat in very abstract ways only (the much-noticed unities at last observed), yet lacking in mysteries that resonate, either ethical, religious, or aesthetic.
By this thinking, then, a central point (or meaning) of Prospero’s magic is that it defines moral limits by illustrating (mostly) psychological obduracy, including Prospero’s own. If we do read his behavior as stubborn and reluctant to leave his island kingdom, we may also without strain read it as a preference for art (and dream) over “reality.” But that cannot in turn be assumed to be Shakespeare’s preference. If Prospero’s art is a type (in any sense) of Art, the most obvious inference is not that Shakespeare yearns for a dream world, but that Art comes from one, or constitutes one, and that any effects Art has on the world “outside” must include recognizing this. Perhaps drowning the book and breaking the staff enact not the rejection of Art but of ideas that Art can, even in its own realm, control the desires it reflects. Even as model Art rejects Absolutes. Prospero is not, apparently, very happy about this; Shakespeare may or may not have been, but he certainly accepted limits gracefully elsewhere, although he tested them constantly. In this play and also, strikingly, in The Winter’s Tale they become part of the subject matter.

In so far as this play is “about” art it requires a broad acceptance of artificiality. The sequence of Prospero’s magic shows illustrates an increased willfulness and arbitrariness, moving from the impressive tempest to a nuptial masque introduced as a “vanity” and petulantly interrupted (although essentially over) and then to a tableau imitating an emblem book (the chess game). The villains and their burlesque counterparts, once their homicidal intents are recognized and foiled on stage, receive magical punishments mostly out of sight, all repetitive of the early demonstrations of power over bodies (freeze them and pinch them), descending into mud and horsepiss—even if it has been noted that the island reveals no other sign of horses. I doubt that any audience can worry, once Ariel saves Alonzo and Gonzalo, that evil may triumph after all, especially with Ariel’s constant reassurances and effortless ubiquity. Yet the point does not seem to be to mock evil or reduce it by parody, but to show us, as many have noticed, that it’s always there, fully preventable only in a magical world, where it may become the occasion for jokes. What is most directly mocked is stupidity and narrow egotism, the traditional targets of comedy, yet unlike what happens in most comedy the mockery does not convincingly triumph; the magical garden continues to harbor real snakes.

So Prospero’s magic is limited in several ways: it does not touch

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man's inner nature; its use descends into stage shows and trickery; it must be put aside fully to confront the "real" world (outside island and play). We can read it, then, as emblematic of good intentions, whose goodness is compromised by self-indulgence, but more fundamentally compromised by the necessary element of illusion in equating art with magic—not only Prospero's illusion, but ours. Shakespeare's art both uses and criticizes such equations, as I hope will be made clearer by some closer looks.

IV ART, MAGIC, AND ILLUSION

I have suggested that Prospero is a manager of shows. He runs versions of a living theatre, both producing and directing—although the latter function is often Ariel's—to test, to punish, and to convert. Those tested, however, don't need it: Ferdinand carries logs absurdly to prove he respects virginity; no real temptation is allowed him. Miranda (we must strain to include her) has her sympathy and new love tested through the same log-carrying; she offers to help, properly anguished over "her" Ferdinand's suffering. Both pass, foregone conclusions. Ferdinand, in fact, is so without passion some critics don't like him; his protestations that his honor won't melt appear comic. All those whose conversions are sought resist but one, and we easily doubt Alonzo's need for all the browbeating and lying he gets, especially the repeated "news," cheerfully delivered by the play's only teacher of sympathy, that his son is dead. Both the tests and conversions, then, degenerate into punishments. So the putative intent of most of Prospero's shows fails to coincide with their results. Prospero is apparently caught in moral justifications that fail to fit his shows because they were not really, or mainly, or purely, moral shows.

What are they then? Obviously enough, they are entertainments. But for whom, and to what point? That is not easy to answer. Or there are several, perhaps not fully consistent, answers.

First, they are for Prospero. A vanity of his art, a demonstration of control, and perhaps a demonstration of longing to stay on the island. Like Leontes in The Winter's Tale Prospero enjoys making the world over to fit his dreams. The log-carrying and the harpied banquet seem obvious instances of a father punishing bad children by whatever dramatic expedient may occur to him. Only in the former the children are not bad at all, so that Prospero has to apologize for these activities, and in the latter the bad children are too bad to be affected. We can understand and even approve, however, Prospero's tours de force: to freeze swords in the air, taunt
villains (and credulous Gonzalo) with disappearing acts, and mock the folly of air slicing. The victims are also, of course, an audience, forced to appreciate Prospero’s power, only the point, even for this audience, seems to be more showmanship than power. Everyone’s dreams have to be subordinate to Prospero’s dreams, however arbitrary. Behavior is controlled largely by controlling perception, emphasizing that the world is as it is seen.

For the next audiences, Prospero and then us, the shows flirt, even through their allusions, with the idea that art itself is to some important degree arbitrary. We are also made conscious that, if we are not to take logcarrying with the seriousness of a “real” test, nor dismiss it as a wholly arbitrary entertainment, it may be part of a literary or dramatic game Shakespeare is playing with us, this time with Prospero as the “forced” actor. The curious combination of Prospero’s real power and real impotence, both functions of his involvement in his own magical (here read “imaginative”) world, seems an excellent—and once one notices this pattern, inevitable—metaphor for the powers and limits of Shakespeare’s own imaginative world, and by not too forced an extension, art in general. Art affirms nothing largely in the sense that Prospero’s magic “comes to” nothing: As Alonzo’s we may want, inspired by renewed consciousness of guilt, or reawakened goodness, or any other already resident characteristic, to act, “led” to this action by art. But if this is causation, it is indirect, crucially dependent on our being largely “there” already. Meanwhile, shows go on, and we must learn not to expect too much of them, or, if we do, suffer Prospero’s moodiness and unresolved state, or possibly even Alonzo’s wish for suicide. In art or in magic shows black may be white, emblems may appear as realities, wishes may become harpies, but they are all spirits that vanish into thin air, and we forget this at the cost (at least) of being bemired in our folly.

Prospero’s (and the play’s) most famous speech (IV,i,147-158) takes these ideas a step further. As the spirit masque, so the world, meaning our world, or any world known to men. This burst of eloquence, variously noticed as a curious intrusion or a striking change of tone seems, depending on how we read it, to ally this play with tragedy, to provide a metaphysical dimension hardly hinted at before, to undercut all of Prospero’s efforts before or after, to change our perspective on The Tempest by enforcing a new degree of detachment. My general argument has been that all these things are already there in the various forms of inconclusiveness we

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have been noting—although I would play down tragic undertones. This speech is indeed central, but it need not be taken with the sadness and weariness that Prospero apparently feels during its delivery.

It is tempting to read it at a discount. Prospero is obviously in a funk, which is not adequately justified by the reason he gives for introducing the "strange, hollow, and confused noise" that cuts off the show. If the "minute of their plot" is almost come, the drama of their entry is curiously attenuated, leaving room for Ariel to be amusing in his description of the helpless plotters, left dancing up to their chins in a filthy mantled pool. And Prospero's subsequent mutterings about the "born devil" hardly sound a grave note either, less even than Caliban's threat of driving a nail into his head did earlier. Yet Prospero seems genuinely upset, as his daughter notices, and if it is not about threats of evildoing, it is most likely about the content of that eloquent speech. The masque, a creation of Prospero's imagination, is interrupted by another creation of his imagination—in short, by the thought that the whole world is no more stable or meaningful than the imagination which "creates" it.

This is indeed metaphysics, but our consciousness that a troubled brain is here expressing itself warns us not to leap at once into Tragic Apprehension; it is just this reminder that Prospero needs to prepare to detach himself from a world where his dreams are everything, yet "amount" to nothing. And there is a positive side to this gloomy view of the ephemerality of things: if we are such stuff as dreams are made on, we make ourselves by dreaming, and much of "the world" too. Our lovers are an obvious case in point; Ferdinand really would do anything for his Miranda, and he very likely really believes, as he says just before the interruption, that "So rare a wonder'd father and a wise/Makes this place paradise." What the naive Ferdinand doesn't yet know (and let him take his time finding out) is that the wisdom and the paradise are both also dreams, already infected beyond repair.

We, on the other hand, are expected to know these things by now, and to be reminded pointedly, here, by Prospero. If this speech undercuts both the moral gravity and magical powers of the play—and even, I would argue, undercuts itself—it is not a violent change or misplaced comment on what has been going on all along. Both here and in The Winter's Tale Shakespeare has been setting up his audience for reflections of this kind, which include consciousness of deliberate artifice, especially as it reveals the gap,
sometimes trivial but always present, between desire and act, dream and the real world.

The last act collects these matters for us. For instance, Prospero's famous lesson in sympathy, noted by the Arden editor as a "gnomic and vital idea":

Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part: the rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

(V,i,27-31)

This is in response to Ariel's vivid description of the three villains distracted, wept over by Gonzalo. How can we ignore that two of the three are not (even in the slightest degree) penitent? They merely have temporarily boiled brains, a result of Prospero's art. Yet the rarer action is in virtue, even if helped along by a delusion grown out of a wish. As art is. The irony points both back into the play and at us, who are also wishers for powers like Prospero's, and perhaps too ready to give them to Shakespeare.

Or, even more strikingly, this speech a little further on, after the major speech abjuring magic. It has often been read with great solemnity.

Most cruelly
Didst thou, Alonzo, use me and my daughter:
Thy brother was a furtherer in the act.
Thou art pinch'd for't now, Sebastian. Flesh and blood,
You, brother mine, that entertain'd ambition,
Expell'd remorse and nature; whom, with Sebastian,—
Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong,—
Would here have kill'd your king; I do forgive thee,
Unnatural though thou art.

(V,i,71-79)

Not, "unnatural hast thou been." The gesture of forgiveness, which we have no reason to think phony, rebounds off Sebastian's consistent (unnatural) malice, although Prospero wants in the same breath to insist that the pinching was "inward"—which must mean, pinching of conscience, the agenbite of inwit. But it wasn't, and Prospero knows it, hence the ambivalence in the speech, shortly followed up by further admission that remorse and nature remain expelled.12 So we have another show, with some of the actors playing the parts Prospero has "written," others just walking through them, deliberately dis-tracted. They want to write their own parts,
and do. Prospero doesn't like to admit this, but surely we should. Nor do we need to deny that there is a serious moral lesson here, only the emphasis of the play seems as much on illfitting yet necessary illusions as on either the fallen world or, especially, on grand regenerations and moral uplift.

We are further reminded that this isle is full of subtleties that distort the taste and encumber belief (perhaps fatally). Gonzalo, with his usual blindness to subtleties of any kind, unwittingly blurts out a few lines that summarize much of what has been going on:

All torment, trouble, wonder and amazement
Inhabits here: some heavenly power guide us
Out of this fearful country!

(V,i,104-6)

Heavenly power is indeed needed, since the fearful country is, variously, the magical illusions, the imagination, and the mind and soul. Nothing is there that they didn't bring, nor will they leave these things there when they go—except Ariel, and perhaps Caliban. Gonzalos will find wonder and amazement at home too, Antonios will replace them with wisecracks and plots, and Prosperos will retire, along with Alonzos, chastened by overreaching.

Prospero, despite his inability not to frown at the recalcitrants, appears to be having a good time, as he promised himself earlier, gloating that they were all at his mercy. If he can't properly be a heavenly power, he can at least run the show his way, even teasing lugubrious Alonzo:

Alonzo: When did you lose your daughter?
Prospero: In this last tempest.

(V,i,152-3)

Their trances and boiled brains, not very effectual morally, are just the thing to reduce them to an ideal audience for a chess game. And the chess game, suggestive as you please of elegant aristocracy, suggests also isolation, especially the sort necessary to maintain the protestations of romantic love. Miranda's wondering expletives are echoed, as Kermode especially notices, by Caliban, both of them much taken by elegant attire:

O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!
How fine my master is!

(V,i,261-2)

Prospero's mild retort to his enthusiastic daughter fits as well here.
Tis new to thee.

V ART, NATURE AND CALIBAN

O ho, O ho! would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

Perhaps Shakespeare has. As many critics emphasize, Caliban is an appealing demi-devil, whose shape, though deformed in some unspecified way, is human. E. E. Stoll has with particular relish laid out the psychology of the "brute," who loves his sensual pleasures and is more amoral than immoral, and who may be allowed an imagination—must be allowed one, if we refuse to dismiss his lyrical speech on dream-inducing music (III,ii.133-40) as out of character.¹³ Few besides Stoll are willing to stop here, however, including me.

With many others I think Caliban should be promoted from a natural man, or a brute man, to Natural Man, and maybe even Us. I don't of course mean we all secretly yearn to rape virgins or murder our bosses, but that Caliban's attempts to understand enough to control his own life have obvious similarities to the rest of the cast, to Prospero, to any playmaker, and to us. In short I would play down the contrasts—which are certainly there in the play—to the idealized romantic and moral paradigms which Miranda and Ferdinand keep assuring us they live by, and which Prospero pays rather ambivalent service to, and emphasize instead that our sympathy with and pleasure in this brute qualifies, if not refutes, Prospero's rants about him and makes any strict belief that nurture will never stick false. At least Caliban has learned that gods don't reside in bottles and that his admiration—and even, he says once, love—for his master isn't all inverted into resentment and hatred, nails or no nails. If not redeemed into goodness, Caliban is very likely to know much better what to do when the next batch of civilized creatures visit him. And the gift of language is far from stagnant in him, either for cursing or celebrating.

Like everyone else in the play, Caliban lives, or tries to live, in illusions that the play shows inadequate. In this context he specially emphasizes that illusions, even fond dreams of evildoing, are natural, opening wide the door to a popular paradox (or would-be paradox) of Shakespeare's time as well as to modern philosophizing on the mysteries of "natural" man—in both cases fallen and hoping to rise. Polixenes' argument with Perdita in The Winter's Tale

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(IV,iv,85-100) is sufficient footnote here to contemporary debate on the natural and the artificial, and applications to notions of the noble savage may be pursued extensively in D. G. James' *Dream of Prospero*. The basic point, as I take it anyhow, is that good and evil are built into most of us (perhaps all—I’m holding out Miranda), and most of us are capable of being better—especially of being taught to be better. This may finally mean better at moral action or better at imagining—two activities ideally connected, but in practice sometimes opposed, since desire inevitably remains in the picture. Moral art as well as the art of illusion are natural, so the common split in the word’s use—unnatural acts being either magical or immoral—are not contradictions but isolations in a hierarchy under the rubric of Polixenes, “the art that nature makes.” That brothers can kill each other is unnatural only from the point of view of someone who insists that natural always means moral—an unusually rigid or didactic playwright, for example. Even the innocent Miranda knows better, when she comforts her father over Antonio’s evildoing in Act One. And the other use of “unnatural” in this play, the unnatural events that Prospero has brought about, remain unnatural only as we remain ignorant of what’s in those magic books, or, if larger mysteries are preferred, what providential forces brought the boat into range of the tempest. Yet it seems odd to call providence unnatural. God must be allowed His own magic tricks, and so must Shakespeare. We have room to choose how earnestly we receive either.\textsuperscript{14}

The main point, to which I think Shakespeare consistently returns, is that attempts to match words and things, wishes and realities, inevitably leave disjunctions, especially for those who insist on neatness and univocality. Shakespeare most certainly did not, and Caliban’s “puzzling” bursts of poetry point this up. Perhaps his uncertain future does too. In trying to be a junior Prospero he got minor tortures and a large wallow—and a little more common sense. Prospero proper got everyone at his mercy, a son-in-law, and his city back—all three rather qualified victories, and basic, fundamental evil is just untouched.

Neither Caliban nor his master could typecast; nature wouldn’t have it. That nature wouldn’t is one of the play’s main messages, one of its “truths about life,” one of its loose ends. Art, like life, orders by acts of wishing and willing and above all imagining; the results are bound to be a little messy. They can be neat only if will dominates all.

*Tempest*
I hope this makes it clearer why I think of The Tempest as experimental, tentative among its wonderful reconciliations. It is tempting, but I think too neat, to identify Caliban with some sort of reality principle, evil itself, or perhaps original sin. Auden seems closer to the truth in making Caliban both the interrogating audience and a voice which becomes, finally, Shakespeare's own—after a kind of reverse metamorphosis from Ariel, the soaring spirit collapsed into the undeniable body. If as I believe Shakespeare will not allow either unequivocal idealization or consistent, "realistic" parody, all the characters are mirrors of us, especially as we are all artist-dreamers, and all the mirrors are chipped and cracked.

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FOOTNOTES

1 The extremes in the range of interpretation may be represented by Colin Still's The Timeless Theme (London, 1936) and E. E. Stoll's "The Tempest," PMLA 47 (1932). The former finds the whole play an allegory, the latter denies any secondary meanings whatever. Between them there is considerable variety, but the central division seems to be between those who take the play as a serious and coherent moral or religious statement and those who find it problematic, ironic, or otherwise resistant to allegorical interpretations. The majority still favor what I call the earnest view—that Shakespeare is in this play culminating (or even summarizing) his career, probably saying farewell to the stage, making a symbolic statement of unusual economy, resonance, and power. The minority offer various more skeptical readings, tend to be critical of Prospero, find ambiguities or loose ends, and generally find the play not fully explained by symbolic patterns. Representative of the majority are Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase, (Standord, 1955), R. G. Hunter, Shakespeare's Comedy of Forgiveness (New York, 1955), D. G. James, The Dream of Prospero (Oxford, 1967); Frank Kermode, Arden Edition to The Tempest (London, 1954); G. Wilson Knight, The Shakespearean Tempest (Oxford, 1932). Representatives of the minority are Bonamy Dobree in Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Tempest, ed. Hallet Smith (Englewood Cliffs, 1969); Harry Berger's "Miraculous Harp: A Reading of Shakespeare's Tempest," Shakespeare Studies V 1970; and Clifford Leech, Shakespeare's Tragedies (London, 1950). Berger's essay overlaps most with my own, although it focuses more intensely on Prospero's psychology.

Norman Rabkin's comments on Shakespeare's consciousness of art and artifice in Shakespeare and the Common Understanding (New York, 1967) also resemble mine, but he differs strikingly in the seriousness with which he responds to symbolic patterns and to tone generally. My own emphasis here is on a much more relaxed view of the play, with special interest in the way Shakespeare's last plays remind us of limits: of dreams, desires, acts, and particularly the ordering action of art. All subsequent references to these authors will be to the works already cited, unless otherwise noted.

2 Dobree and Berger, for example.

3 These last few sentences crudely summarize the views of D. G. James. I found this a fascinating and helpful book, although James' elegiac view of the play is almost a polar opposite to mine.


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5 D. G. James (Chapter II) insists that there are “two tempests,” the first an illusion, but no one I have read is quite willing to claim all the play’s action is somehow just “dreamt.” If there is a prevalent view about the “actual” force of Prospero’s powers, it seems to be that they do indeed exceed what we now mean by magician’s tricks, yet most critics proceed without much troubling over this to discussing what the magic may mean in the play. James sees Prospero’s rejection of it as the rejection by the seventeenth century of magical explanations in favor of the new science. See C. J. Sisson, “The Magic of Prospero,” Shakespeare Survey II (1958), for a neat summary of Elizabethan notions, legal and philosophical, concerning black and white magic.

6 Harry Berger argues these points strongly.

7 In “New Uses of Adversity: Tragic Experience in The Tempest,” Stephen Orgel has the reading most plausibly claiming that the masque is functional. For him it represents, as masques traditionally do, a world outside time and also, as a masque of Ceres omitting winter, a natural order shaped by man’s idealization (the imagination). In short, it is a version of Prospero’s imagined wishes, so that “Prospero’s interruption is full of a consciousness of the dangers not only of the conspiracy he has forgotten but also of the imaginative world that has tempted him to forget it.” This reading appears to me to reinforce my own, even though Orgel takes the idea of suffering more seriously than I do throughout. Orgel notes at the play’s ending some of the loose ends I do, but for him they represent tragic implications. His essay appeared in In Defense of Reading, Richard Poirier and Reuben Brower, eds. (New York: 1962).

8 See R. G. Hunter, who thinks the evil is reduced, against Harry Berger.

9 All the more extreme symbolic readings, especially Still’s, appear to want to assert metamorphic powers (acting on us) in The Tempest. In my view the play mocks them.

10 Although we feel much less cruelty here, Alonzo’s punishments resemble Isabel’s in Measure for Measure, where the Duke requires her to forgive her brother’s executioner before he tells her there was no execution.

11 For the banquet scene, for example, R. G. Hunter favors an interrupted communion, finding this a more precise analogy than a symbol of deceitful desire (such as Northrop Frye, in his introduction to the Pelican Shakespeare) or allusion to Christ’s temptation (such as Kermode in his introduction to the Arden Shakespeare). I prefer the more general sort of suggestion (Frye’s), since to insist on close Christian parallels would require precisely the narrowness of didactic focus which I would argue against. My point is simply that the scene invites various interpretation without requiring one “right” reading.

12 Sebastian does make one pious remark—“O most high miracle”—but this hardly constitutes an obvious change of heart. He also says Prospero is possessed by the devil, and Prospero’s remarks to Antonio don’t seem to suppose a conversion. If we are to believe, as Gonzalo appears to, that everyone has found himself and become virtuous too, Shakespeare has strikingly left out reassurances we might reasonably expect, especially if we bear in mind his usual attention to such loose ends in his comedies.

13 See also John Wain, who sees in Caliban underprivileged people everywhere. Wain’s essay appears in Hallett Smith’s anthology, Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Tempest.

14 Again, this whole argument can be conceived as a game exploring limits, as I try to elaborate in a companion essay on The Winter’s Tale. I don’t think J. M. Murry got it quite right when he argued that Polixenes—and Shakespeare—were saying that “Where man’s art improves nature, it is nature’s art in man; where it makes nature worse, it is man’s art alone.” The problem is in calling “man’s art alone” unnatural, as usage both in Shakespeare’s time and ours amply illustrates. Are elaborately synthetic poisons unnatural? Man makes them by natural wit from natural elements.
Is evil unnatural? It is the profoundest urge of some human creatures, as Shakespeare's tragedies fully show. To shift the terms in the way I favor is merely to call attention, as I think Shakespeare does often, to man's tendency to use the label unnatural for things he doesn't like, want, or understand. Here he meets his own limits—of, naturally enough, taste, desire, and knowledge, and finally, if he acts, in what he produces—like plays.

15 *The Sea and The Mirror*. I am not sure I understand all that Caliban is meant to be here, and I think Shakespeare stops short of Auden's apparently religious solution, but I find most of Caliban's musings close to mine. Especially this, where he speaks as audience:

You yourself, we seem to remember, have spoken of the conjured spectacle as 'a mirror held up to nature', a phrase misleading in its aphoristic sweep but indicative at least of one aspect of the relationship between the real and the imagined, their mutual reversal of value, for isn't the essential artistic strangeness to which your citation of the sinisterly biassed image would point just this: that on the far side of the mirror the general will to compose, to form at all costs a felicitous pattern becomes the *necessary cause* of any particular effort to live or act or love or triumph or vary, instead of being as, in so far as it emerges at all, it is on this side their *accidental effect*?

It seems to me that Shakespeare has in this play also included the second perspective, that of accidental effect.

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