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John Patrick Coby

Kenyon College, pcoby@smith.edu

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POLITICS AND THE POETIC IDEAL IN SHAKESPEARE'S
THE TEMPEST

John Patrick Coby
Professor of Government
Smith College
Northampton, MA

pcoby@smith.edu

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Politics and the Poetic Ideal in Shakespeare's The Tempest

After Socrates declares poets banished from his regime in the tenth book of the Republic, he refers to an "ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry" over the matter of final authority in the political domain (607b). Socrates attacks poetry on grounds that its imitation is twice removed from the truth, that it undermines moral virtue, making men fearful, rapacious, and imprudent, and that it hinders philosophy by breeding attachment to the things of this world and by depicting the human condition as hopelessly tragic or comic. He concludes that poetry ought not presume to legislate for politics through its images of the noble and the just. Rather, as he asserts, the salvation of politics depends on philosophy: "Unless...philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize...there is no rest from ills for the cities...nor I think for human kind" (473c-d).¹ Aristophanes takes up the gauntlet on behalf of poetry. In the Clouds he observes that philosophical rule implies the absolute supremacy of knowledge, a principle which in practice justifies patricide, incest, and (thinking of Edmund Burke whom Aristophanes resembles) the iconoclasm of a revolutionary reign of terror. A more contemporary proponent of the rights of poetry is Friedrich Nietzsche who regards philosophy as but a species of poetry, albeit poetry's highest expression--philosophy is the making of meaning horizons, the transfiguration of values.

The reason for reviewing this piece of intellectual history is that The Tempest appears to be Shakespeare's testimony concerning the "ancient quarrel." The Tempest interweaves strands of philosophy and poetry into a tapestry that illustrates the subject of wise and legitimate rule. As to the political contest between poetry and philosophy, it might well be assumed

that Shakespeare, being a poet, settles the issue in favor of his own profession. But this emphatically is not the case: the portrait of philosophical Prospero using poetry--or what will be argued is the equivalent of poetry--demonstrates the priority of philosophy to poetry. In The Tempest philosophy rules poetry. From this relationship, however, it should not be concluded that Shakespeare simply sides with Plato, for in one crucial respect the two of them do seem to differ. In the Republic Plato's Socrates recommends power to philosophy, but then bemoans the fate of the philosopher assigned governing duties in the "cave" of political opinion. It is Plato's belief that political responsibilities are a burden and distraction which the true philosopher will discharge only if compelled. By contrast, the theme of The Tempest is the primacy of the political life over either of the representatives of theoretical detachment--i.e., philosophical contemplation or poetic creativity. Whichever one prevails politically is perhaps less important than that they each be politically engaged: Prospero is made to resume political duties for his own protection, for the efficacy of his wisdom, and for the health and well-being of his philosophical reflections, which would capsize in the storms of mutability without the ballast of political affairs. As philosophy rules poetry in The Tempest, so it seems that politics rule philosophy. But if it is extreme to maintain that the active life in Shakespeare is pre-eminent, it is at least correct that he regards politics as indispensable to the life of the mind. For Shakespeare, the philosopher and the poet do not abide within the "cave" of politics grudgingly and at cost to themselves; it is where they belong.

I

The action of The Tempest is the consequence of various usurpations of conventional political authority: most especially the deposal of Prospero,

Duke of Milan, twelve years prior; but also the symbolic re-presentation of that crime via the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonso, King of Naples; finally the mutinous antics of Caliban and his courtly cohorts, Stephano and Trinculo, as they plot the overthrow of Prospero.² In light of these several rebellions against constituted authority, it seems significant that the play opens with an imperious boatswain (not even a captain)³ shouting commands and barely controlled insults at the King and his company:

You mar our labour: keep
your cabins: you do assist the storm.
(I.i.13-14)

What cares these roarers
for the name of King?
(I.i.16-17)⁴

However indecorous such talk might seem to the ever-patient Gonzalo, it must be clear to the reader that the boatswain is totally within his rights, for in times of trial the natural ruler is one who can meet the crisis with the expertise of art; and in times of trial the natural hierarchy of knowledge over ignorance supersedes conventional determinations of legitimacy. Hence, during the life-threatening tempest, the boatswain, his authority delegated by the captain and deriving from his own art, is the natural ruler aboard ship; and the King is properly ordered to go below and remain quiet.

The opening scene then, as so described, presents a contrast between natural and conventional rule, which allows one to distinguish the boatswain's assertion of authority from the usurpations of Antonio and Sebastian. But if knowledge constitutes a legitimate claim to rule, what the play next invites us to observe is the deficiency of the boatswain's technical knowledge in combatting the storm. Because the boatswain possesses the relevant skill, he rightfully commands the King; but even the boatswain is defeated by the elemental forces of nature. Or so it would appear--for soon it is

learned that the storm is unnatural, produced instead by the art of Ariel at the behest of Prospero. Ariel explains how he created the illusion of a sinking ship and how a "fever of the mad" induced the members of the court party to leap overboard. Ariel's art conquers the less knowing art of the boatswain's, which has itself replaced, if only temporarily, the conventional rule of the King. A hierarchy is here established by which authority is transferred to the agent whom knowledge has rendered more powerful.

But to what purpose is this power and this knowledge put? The boatswain's art serves the limited objective of safety at sea; it can in no way function as a permanent substitute for kingly rule, and is in fact but an instrument for the employment of others. Ariel's more formidable magic is no less instrumental in its character, lacking any evident sense of design or purpose: Ariel takes his instructions from Prospero and reports back to him, receives each assignment anew as if it were disconnected from the before and after, and thinks of freedom and the good life as nothing more constructive than sucking in a cowslip's bell and chasing summer on a bat's back (V.i.88-94). His initial words are:

All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come
To answer thy pleasure; be't to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task
Ariel and all his quality.

(I.ii.189-93)

Another critic has observed that Ariel resembles an actor moving anxiously from part to part and preoccupied with critical opinion.⁵ As an actor Ariel stands in need of a director. As a creative potential, capable of fantastic illusions and mesmerizing music, Ariel wants disciplined intelligence. Ariel's art, of its own, is purposeless and without real power; only guidance from above, from Prospero, can make it effective and valuable. Thus final authority passes from the magical art of Ariel to the wisdom of Prospero. Prospero is a political ruler in the Aristotelian sense because his wisdom is that

"architectonic" science of politics which controls and orients the activities of all the lesser arts.⁶ To be sure, Prospero is a magician as well, with robe and staff and book, but his importance and distinctiveness on the island come from his knowledge of human ends, his wisdom, rather than from his magic or his art. Ferdinand is the first to see that the source and crown of the island's many wonders is Prospero's wisdom:

Let me live here ever;
So rare a wonder'd father and a wise
Makes this place Paradise.

(IV.i.123-24)

II

The opening scene, which titles The Tempest, is an ascent, leading in the subsequent scene to the wise and powerful Prospero, absolute monarch and contriver of all events. What then are the origins, conditions, and operations of this wisdom that is conjoined with power? Act I. Scene ii. serves to answer these questions.

Excepting the late appearance of Ferdinand, Scene ii is a reminiscence structured around the characters of Prospero, Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban. All of these reminiscences have Prospero at their center, for they concern his past life as Duke of Milan and his rule on the island over each of his charges or subjects. For twelve years Prospero has been confined on an island in the company of a young girl--his daughter--a spirit, and a man-monster. Why these three? Is Prospero's wisdom in any way the product of his close association with child, fairy, and beast? Prospero's recollection of his dukedom in Milan and how he managed to lose it may offer a clue.

There came a time in Prospero's governance of Milan when the Duke convinced himself of the superior dignity of the contemplative life and of his special talent for the liberal arts. In order better to pursue "secret

studies," as he calls them, he delegated ducal responsibilities to his brother Antonio and retired into his library. This neglect of "worldly ends" combined with an uncritical, parent-like trust of Antonio precipitated his brother's betrayal, in collusion with the King of Naples, and resulted in his being cast into the sea, there presumably to die. In addition to Prospero's personal injury, his city suffered an "ignoble stooping" before Naples (annual tribute, homage, subjection of coronet to crown)⁷ that it had not formerly known.

Prospero's withdrawal from public life for the "betterment of his mind," his unwillingness any longer to measure character and dispense justice, his disinterest in the harsh realities of the political world--all bear a partial resemblance to the mercurial roamings and the ethereal freedom of the spirit Ariel. Prospero says of himself that he grew stranger to his state, "transported and rapt in secret studies"; and Antonio judged him incapable of "temporal royalties," a habitant of his library only. In similar manner it is said of Ariel that he was "a spirit too delicate/ To act [the] earthy and abhorred commands" of the witch Sycorax. The quiet of a library and the life of study were preferred by Prospero over the rigors and responsibilities of politics, and for this choice he suffered a twelve year confinement on the island. Likewise, the too delicate nature of Ariel resulted in twelve years imprisonment in a cloven pine. What Antonio was to the contemplative Prospero, Sycorax was to the dainty Ariel--each the tyrant condemning his/ her victim inadvertently to a twelve year incarceration. It is noteworthy also that Ariel embodies the magical art that Prospero retired into his library to study. But whereas in Milan the study of this art was an escape from government, on the island it has no higher purpose than political rule--the just and fitting treatment of each character under Prospero's sway, the

righting of past wrongs, and the accomplishment of future communal goods. How ironic, that while duke of an important Italian city, Prospero was virtually apolitical; but during his exile on a nearly uninhabited island, devoid of human beings save for himself and his daughter, Prospero has developed into the consummate political man, rivaled in his omniscience and power only by the philosopher-kings described in the Platonic dialogues. Having once exchanged his dukedom for a library, Prospero learned how to be a duke while occupying a humble cell.

The question then is whether Ariel contributes to Prospero's political education. In light of the above similarities, it seems a fair conjecture that Ariel serves to remind Prospero of an aspect of his own character, one worthy and deserving of respect, it is important to note, inasmuch as Ariel, unlike Caliban, is under contract to Prospero and indentured for a specified period of time--and interestingly for twelve years, more precisely thirteen abated to twelve--but an aspect much in need of supervision and control if political objectives are ever to be achieved. When Ariel asks of his liberty, Prospero treats the inquiry as incipient rebellion and threatens to "peg" Ariel in the "knotty entrails" of an oak. The premonished sentence is again for twelve years. Its form and duration suggests an intended repetition of the punishment already suffered by Ariel. Now Prospero has suffered a strikingly similar punishment. Might the rebellion of Ariel then, calling for premature freedom, represent a rebellion within Prospero himself, a rebellion of the retiring and contemplative against the politically responsible. The Prospero who later in the play can so absorb himself in the revels of a wedding masque that his lieutenant Ariel will not dare remind him of the approaching conspirators is indeed a Prospero still tempted by the life of the scholarly, creative recluse (IV.i.167-69).⁹ Were this side of Prospero's

character to rebel and prevail, Prospero's plans for deliverance would come to nought and his confinement on the island would continue. One might say that having failed to learn the lesson of his deposal, Prospero would need to repeat his punishment of twelve years in exile. The twelve year "entreement" with which Prospero threatens Ariel for the mere mention of rebellion bears the mark of just such a repetition, necessary for someone disinclined to persevere and willing to excuse himself from fulfilling his commitments. In threatening Ariel then, Prospero threatens himself. He is ruthless to the unsuspecting sprite, giving no quarter and taking no chances. With a great outpouring of anger ("Thou liest, malignant thing!"), Prospero silences the appeal to freedom. Like Ariel, Prospero too wants his freedom; he concludes the play by beseeching the audience to set him free. But this freedom is not cleaply purchased, as it was in Milan; it is instead tied to and contingent on the completion of his political project.

Prospero's anger has a specific point to it. He rebukes Ariel for having forgotten Sycorax:

Pros. ...hast thou forgot her?

Ari. No, sir.

Pros. Thou hast. Where was she born? speak; tell me.

Ari. Sir, in Argier.

Pros. O, was she so? I must
 Once a month recount what thou hast been,
 Which thou forget'st....

(I.ii.259-63)

Ariel, it seems, is much given to erasing from memory the pain he felt and the evil source from which it issued, even to the extent of needing monthly reminders. It might also be charged against the too trusting Duke of Milan that he turned his back on evil, on the true character of his brother

and on his "inveterate" enemy the King of Naples, and that he irresponsibly let events take their own course. But here on the island, comparable neglect is hardly possible, because Caliban, son of the hag-seed Sycorax, is a constant and unmistakable reminder of the existence of evil and of the need to combat it. On the one other occasion in the play when Prospero is again flush with anger, he has himself forgotten the "foul conspiracy/ Of the beast Caliban and his confederates" (IV.i.139-40). His anger is not directed against himself, however; rather its object is the irredeemable nature of Caliban:

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick, on whom my pains,
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
And as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers....¹⁰

(IV.i.188-92)

Caliban's conspiracy, which provokes this outburst, parallels on a comic plane the more sinister plot of Antonio and Sebastian against Alonso, and this plot conspicuously recreates the initial injustice done to Prospero. The anger which Prospero feels towards both the congenital and specific evil of Caliban keeps him in touch with and concerned about the evil in Milan. The contribution, therefore, which Caliban makes to the education of Prospero is the evocation of this anger, this indignation, and the political engagement it serves to produce.

But Prospero's anger notwithstanding, it is still unclear why after twelve years Prospero would continue to feel himself victimized by events in Milan. It was he after all who chose a library over a court, and he who preferred secret studies to the exercise of power. Although exiled on a lonely island, he still has his books, and so his cell is effectively his library. And at his command are Ariel and his minions; hence the possibilities of this art practiced on the island (e.g., raising the dead [V.i.48-49]) exceed anything imaginable in Milan. Prospero the scientist has been given

the ideal laboratory, so why does he wish to return to responsibilities he once had shunned?

Prospero is indeed angered by the loss of something that was rightfully his, even though not much valued, and he is especially hurt by the ingratitude of a brother ("...that a brother should/ Be so perfidious!" [I.ii.67-68]). But the further explanation of his development as a political man lies with Miranda, whom he dearly loves. The attempted rape of Miranda by Caliban must have convinced Prospero that the enchanted island could be no permanent home, however much it may have suited the interests of an aspiring magician-scientist. Because Prospero had one human being to love and whose future to care for; because his daughter, grown to young adulthood, needed a husband and the companionship of women, he could not allow himself to continue the studious retirement that caused his exile in the first place. The Ariel within him, as it were, had to be disciplined--knowledge for its own sake made subject to political wisdom¹¹--so that his daughter's happiness might be secured--so that also the evil of Caliban might be controlled, past injustices set right, and malefactors brought to repentance. It is not surprising then that it would require the company of Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda to transform this student of the liberal arts into a powerful and purposeful philosopher-king.

Late in the play Prospero provides a description of the art whose operation has rendered his enemies helpless before him. Much has been written about whether Prospero practices a white or black magic.¹² The purpose here is not to join this debate, but rather to draw a simple distinction on the basis of the account given at V.i.33-57. From this distinction it should be clear how Prospero's supervising wisdom produces its intended effects.

Prospero speaks of a "rough magic," executed through elves and demi-

puppets, which empowers him to bedim the noontide sun, call forth mutinous winds, direct thunderbolts, shake the earth, pluck up trees, and summon the dead from their graves. Prospero abjures this rough magic, which in several of its particulars prefigures the objectives of modern science and technology-- i.e., power over nature. But he does not yet dispense with it, not until he buries his staff and drowns his book, because, as he says, there still is need of some "heavenly music," or "airy charm," "To work [his] end upon [the courtiers'] senses." Ariel and the spirits under him are the heavenly musicians of the island. Of their music Caliban says,

...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 wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again.

(III.ii.133-41)

Ariel and his charges also produce illusions, which like their music have the effect of disturbing the senses. Two notable examples are the banquet table and the wedding masque. It seems then that one half of Prospero's rough magic, distinct from his manipulations of nature, consists of these harmonies and illusions, sounds and images, which unerringly function to disrupt the senses and suspend disbelief. Coleridge's famous phrase, "the willing suspension of disbelief," which he coined to explain a reader's submission to poetry featuring the supernatural and the mysterious,¹³ aptly describes the workings and results of Prospero's art. Perhaps then it would not be too obtrusively metaphorical to say that Prospero's art, or that part of it dependent on sounds and images, represents a kind of poetry¹⁴; and, further, that Prospero as political man uses both science and poetry, that is

magic and music, to accomplish his aims.

One final word. The tempest which begins the play seems to be a combination of power over nature and illusion--the real, albeit artificial, storm, and the phantasm of a split, burning, and sinking ship.¹⁵ Once the castaways arrive on shore, however, this balanced combination is replaced by predominant use of the "poetic" component of Prospero's art. There do continue to be instances of magic practiced on the island: fresh garments, pinches and cramps, arrested sword thrusts, to name a few; but in the main, Prospero's political project is brought to completion by the operation of what has been loosely termed his "poetry."

III

Prospero's poetry transmits a teaching to each of three sets of characters who fall under its influence: Ferdinand and Miranda; Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo; Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, and Sebastian. The content of this teaching is at most points idealistic, without ever being quite utopian; and it accounts for the paper's title, "Politics and the Poetic Ideal." Prospero's political exertions aim at an idealism that can renew the harsh worlds of Naples and Milan by transforming those of their citizens detoured to this island retreat.

Ferdinand is the first of the castaways to sample the island's mysterious melodies. The music of Ariel descends upon him while he struggles for his life against the sea; it visits him upon the beach as he laments the loss of his father; and it ushers him to within the vicinity of Prospero's cell. While Ferdinand is uncertain of the music's source and meaning, he reports being comforted by it:

This music crept by me upon the waters.
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air....

(I.ii.394-96)

That the music consoles by intimating the benevolence of nature's forces is confirmed by Ariel's next song:

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.
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell....
 (I.ii.399-405)

Ferdinand is made to sense the presence of solicitous immortal powers as a preparation for his interview with Miranda--wondrous Miranda, "the goddess/ On whom these airs attend!" (I.ii.424-25). Similarly Miranda, through her extraordinary inexperience (perhaps assisted by the art-induced sleep from which she has recently awakened), views the brave form of Ferdinand "a thing divine." Although disputed by Prospero, Ferdinand's putative divinity is first suggested by the marvelous manner of his presentation to Miranda: "The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,/ And say what thou seest yond" (I.ii.411). Miranda is asked to gaze upon a theatrical unveiling, a heavenly apparition.

Ferdinand and Miranda fall instantly and completely in love. Poetic illusion has invested each with qualities of the divine. Because of their love, they view the world through romantic lenses, a brave new world full of beauty, grace, and harmony. Such is particularly the case with Ferdinand who, despite unjust accusation and enslavement, says of his log-carrying labor that it has been made pleasing by the mistress whom he serves. Even the loss of his father and friends is slight injury to him given the vision of Miranda as compensatory benefit:

Might I but through my prison once a day
 Behold this maid: all corners else o'th'earth
 Let liberty make use of; space enough
 Have I in such a prison.
 (I.ii.493-96)

Miranda is the peerless one, "the top of admiration." But this conviction is unusual for Ferdinand whose wide experience with women has taught him the defects of them all (III.i.39-46). Disappointed in love, Ferdinand's affections pass regularly from one woman to the next. If his love for Miranda is then to endure, he must transcend the lessons of his experience and she the limits of her sex. This much seems to occur, for not only is Miranda deemed worthy of her name ("wonderful"), but by the end of the drama Ferdinand appears less experienced than his beloved who is overheard speaking knowingly of the role of false play in the affairs of the world (V.i.172-74).

Poetry inspires the sweet sentiments of love, and love transforms Ferdinand into an innocent. But poetry can also serve to toughen the soul, to discipline what Ferdinand calls "our worser genius." The wedding masque is Prospero's most elaborate attempt at poetic illusion. The substance of the masque supports Prospero's earlier caution against pre-marital sex: Iris, the rainbow messenger of Juno, summons Ceres, the goddess of earth's fertility, to descend and bestow her blessing on the betrothed couple. Ceres hesitates, wanting to know if Venus, and her son Cupid, attend upon Juno (Venus and Cupid cooperated in Pluto's abduction of Ceres' daughter). Since they do not, Ceres comes down, and along with Juno sings the blessing of bounteous crops. The injury to Ceres and her consequent avoidance of Venus and Cupid mean that the prosperity and fertility of young lovers depend entirely upon the chasteness of their characters. The reason why Prospero, and by his claim the pagan deities, so value self-restraint is that the lusty having of Miranda by Ferdinand, in submission to his "worser genius," would leave him essentially undistinguished from Caliban.¹⁶ Caliban, the man-monster, is emblematic of the dark, untamed passions of humanity's "worser genius," which put at risk Prospero's plan for human ennoblement. The cosmic poetry of the

wedding masque helps then to fortify the lovers against the temptations of the Caliban within.

Ferdinand is not long in believing, however, that he is in the presence of genuine divinities who, like Prospero, adjure him to "be more abstemious." He queries Prospero about whether the apparitions are instead spirits, and Prospero, evidencing an artist's pride in his handiwork, confides that they are. Even though Ferdinand has penetrated the illusion of the masque, he is nonetheless amazed by what he finds. The wisdom of Prospero has made the island a Paradise, and Ferdinand would like to reside here forever. An island called Paradise, overseen by a wise and wonder'd father, is so provocative a simile that it cannot help but, through extension, transform Ferdinand and Miranda into Adam and Eve; and the injunction to control "th' fire in the blood" into God's commandment not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; there is even a serpent in the person of Caliban. By identifying the artist behind the art, Ferdinand in effect transfers the status of divinity from the spirits enacting the masque to Prospero their master, with himself and his betrothed the adventitious recipients of divine rule. The beauty of Prospero's poetry invites Ferdinand to dream of Paradise, while rendering him more fit to dwell within, or able and willing to make of the world something akin to Paradise. The one point of difference between Ferdinand and Miranda and Adam and Eve is that Paradise for the former is not a permanent domicile; they are rather intended to carry their innocence, untainted and unfallen, into a malevolent world where, by their rule, the process of ennoblement and redemption can be carried forward.

The effects of poetry upon the play's lesser characters--Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo--are essentially twofold. In a passage quoted above, Caliban explains how the island's music, "a thousand twangling instruments,"

provides him with harmless but cherished pleasures--sleep punctuated by sweet dreams of riches showering down upon him. Music-induced sleep delivers Caliban from his hard labors, while at the same time quieting his insolence and suspending his malicious designs. Ariel reports that the music of his tabor in like fashion overcame the alcoholic bravado of Stephano and Trinculo and distracted them from their purpose:

So full of valour that they smote the air
 For breathing in their faces; beat the ground
 For kissing of their feet; yet always bending
 Towards their project. Then I beat my tabor;
 At which, like unback'd colts, they prick'd their ears,
 That, calf-like, they my lowing followed, through
 Tooth'd briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss, and thorns,
 Which enter'd their frail shins....

(IV.i.172-81)

The assault on Prospero's cell is deflected as the would-be assassins find themselves bemired in a muddy pool, smelling all of horse piss.

The upshot of their misadventures, brought on by the music of Ariel and the punishment of his ministers, is that Stephano comes to realize what a poor king he would make and Caliban the folly of his having renounced the rule of Prospero. Their experience teaches them about the natural differences among men, while disabusing them of their conceit of wisdom. It instructs them in the obligations and perogatives of rank and elicits from them a willing deference to authority, or what Plato in the Republic calls moderation. The poetic art is not as salient in this example as in others--nothing like a noble lie--but still it contributes to the education of the play's comic figures.

Alonso and his courtiers are the final party of island visitors to be exposed to the airy charms of Prospero's art. As in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, they are witnesses to a finely contrived illusion. The vision of dancing spirits portering viands for a banquet transfixes and enthralls

them. But before the hungry spectators can sample the fare, Ariel appears in the form of an accusing harpy, naming Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian "three men of sin." The harpy is visible only to these three, two of whom have confirmed their sinfulness by twice plotting the death of Alonso. Ariel's message is that the natural order is in league with the moral order; that "destiny," "Fate," and the "pow'rs" punish injustice by turning elemental nature against the peace of malefactors; that the "never-surfeited sea" has requited Prospero his wrong by causing to "belch up" on shore the band of conspirators; and that "ling'ring perdition" will stalk the miscreants' every step unless they repent their sins and lead clearer lives. The retribution of destiny has heretofore fallen mainly on Alonso, and so it is he who most evidently is stricken by remorse and despair. Alonso describes the harpy's revelation as a monstrous bassing of his trespass. The billows, the winds, and the thunder jointly proclaim his twelve year-old sin as reason for his son's now lying bedded in the ooze. The moral content of this poetic illusion is quite explicit: nature demands justice, and the "pow'rs, delaying, not forgetting", punish wrongdoers.

The other side of punishment is reward, and the sympathetic extension of reward is benevolence and mercy. Gonzalo is disposed to such a view of the world. When the shipwrecked survivors arrive on shore, he pronounces the island habitable, even bounteous--"How lush and lusty the grass looks!" Their preservation is a miracle, and so an occasion for gratitude. And while Ferdinand is not with them, he too has surely survived. Gonzalo is a loyal friend to the King; he consoles Alonso with good cheer and unremitting optimism. Of all the characters, Gonzalo is perhaps the most susceptible to the island's charms. Even without benefit of special instruction, such as that given to Ferdinand and Miranda and Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian, he is

wont to believe that divine providence chalks the paths of men.¹⁷ And so, when the King and his son have been reunited and Prospero discovered alive, it falls to Gonzalo to draw the moral of the play:

Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue
Should become Kings of Naples? O, rejoice
Beyond a common joy! and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife
Where he himself was lost, Prospero his dukedom
In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves
When no man was his own.

(V.i.205-13)

By way of summation, Prospero's poetry nurtures the love between Ferdinand and Miranda, it conveys to them the importance of self-restraint, and it prepares them to play their part in the redemption of Naples and Milan. To Caliban and his companions it offers harmless pleasures and an escape from reality more salutary than alcohol; and it assists with their learning of deference. Alonso is reminded of justice, and most of the castaways, but Gonzalo especially, come to suspect that a providential power has been watching them, testing them, and intending their salvation. This is the substance of the island's teaching, imparted chiefly through music and illusion, sounds and images--poetry.

IV

If the transmission of this teaching is in the manner of poetry, so too are the conditions of its reception. Other commentators have remarked that the many mysteries of the island serve to reduce the courtly visitors to a state of childlike credulity, wherein the evidence of their senses and their considered judgments are no longer trusted.¹⁸ Prospero's pupils are made disoriented and bemuddled, their critical thinking silenced, that they might be open to his instruction. Following the tempest with its illusion

of a sinking ship, Prospero asks of Ariel, "Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil/ Would not infect his reason?" And Ariel replies, "Not a soul/ But felt a fever of the mad" (I.ii.207-09). The infection of reason is also the term Prospero uses to describe Miranda's unhesitating love for Ferdinand: "Poor worm, thou art infected!" (III.i.31). When cynical Sebastian and Antonio are witnesses to dancing spirits, they are so nonplussed that they profess themselves willing to believe in unicorns, phoenixes, and the most far-fetched reports of travelers. Of their perturbation Prospero says, "And these mine enemies are all knit up/ In their distractions: they now are in my power;/ And in these fits I leave them" (III.iii.89-91). And when the time arrives for Prospero to lift his charms, he describes the awakening as follows:

A solemn air, and the best comforter
To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains,
Now useless, boil'd within thy skull! There stand
For you are spell-stopp'd....

...The charm dissolves apace;
And as the morning steals upon night,
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
Their clearer reason....

...Their understanding
Begins to swell; and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore,
That now lies foul and muddy.

(V.i.58-82)

Even when the spell is broken and clear perceptions return, Prospero is hard pressed to convince his victims of the realities before them:

You do yet taste
 Some subtleties o' the isle, that will not let you
 Believe things certain.
(V.i.123-25)

I perceive these lords
At this encounter do so much admire,
That they devour their reason, and scarce think
Their eyes do offices of truth, their words
Are natural breath: but, howsoe'er you have
Been jüstled from your senses, know for certain
That I am Prospero....
(V.i.153-59)

What happens to the castaways is that they are made to be children again, deprived of their reasoning faculties so that they can experience the world as new and wondrous. References to wonder abound in the play. Ferdinand expresses wonder at the sight of Miranda (I.ii.429), and wonders to hear Prospero speak of Naples (I.ii.435). Alonso refers to the drowsiness come over him as a "wondrous heavy" (II.i.193). Miranda's name means "wonderful," its aptness effusively acclaimed by Ferdinand (III.i.38). Prospero is a "wond' red father and a wise" (IV.i.123), who reveals the young couple at chess as a wonder within his cell (V.i.170). Miranda looks out upon the "brave new world" of the court party and pronounces it a wonder (V.i.182)--and there are other instances as well. The state of wonder, in the judgment of Gonzalo, is the most educative of all, opening people to dimensions of reality distorted and blurred by the routine of existence--"and all of us [found] ourselves/ When no man was his own." The spiritual transformation to which he refers is rooted in the conviction of providence as a guarantor of ultimate justice, and thus as the inspiration of poetic idealism (poetic justice). In fact, it may be said that the central tenet of the poetic teaching and the highest object of poetic wonder is providence itself, because all the many wonders of the enchanted island pale when set beside Gonzalo's rhetorical question, "Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue/ Should become kings of Naples?"

V

There is an alternative understanding of the world, the "adult" view, so to speak, presented through the figure of Antonio. When the "wondrous heavy" takes all the courtly party save Antonio and Sebastian, Antonio resists the suggestion that something strange has occurred. He attributes their

drowsiness first to "the quality o' the climate"; but when that explanation fails, he forgets the incident and turns to something else. The new idea which engages him is the usurpation of Alonso's throne. Antonio is a calculating man, and the unexplained sleep that possesses the others is less an object of wonder for him than it is an opportunity for gain. Antonio sets out to win Sebastian's complicity in his plan, but Sebastian is so taken aback by this talk of usurpation that he ironically supposes Antonio to be among the sleepers. Antonio's point, however, is that only he is awake, that Sebastian lets his fortune sleep. Not to be alert to the smallest opportunity for advancement is to "wink'st" at fortune "whiles thou art waking." Sebastian confesses his "hereditary sloth," and Antonio promises to teach this "ebbing man" how to flow. A flowing man is one who seizes the moment, unhindered by the admonitions of conscience:

...I feel not
This deity in my bosom: twenty consciences,
That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they,
And melt, ere they molest!

(II.i.271-75)

Antonio has confidence in his reading of the world. He knows that justice is without force and that intelligent men prosper by looking out after themselves. When Sebastian remembers that Antonio "did supplant [his] brother Prospero," Antonio furthers the temptation by pointing to the ducal robes now gracing his body: "And look how well my garments sit upon me;/ Much feater than before" (II.i.267-68). The ducal garments, Antonio believes, establish the wisdom of usurpation and his own power over Prospero. What Antonio does not realize, however, is the condition these garments are in--they are fresh and new-dyed. Gonzalo observed this strange phenomenon before, and concluded from it, and from his optimism generally, that their fortune was in the hands of a beneficent deity. Antonio on the occasion paid

no attention, certain as he was that his cynical view of the situation was the correct one. But the clear-headed, ever-scheming Antonio was wrong, for confirmation of the more sanguine view had earlier been provided in Ariel's report to Prospero: "Not a hair perish'd;/ On their sustaining garments not a blemish,/ But fresher than before" (I.ii.217-19). Since the freshness of the garments is due ultimately to Prospero's art, Antonio is again wrong in thinking that his garments prove the defeat of Prospero¹⁹; and wrong finally in supposing that the "wondrous heavy" is but a chance event that flowing men exploit for their own advantage. In fact, it is a trial of their virtue carefully orchestrated by Prospero²⁰--and a trial which Antonio is badly failing.

Prospero reigns over the enchanted island as a providential deity. His power and his prescience are very nearly absolute. He uses his qualities, first, to avert tragedy--for nothing ill can occur so long as Ariel is there to intervene; second, to test the worth of the mortals subject to him; and third, to lead these mortals to ennoblement and redemption through self-discipline and remorse. When captured by the island's marvels, the visitors learn how to behave in a providential universe. On this island the wisdom of Antonio is nothing short of foolhardiness. But is it folly elsewhere, on larger terrain? It is if Gonzalo's benediction is correct, for Gonzalo has gone to school on the island and sees no difference between its operation and that of the world. And it may be foolish for other reasons as well. The question to be considered though is whether the play offers any insight into this problem.

VI

In Act III Prospero spies a "Fair encounter/ Of two most rare affections"--

i.e., Ferdinand and Miranda--and overhears their heartfelt professions of love. Somewhat regretfully he says to himself, "So glad of this as they I cannot be,/ Who are surpris'd with all" (III.i.93-94). As the matchmaker behind their love, Prospero is hardly taken unawares by it, and so he feels himself cut off from some of the moment's joy. He is at a similar remove from the other characters and their experiences of amazement, simply because the island holds no surprises for him. Since he is the cause of all strange happenings, he has little to wonder at.

There is one exception, however. Prospero is not responsible for the ships' having passed within reach of his tempest-making powers. They sailed near the island by some agency other than his own. Does Prospero stop to ponder the why and wherefore of this bizarre event? His remarks on the occasion are quite revealing:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
 (Now my dear lady) hath mine enemies
 Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
 I find my zenith doth depend upon
 A most auspicious star, whose influence
 If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
 Will ever after droop.

(I.ii.178-84)

In response to the one genuine arcanum of the play, Prospero concentrates his mind on the unique opportunity it affords him. In this he echoes Antonio who lectures the "ebbing" Sebastian on the advantages of foresight and resolution. He surely does not sound like Gonzalo who sees providence at work even behind the usurpation of Prospero's dukedom, twelve years past. But Prospero, rather than avow a providential power and offer thanksgiving, as Gonzalo would have done, attributes the passing of the fleet to "accident," "Fortune," "zenith," an "auspicious star." It is true that Prospero once mentions "Providence divine," this in reply to Miranda's query, "How came we ashore?" But Prospero's providence takes the human form of Gonzalo, so to speak, whose virtues Prospero

sets instantly to praising. This tribute paid the noble Neapolitan is so heart-stirring, the expression of gratitude so sincere, that upon completion of the speech, Miranda has no thought for the mystery of the divine, but can only dream of meeting the man whose kindnesses once saved them: "Would I might/ But ever see that man!" In any event, what is said of divine providence is shortly reinterpreted as the dispensation of chance in the quotation cited above.²¹

Prospero then seems not to affirm a providential deity regulating affairs in the world, even though his close management of the island invites such a belief. To be sure, his character indicates support for the moral virtues which providence elicits and rewards, but these virtues exist differently in Prospero than they do in his several charges. For instance, Prospero never fails to speak pejoratively of the bewilderment and paralysis that are proper to the state of wonder: infected reason, "fever of the mad," "unsettled fancy," boiling brains, "ignorant fumes," befouled and muddied shores of reason; "knit up in their distractions," immobile prisoners. Prospero, by contrast, conjoins the disposition to justice with prudential reasoning and the power of action. Like Antonio, he too is an adult and counts himself superior to the others by virtue of his maturity. Whereas Gonzalo supposes that "all of us [found] ourselves/ When no man was his own," Prospero submits that man's true self is not to be found in childlike bemusement: "My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore, And they shall be themselves" (V.i.31-32). The child lacks learning and responsible freedom, and even some of his putative innocence--Prospero looks to nature and finds there Caliban rather than the gentle arcadians of Gonzalo's plantation.²² Piteous Miranda is the only true innocent, and she is not natural, in the sense of untouched by art, but is much the consequence of careful cultivation.²³ Judged then by the character

of Prospero, the experience of wonder cannot itself be regarded as the measure of human excellence, despite its serving as the means of renewal and improvement. If one were to venture a more expansive statement of this conclusion and of the one from the paragraph above, it would be that Christianity is not the standard--not in faith, not in obedience lies Prospero's greatness, not even in pity or forgiveness; but in the knowledge of the soul and the rational use of power.

Any attempt to locate Prospero in relation to Gonzalo, on the one hand, and Antonio, on the other, must take account of something more important than either Prospero's reflections on divine providence or his estimation of the state of wonderment--namely the skepticism evident in his speech dispelling the wedding masque. The speech reads as follows:

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

(IV.i.148-58)

What inspires this solemn lamentation is the sudden remembrance of the "beast Caliban" and his "foul conspiracy." Prospero is angry, and Miranda remarks on his singular distemper. But why so unnerved by this reminder of evil? After all, the Act began with warnings to Ferdinand to keep in check his own Caliban, "th' fire in th' blood," and the pageant sought to persuade him to do as instructed. When midway through the performance Ferdinand inquired whether the actors were but spirits, the consequence--far from being despair--was praise and admiration for Prospero's great wisdom (even the implicit

ascription of godliness--Paradise), and for Prospero evident satisfaction with the facility of his art: "Spirits, which by mine Art/ I have from their confines call'd to enact/ My present fancies" (IV.i.120-22). But now, following the recollection of Caliban's conspiracy, Prospero concludes from the spiritual nature of the actors that all things are insubstantial--because Paradise has a Caliban, Paradise will fail; and because it will fail, it is but a dream; and because a dream...what?

A pronounced difference in attitude this is, but one which perhaps can be accounted for by a statement that comes somewhat later. Prospero reveals that he is especially galled by Caliban's irredeemable nature upon which "nurture can never stick"; that his pains, "humanely taken," are "all lost, quite lost," and that Caliban grows worse with age (IV.i.188-92). "I will plague them all,/ Even to roaring," he inveighs, reminiscent of the God of Genesis who, upon surveying the universal corruption into which mankind had fallen, complains: "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I ever made them" (Genesis 6:7; New Oxford Annotated Bible).

Prospero takes solace from the belief that his wisdom and his power can rectify a fallen world. Even the constraints of chance, formerly acknowledged, do not diminish this belief, since Fortune's wheel has taken a turn for the better. But the person of Caliban--still imprecatory, still rebellious--testifies to the limits of Prospero's power, indeed to its failure.²⁴ Here is an evil that will not be reformed and that demonstrates the futility of the attempt. From this one example of frustrated purpose, Prospero extrapolates the futility of all human endeavor. The productions of man believed most durable--towers, palaces, temples--embodiments of beauty and hope, even the earth itself--man's home--lack permanence, will pass away. From the perspective

of eternity, nothing of this world is real, any more than are airy spirits real from the perspective of man. Human life, ending in death, is but a dream enveloped in the oblivion of sleep--a brilliant drama played against the bleak backdrop of eternal rest, commotions of consciousness muted by the long silence of time. The dreams of life are like Caliban's dreams, momentary escapes from a reality of servitude; or like Prospero's wedding masque, a halcyon hideway displaced by the convergence of evil. The evil of which Prospero complains, however, is not conspiracy, greed, or concupiscence, for these too are fleeting; rather it is the condition of mortality which claims all things existent. There can be then no personal immortality, nor, it would seem, a providential deity dispensing final justice in the form of heaven and hell.²⁵

These dark ruminations, says Prospero, are the work of a vexed, old, and troubled brain, a beating mind, and betray his weakness and infirmity. He suggests by this characterization that amazement and wonder have "infected" his clear reasoning, and that the obscurities of a vast and unfamiliar universe have brought him to a halt.²⁶ As if to offer demonstration of his discomfiture, Prospero next invites the betrothed couple to retire into his cell and there to repose, forgetting, it would seem, his previous monition, "do not give dalliance/ Too much the rein." Prospero's perplexity, however, is not like that which transfixes the castaways, for they are witnesses to a theodicy, whereas he confronts an alien world possibly indifferent to human purposes: if all things human melt into thin air, why is the wedding important, why the repentance of sinners, and why the just assignment of rewards? More immediately, why is it necessary for Ferdinand and Miranda to respect "holy rite" and "sanctimonious ceremonies"?²⁷

Prospero's skepticism does not set loose this demoralizing (or liberating)

chain of reflections. But a similar skepticism in Hamlet does produce such a result, and a quick comparison with the Prince of Denmark may prove useful in regarding Prospero vis a vis Antonio and Gonzalo.

Hamlet's "problem," as everyone knows, is his protracted passivity, and the traditional explanations are that he thinks too much or that he is appalled by the sinfulness of his mother and uncle. But as early as Act I. Scene ii., before Hamlet learns from the ghost of anyone's guilt in anything, Hamlet is longing for the nullity of death: "O! that this too too solid flesh would melt..." (129).²⁸ The only crime apparent to him is vulgarity, and in this all are implicated. With his father gone the world is an "unweeded garden" which to Hamlet's eyes seems "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable"-- "Things rank and gross in nature/ Possess it merely." Excellence has vanished, so too beauty, and Hamlet is tired of the common world that has been left behind. Without his father, whom Hamlet surely places in the company of Alexander and Caesar, all things appear to him equal. And yet later reflections upon a world so dispossessed lead him to extend this equality even to the great men who stand above it:

Alexander died, Alexander
was buried, Alexander returneth into dust;
the dust is earth; of earth we make loam;
and why of that loam, whereto he was converted,
might they not stop a beer barrel?
Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a whole to keep the wind away;
Oh, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw!
(V.i.230-38)

Hamlet views nature as a process which oversees the reduction of men into equally insignificant portions of earth. This continuous and meaningless cycle of growth and decay, which gives no account of man in his uniqueness, quite rightly relieves Hamlet of the heavy burden of avenging his father's death and of restoring right order to Denmark--for the concept of justice

with its moral imperatives is nothing more than ephemeral.

What Hamlet learns from the ghost, however, is that this wearisome, uninteresting world is not nature's own doing; rather it has come into being through violation of the natural order. The world thus passes from a place of tedium, deserving of contempt and arguing for suicide, to one outraged and misshapened by sin. The transition both acquits nature of Hamlet's nihilistic suspicions, while calling for nature's redress. Throughout the play Hamlet's main challenge lies in keeping uppermost in his mind this one thought of sinfulness. He never really doubts the veracity of the ghost's accusations, that Claudius usurped the throne through murder and adultery. What he doubts is the unnaturalness and criminality of such behavior; and this he questions not because he considers too curiously but because his heart is deadening as it slowly gives up its indignation. Hamlet knows good and evil through his passions. The show of passion in others acts as a stimulant on him: a player brought to tears over Hecuba, an army marching to its death for a parcel of land too small even for a cemetery. These incidents serve as transfusions of vigor into his emotional life. But they are temporary; torpor again overtakes his passions. And when his passions fall silent, Hamlet falls into doubt; and doubt in Hamlet is the cause of his paralysis. Late in the play Hamlet finally does act, but at random, citing "special providence" as the excuse for his surrender of prudence and responsibility, with the result that three additional people die--Gertrude, Laertes, and Hamlet himself.

How is it then that Prospero's musings on the insignificance of man do not produce in him the "problem" of Hamlet? In the first place Prospero does not suffer from Hamlet's emotional sterility. On the contrary, Prospero is at pains to suppress his anger, and his love for Miranda never abates.

Secondly, Prospero transcends the salutary illusions of his island, while Hamlet is happy to live only in the penumbra of his great father and is undone by the triumph of mediocrity. Hamlet also has duty thrust on him by another; Prospero, however, is the author of his own plan. Finally, Prospero has good reason to feel confident that he can set the world right; he is powerful, the master of his art, and has events well in hand. Hamlet, by contrast, is either passive or aimless, and is ruined by the responsibility of correcting a kingdom that is out of joint.

But there remains a still greater difference between them. Prospero's skepticism is a reflection of the problem of impermanence and of the human striving for immortality. It does not extend to a denial of human nature itself or to the moral precepts on which human beings are reared. Prospero is not in despair, and so he could never endorse Hamlet's reduction of man to "this quintessence of dust." The specificity and dignity of man are rather affirmed by Prospero, who knows well that Caliban the primitive and Antonio the sophisticate are two complementary examples of human degeneration--Caliban reminding of the bestiality of human passions, Antonio of the corruption of human reason. When Prospero looks outside himself, he is unsettled by the failure of things worthy to endure the passage of time. But when he consults his own soul, there he finds an order and harmony untouched by the transience without. The nobility of reason seems not to suffer the mutability that claims even the great globe. Likewise, the goodness of love, of repentance and spiritual renewal, bear the markings of eternity.

Prospero is no Platonic philosopher who ascends to a vision of the good and then translates its mysteries into an ethical creed. When Prospero philosophizes, he is made blank by the dark stillness of eternal sleep. There

is nothing beyond human action that he can affirm. And yet he is not without his bearings. Prospero resembles Aristotle (more than he does Plato) who argues in the Ethics that virtue determines the ends and that prudence selects the means.²⁹ By virtue Aristotle understands the activity of choosing in response to emotion, where repetition has made choice habitual and where the habits of choosing have produced a disposition to prefer the mean--in response to fear, to prefer courage rather than cowardice or heedlessness. Such a disposition constitutes the fixed character of the virtuous man, which character has added to it the prudential wisdom necessary to accomplish in practice what this fixed character elects to do, i.e., to be courageous under the changing circumstances of the moment, or to hit the mean of courage when the target is in motion.³⁰ Aristotle goes on to say that virtue is an activity of the soul that conforms to human nature and that conduces to happiness.³¹ Its justification is a happy human being complete in the development of his faculties. In effect Aristotle divorces moral virtue from intellectual virtue and defends the desirability of the former even in the absence of a sanctioning idea of the good. Now Prospero is Aristotelian, or apparently so, because he trains his several charges in the habits of virtue and because he never wavers in his belief that virtuous action in a mutable world is a source of true human happiness. Moreover, since Prospero's theoretical speculations seem not to afford him the comfort and satisfaction that come to Aristotle, but rather imbue gloom and inertia, his moral steadfastness serves to obviate and argue against his philosophical nihilism. Politics protects Prospero from the skepticism of his philosophy; he is wise, in part, because he is active. But whether Shakespeare thinks that a corrosive and paralytic skepticism is endemic to philosophy, it would be rash to say judging from one or two plays alone.

To reiterate the most crucial difference between Prospero and Hamlet:

Prospero is convinced that even though the world is an "insubstantial pageant" and life but a dream rounded by sleep, still the human soul has its own natural constitution which prescribes a mode of conduct conducive to happiness; that reason in the soul is a lordly element properly placed in command of the passions. Enjoined by Ariel to take pity on his captives, an attentive Prospero responds,

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
 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.25-30)³²

Human nature imposes the obligation to be a human being, and to live as a human being is to follow the dictates of reason. Prospero is pleased that angry vengeance was not permitted to disrupt his mind's control, and so to defeat its purposes. Such an insurrection within his soul would have paralleled--even ratified--Antonio's usurpation of the dukedom in Milan. For it is Antonio's principle of life that one should heed the call of instinct, using reason to accomplish its ends--hence desire and cleverness supplant virtue and prudence. It is not accidental that Antonio's conspiracy is re-enacted by Caliban, for Antonio images the man-beast through his criminality and his anarchic soul. Antonio is a diminished human being. As the civilized counterpart to Caliban, he has done himself grievous injury, more serious even than the harm he has inflicted on others. The evil is real and significant, notwithstanding the mortality that concludes every life and all existing things--of this Prospero is assured.

Action in the world requires standards and purposes, for choices are made pursuant to some conception of the good. Prospero is an actor, a political man, whose orientation derives from the potentialities of human nature. But

Prospero's primary responsibility is to educate people for whom "nobler reason" and the "rarer action" of virtue are less than compelling motives: people like Gonzalo whose vision of bliss is innocence and ignorance, like Alonso whose acknowledgement of crime is inspired by grief and sustained by fear, Ferdinand whose erotic desires are uneasily tempered, and Miranda who is piteous at the cost of being discriminate and just. Such people Prospero teaches by exposure to the island's magic and by intimation of a presiding providence both just and forgiving. In the Epilogue Prospero calls upon the audience of the play to cooperate with his project by imaginatively effecting his transport to Naples.³³ He thus makes it clear that he counts the audience among his pupils, for they will do as requested only if, like the court party, they have been transformed by the idealism of Prospero's poetry. The Tempest then is to playgoers what the enchanted island is to the castaways--a place of renewal and restoration, a retreat from the coarse realities of the world, and an opportunity to begin again with grace and hope and the determination to do well. Shakespeare's play, no less than Prospero's island, reflects the wise rule of a philosopher-poet.

Prospero says that following his daughter's nuptial and his own reinstatement in Milan every third thought will be his grave. He may intend by this statement a sober recognition of the fact that the disabilities of old age make full resumption his political duties impossible (but then how old can Prospero be with a daughter of only fifteen?).³⁴ Or it may alternately refer to the Platonic definition of philosophy as preparation for dying.³⁵ If the latter, it should be observed that only one third of his rational life is given over to the pursuit of wisdom. Prospero is no full-time philosopher; indeed to discourage the life of solitary study was the purpose of his internment on the island. The play closes with this octosyllabic verse:

As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

By identifying a free existence with the return to Milan, and by tying his freedom to the success of his teaching, Prospero indicates the importance of politics to philosophy.

NOTES

1. This quotation is taken from the Allan Bloom translation, The Republic of Plato (New York: Basic Books, 1968). For an excellent account of the Platonic critique of poetry, see Bloom's Interpretive Essay which accompanies the translation, pp. 426-34.

2. Prospero strangely treats the newly arrived Ferdinand as a traitor and usurper (I.ii.456-58) and is himself charged with usurpation by Caliban (I.ii.333-34). Usurpation pervades the play, touching each of its three groupings of characters.

3. That it is a boatswain rather than a captain--despite Alonso's insistence on speaking with the ship's master--heightens the contrast between hierarchies rooted in tradition and those rooted solely in nature.

4. Citations of The Tempest are from the fifth Arden edition, Frank Kermode, editor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954).

5. Joan Hartwig, Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), pp. 167-68.

6. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1094a18-1094b20.

7. Two passages in the play suggest that the dukedom of Milan will pass through Alonso's line, that is to say be inherited by Ferdinand:

Alonso. O thou mine heir
Of Naples and Milan, what strange fish
Hath made his meal on thee?
 (II.i.107-09)

Alonso. Thy dukedom I resign....
(V.i.118)

8. Leo Marx, in his book The Machine in the Garden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 51-57, describes the island's politicalization of Prospero in light of the nature/art theme.

9. See Douglas L. Peterson, Time Tide, and Tempest: A Study of Shake-

speare's Romances (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1973), pp. 238-39.

10. Prospero perhaps exaggerates: Caliban has been taught to speak, and his speech, as many critics have observed, is not without its charms. See, for instance, R.A. Foakes, Shakespeare: The Dark Comedies to the Last Plays (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971), pp. 152-55.

11. Prospero offers an example of self-sufficient knowledge in the speech abjuring his rough magic (V.i.41-51). See David Grene, Reality and the Heroic Pattern: Last Plays of Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 102.

12. For example, Walter Clyde Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937), pp. 163-99; R.H. West, Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), pp. 80-95; D.G. James, The Dream of Prospero (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 45-71; Kermode, Arden edition, The Tempest, pp. xl-xli; Foakes, Shakespeare, pp. 165-168.

13. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Ch. XIV.

14. G. Wilson Knight, The Crown of Life (London: Oxford University Press, 1947). Knight calls Ariel "a personification of poetry itself" (P. 210), and later likens Prospero's art to poetry (p. 252). And Kenneth Muir, in Shakespeare's Comic Sequence (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), p. 192, remarks, "What else is Prospero's magic but the power of poetry?"

15. Gonzalo speaks repeatedly of a splitting ship (I.i.60-61), whereas Ariel's description tells only of consuming fire (I.ii.195-206). Either way, Miranda bears testimony to the ship's destruction (I.ii.8), and the surviving fleet is said to be "Bound sadly home for Naples;/ Supposing that they saw the King's ship wrack'd..." (I.ii.235-36). But of course the King's

ship did not sink, was not even damaged; throughout the play it sits safely in harbor, to the complete amazement of the awakened mariners.

16. Kermode, Arden Edition, The Tempest, p. xlix.

17. An implied reference to providence may also be part of Gonzalo's intention in comparing Claribel with Dido; for Dido reminds of Aeneas whose journey was providentially ordained. See Hartwig, Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision, p. 145.

18. Derek Traversi, Shakespeare: The Last Phase (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1953), pp. 211, 239, 266; Robert Langbaum, Introduction, The Tempest (New York: Signet, 1964), p. xxxiii; Hartwig, Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision, pp. 138-40, 152-58.

19. Prospero's garments also figure in the confounding of Caliban, who, in assuring his accomplices that Prospero would be asleep (III.ii.111), likewise miscalculates the moment of opportunity.

20. The administration of the trial is less than perfect, however; for if Sebastian had not strangely hesitated, Ariel's alarm would have sounded too late. Is Prospero's plan saved by chance?

21. Traversi (Shakespeare: The Last Phase, pp. 199-200) cites the lines, "By foul play, as thou say'st, were we heav'd thence,/ But blessedly help hither" (I.ii.61-62) in support of his Christian reading of the play. But he does not press his point too far or think that it establishes his thesis because, as he notes, the key word "blessedly" is taken up from Miranda. He later observes the similarity between Prospero and Antonio on this matter of opportunism (p. 218), but he draws no conclusions from it.

22. See Marx, The Machine in the Garden, pp. 46-57.

23. Robert Speaight, Nature in Shakespearian Tragedy (London: Hollis and Carter, 1955), p. 156.

24. See Grene, Reality and the Heroic Pattern, pp. 94-95.

25. For an interesting discussion of Prospero's dream speech, see John Middleton Murray, Shakespeare (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936), pp. 341-43.

26. See Howard B. White, Copp'd Hills Toward Heaven: Shakespeare and the Classical Polity (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), pp. 134-38. With the help of Aristotle, White distinguishes between the self-sufficient wonder of poetry ("an emotional state...susceptible of renewal...partly joyous, partly painful, but seldom a way of life") and the wonder that eventuates in philosophy. Philosophical wonder, he argues, "does not begin with the spectacular, but with the commonplace, albeit the mysterious commonplace (proxeiros)" ...with "what is usually called the eternal recurrence.... It is not spectacles which lead to wisdom, but the observation of and the reflection on the mysteries of the diurnal."

27. Foakes (Shakespeare, p. 162) offers these comments on Prospero's dream speech and the masque that preceded it: "...the descent of Juno as queen of heaven constitutes a theophany in the play.... In this sense the masque relates to an order outside Prospero, and beyond his control, a heavenly order. The masque belongs in a scheme of social and cosmic order to which Prospero himself subscribes, as is shown by his determination that the wedding of the lovers be celebrated with 'full and holy rite,' in his ratifying his gift of Miranda to Ferdinand 'afore Heaven' (1.7), and in his concern throughout to restore himself to his rightful place as Duke of Milan." But of course the masque is not a theophany; it is, as Prospero says, "some vanity" of his art; and as art it is insubstantial. Prospero may well subscribe to a social and cosmic order, but the question is, Does he have any warrant for doing so? Peterson (Time, Tide, and Tempest, pp. 242-43)

takes more seriously the implications of the speech but attributes them to the world-weariness of an old man.

28. Citations of Hamlet are from the fifth Arden edition, Edward Dowden, editor (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1919).

29. Nicomachean Ethics 1144a8,1145a6.

30. Ibid., 1106a36,1107a3.

31. Ibid., 1097a15-1099b8.

32. Traversi remarks of this speech that "No where is the part played by the Christian ethic in shaping this play more clearly stated" (Shakespeare, p. 265). What Prospero celebrates, however, is not so much pity and forgiveness, but the ability of his reason to hold fast against the pull of the passions, thus allowing him to remain true to his purpose. Rather than a statement of Christian ethics, which gives first place to the spiritual virtues of faith, hope, and charity, it bespeaks the classical ethics of Plato and Aristotle. Muir (Shakespeare's Comic Sequence, pp. 180-81) discounts Christian elements in the speech, pointing to parallels with Florio's translation of Montaigne's essay on cruelty (ii.xi.).

33. Hartwig, Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision, p. 174.

34. James, The Dream of Prospero, pp. 125-29.

35. Plato, Phaedo 64a.