An Approach to *The Tempest*

The Tempest easily allows—it might almost be said to invite—allegorical interpretation. It has been seen as structured upon the theme of the relation of flesh to spirit, of chaos to order, of Nature to Art. It has been read as a meditation on the development of political thought in Shakespeare's period, the rights and responsibilities of rulers and of subjects, the dangers and attractions of rebellion, innovation, and utopian ideals. It has been presented as a study in contrasts—between the old world and the new, decadence and primitivism; or between different kinds of magic, diabolical and virtuous—with all the philosophical and religious consequences the contrasts imply. In particular, Prospero has been variously interpreted: as, for instance, a figure of Redemption, as a forerunner of the new science, as a symbol of intellectual order. And one view of Prospero has gained such currency as almost to be taken for granted, entering subtly into many accounts of the play otherwise very unlike each other. His magical powers are thought to resemble the functioning of creative imagination. Prospero is viewed as an artist, and his renunciation of magic is identified with Shakespeare's farewell to poetry.

That not all such interpretations are equally persuasive and illuminating need not be said. What seems to me interesting at this stage in the play's history lies rather in the characteristic nature of the interpretations than in their differences of focus or emphasis. Around all of Shakespeare's work a vast amount of interpretation accumulates, but the case of *The Tempest* is I believe unusual. Explanations of, say, Hamlet's behaviour are legion, but almost always they offer to guide our understanding of what happens within the play. Very little in *The Tempest* requires explaining at that level. Interpretations of this play characteristically move outward, seeking less to elucidate its action than to relate it significantly to concerns in the world at large. They treat the play as a disquisition on, or representation of, subjects not centrally of its own substance; and perhaps they are justified.

Perhaps they are justified; but if so—and if there's any truth in the distinction I've drawn between interpretations of this play and of others—that would seem to reflect something peculiar in the nature of this play. *The Tempest* is compact, lucid, tightly-knit, artfully contrived to seize and sustain attention. It contains some strikingly original characters, memorable speeches, scenes calcu-

lated to arouse wonder and laughter. Its action unfolds with energy and economy. An alert and practised intelligence can be felt in every detail of the composition. And yet, in comparison with Shakespeare's major plays, *The Tempest* appears measurably more slight—slight, I'd argue, in both construction and conception. The formal perfection of *The Tempest,* encompassing of course much more than its celebrated observation of the unities of time and place, remains less impressive, accomplishes less in the organization of complex conceptions than, say, the dense reiterations of *Coriolanus* or the powerfully logical exfoliation of *Macbeth.*

Echoes of *Macbeth,* especially, have been remarked in the plot to kill Alonso. As Lady Macbeth urged her husband to murder Duncan in his sleep, so Antonio prompts Sebastian to murder the sleeping king, and images and phrases from the earlier play reappear in the dialogue of the later. To recall *Macbeth* here brings out the rapidity and ease with which *The Tempest* develops its plot, attributing just enough of motive, of calculation, and of scruple to the two plotters. But the comparison brings out also how diminished an imaginative engagement with evil it is that can make do with this ease and economy. The scoundrels of *The Tempest* look sketchy alongside the great figures whose roles they re-enact. It has been said, for example, that Antonio's attitude to conscience parallels Lady Macbeth's, but the parallel, if there be one, recaptures none of the intensity, the horror, the strenuous, dreadfully sensuous awareness of consequences, the enormous seriousness of the lines in which Shakespeare represents Lady Macbeth's repudiation of conscience:

> Come, you Spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
> Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of Nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> Th'effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
> And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring ministers.
>
> (I.v.40-48)

Antonio, when Sebastian refers to his conscience, answers with a jaunty dismissal possible only to one for whom the problem, for whom all the consciousness implicit in Lady Macbeth's lines, has never existed:

> Ay, sir; where lies that? if 'twere a kibe,
> 'Twould put me to my slipper: but 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.271-275)[1]

Of course it must in fairness be said that Antonio and Sebastian have too small a share in *The Tempest* to need more ample inward development; that their plot is forestalled before it can do harm, so that their evil intent requires no deeper exploration; and that the play, being a comedy, could not accommodate a fuller realization of horrors. Granting all this does nothing to discommode my argument: it is only another way to make the point. *The Tempest* requires—for Shakespeare—relatively little in-depth explanation, it directs commentary outward towards allegorical readings, because the limiting perfection of its structure restricts its engagement with the postulated materials. This is not to deny the pervasive evidence in the play of a fertile, receptive, intellectual activity—an activity throwing up ideas for sharp though not extended consideration. Nor is it to deny the signs of creative self-delight in imagining all round a Caliban or an Ariel. It is rather to argue that Shakespeare's interest, the creative interest manifest in the play, does not lie where it might normally be expected.

That interest does not lie, for one thing, in the fable, which has less of complication, uncertainty, or suspense than in any but the slenderest of Shakespeare's early comedies. It lacks suspense because evil here is too shadowy and unrealized, too quickly prevented, too powerless seriously to threaten. It lacks uncertainty because Prospero's foresight is too clear, his intelligence too ubiquitous, and his power too apt, to leave the issue much in doubt. The action of the play devolves therefore into a sequence of stages in the fulfilment of his will. It is because he so largely controls the destiny of all the other characters that it is tempting to see Prospero as puppet-master or playwright. Yet the analogy can overpersuade. The other figures are assigned roles in a play of Prospero's devising. Prospero himself figures in the play that he creates, but figures also in the larger play (Shakespeare's) that circumscribes, and tests the limits of his control within, his creation.

I want to suggest, then, that the main concern of *The Tempest,* its focus of interest, lies not in the plot—so little is done with the plot; not in character—so many of the characters are little better

1 The quotation from *Macbeth* is taken from the Arden edition, ed. Kenneth Muir (London, 1959). Quotations from *The Tempest* are taken from the Arden edition, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1962).

than sticks; not in comedy—the clowning is expert, but Shakespeare's treatment of it seems aloof and restrained. Nor, I should add, does the main concern appear in the large, noble themes of reconciliation, forgiveness, love and restoration: these are handled too perfunctorily, arriving at a resolution without deep conviction. The main concern, at least as I find it, lies in the interrelationship between the play Prospero constructs and *The Tempest* as a whole, between Prospero's will and Shakespeare's knowledge.

Putting the case in this way risks making the play sound more schematic and reflexive, more turned in on itself, than it really is. For much of the time, there is no call to distinguish the action of the play as a whole from the pattern Prospero imposes. Yet it is obvious that Prospero manipulates the action to an extraordinary degree, so that he stands above the play as no other character does in Shakespeare, not even the Duke in *Measure for Measure* or Paulina in the last act of *The Winter's Tale*. And at the same time, although this may be less obvious, the play contains carefully placed perspectives to show Prospero's limitations both as magician and as man.

How great his powers are, how high he stands above the other characters, the first scene amply conveys—conveys the more tellingly because at first the exercise of Prospero's art in the storm must be unknown. Instead, the play opens with what seems an objectively real event, tumultuous, rousing, but not improbable, and made more convincing by the self-centred exchanges between the sailors and the courtiers. Yet these very exchanges ironically testify, in the light of our later knowledge, to Prospero's control. When Gonzalo reminds the boatswain of the King's presence—"remember whom thou hast aboard"—the reply points to the helplessness against enraged Nature of ordinary mortals, including kings and their ministers:

> None that I more love than myself. You are a counsellor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the presence, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority: if you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap.
>
> (I.i.20-26)

What it is here supposed no man could do turns out to be precisely what Prospero does, "command these elements to silence". But even before an audience learns that, it is permitted to feel secure that this storm will do no harm. The tone of Gonzalo's response to the boatswain effectively reduces the terror of the scene, gives promise of rescue:

> I have great comfort from this fellow: methinks he hath no drowning

mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging: make the rope of his destiny our cable.
(I.i.28-31)

The joke returns at the end, when Ariel leads the boatswain ashore to be greeted by Gonzalo with the words:

I prophesied, if a gallows were on land,
This fellow could not drown.
(V.i.217-218)

The dramatic effectiveness of the first scene thus establishes the reality of Prospero's claims—

I have bedimm'd
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
Set roaring war
(V.i.41-44)

—and at the same time evinces Shakespeare's (not Prospero's) consciously shaping art. The scene's blended effects are typical of the play. All through the play, the quality of dream or fantasy is interfused with its opposite, an ever-present, unillusioned and acerbic knowledge of the actualities of human life. It is a combination to be found even in the setting, for the island itself is so variously described as to allow views of it ranging from paradise to purgatory. Caliban's accounts (and he knows the island more thoroughly than any) are contrapuntal:

. . . fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.
(I.ii.340)

As he describes it to Stephano, Caliban's innocent delight in the island emerges through his clamorous eagerness to please this new god with the wondrous bottle:

I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries;
I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.
(II.ii.160-161)

In this aspect, the island almost justifies Gonzalo's daydream of a utopia in which

Nature should bring forth,
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.
(II.i.158-160)

So Caliban offers, with his services, his own sense of the island's teeming variety:

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock.
(II.ii.167-72)

That it is service Caliban offers, not merely Nature's plenty, needs emphasis. Even here, in this demi-Eden, Nature does not, as Gonzalo would believe, produce "without sweat or endeavour" (II.i.156). It is necessary to dig with long nails, to climb trees, set snares, make dams for fish, carry firewood, and wash dishes—to labour in order to live. The awareness of actualities is ever-present.

This doubleness remains even when the island assumes its supernatural aspect. As a place of enchantment, it can take the guise Caliban describes to reassure his companions:

> 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.133-141)

Equally, it can take the guise of nightmare; the spirits that hum about his ears he speaks of elsewhere as pinching him, pitching him into the mire, misleading him in the dark, setting upon him:

> Sometime like apes, that mow and chatter at me,
> And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which
> Lie tumbling in my barefoot way, and mount
> Their pricks at my footfall; sometime am I
> All wound with adders, who with cloven tongues
> Do hiss me into madness.
>
> (II.ii.9-14)

Caliban is of course, as everyone notices, far more than the irredeemable beast Prospero makes him out to be. The point should suffice to forestall any facile identification of Prospero with Shakespeare himself. And in Caliban's contrasting experiences of the mysteries of the island there are rudimentary intimations of something we might call a religious consciousness. He lives between the recollection of torment and the dream of grace, and in his own nature incarnates something of their struggle. Not wholly irredeemable, he does learn from his folly: his last speech contains a declaration which, though equivocal, reaches out for its significance into the deepest claims of the play:

> I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace.
>
> (V.i.294-295)

Were these indeed his very last words, they would not be equivocal, they would merely be sentimental. But here again the play

draws upon its harder knowledge. Caliban goes on to berate himself for poor judgment of Stephano, taking the drunkard for a god. Seen in the light of that, his quest for wisdom and grace dwindles into a resolution to win the favour of the stronger side: it suggests at least that no miraculous regeneration should be expected from a creature capable of the sullen, brutal hatred with which he had urged Prospero's destruction:

> with a log
> Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
> Or cut his wezand with thy knife.
>
> (III.ii.87-89)

Caliban is not the only one to express the dual nature of the island. When the court party has first come ashore, its members respond varyingly to their surroundings. Adrian and Gonzalo observe the delicacy and temperance of the climate, the sweetness of the air, the natural fecundity, the vigorous green of the grass. Antonio and Sebastian observe only the opposite of these qualities. They are not responding to different scenes: both sets of observation are given simultaneously, in harsh counterpoint:

> *Adr.* The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
> *Seb.* As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
> *Ant.* Or as 'twere perfum'd by a fen.
> *Gon.* Here is everything advantageous to life.
> *Ant.* True; save means to live.
> *Seb.* Of that there's none, or little.
> *Gon.* How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!
> *Ant.* The ground, indeed, is tawny.
>
> (II.i.45-52)

Whatever the reality of the island, what each sees here is his own image. This is crucial. Our understanding of the whole play depends not indeed upon this scrap of dialogue but upon the insight offered here more baldly than elsewhere. The dualism of the island, and of the play, is not to be found in the objective world. It is in, innate to, mankind. And the objective world is not independently to be known. The storm, the sequence of events, the island itself, each separate reality has its existence only as it takes form in the imagination of participant or perceiver. Thus it is that the music of the island induces all of the courtiers to sleep, except Antonio and Sebastian. They, although they attribute the drowsiness of the others to a "quality o'th'climate" (II.i.195), remain broad waking, and hatch their plot. Ariel's harmony can take no hold on their discordant imaginations.

The world of the play exists as it is perceived, to all of its inhabitants, its form plastic to their differing natures. So it is that when Miranda finds mankind beauteous and the world brave and

new, her words carry conviction, they speak to our sense of truth rather than to our hopes alone, even though we are fully aware of the ironies. Prospero's answer,

> 'Tis new to thee
>
> (V.i.184)

may express his own bitter disillusionment, but as a comment on Miranda's exclamation it is perfectly just. To the audience of the play, neither view is out of keeping with what has been seen. What has been seen, the status of the presented spectacle, is indeed as much a question for the audience of the play as for any of its inhabitants.

That question brings us to Prospero. Understanding how the appearance—or rather, the perceived reality—of island and event, setting and story, vary with the nature of the perceiver can explain, better than learned excursions into Elizabethan theories of magic, the secret of Prospero's Art. It can explain also his role in the play, his character, and (to some extent) his relation to the poet.

A distinction needs to be drawn between the general impression of powers the play claims for Prospero, and the specific exercise of those powers as the action demonstrates them. The magic abjured in his renunciation speech is strong stuff:

> to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar: graves at my command
> Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent Art.
>
> (V.i.44-50)

We need not question his word, despite perhaps a slight worry about graves on a previously uninhabited island. These images lodge themselves with sufficient energy in the mind to leave a lasting sense of the vast capacities Prospero gives up: the tangled roots of great trees, for example, seen vividly yet in apt diminution as spurs, the trunks plucked up by a giant. The effect of the whole passage, coming where it does near the end of the play, is to generalize Prospero's power, create a heightened impression of it, at the point where he resolves to dispense with it. It is a dramatic effect, specifically local, reinforcing the play's climax; and it is in keeping with his sense of himself that Prospero should so dramatize, should represent in such epical grandeur, god-like, the accomplishment he is about to sacrifice.

The magic actually performed in the play is different. It is essentially an art of illusion, or perhaps it may be less misleading

to call it an art of suggestion. It works by evoking in the subject the required sensation, of pain, or harmony, or drowsiness, and by registering upon the senses the required sounds and pictures. This does not mean that the effects are simply subjective, as, say, delusions induced by hypnosis would be. In the tempest of scene one, the people on board ship hear the howling of the wind, feel the turbulence of the sea, wrestle with the heaving sails. In scene two, Miranda likewise sees the wild waters and the black stormy sky; but Ariel, when he comes, reveals that the whole tempest has been a performance. The term is significant. What he has done is to act out the illusion Prospero planned.

Pros. Hast thou, spirit,
Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?
Ari. To every article.
I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
I flam'd amazement: sometime I'd divide,
And burn in many places; on the topmast,
The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors
O'th'dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not: the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake.

(I.ii.193-206)

As actor of this show, Ariel more than performs it faithfully; he does it with a creative zest, an enjoyment of his own lambent energy and power to amaze, that outstrips any notion of service he owes to Prospero. Here, as elsewhere, he speaks as one wishing not merely approval but applause—which Prospero at once bestows. Ariel's last words in the play are the aside to Prospero:

Was't well done?

(V.i.240)

Even when his mission is a cruel one, Ariel performs it with the self-enjoyment of a polished, resourceful showman. Leading the three clowns to the foul lake, he finds them transformed by drink, as if by witchcraft, into the semblance of animals:

. . . they were red-hot with drinking;
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,
Advanc'd their eyelids, lifted up their noses
As they smelt music: so I charm'd their ears,
That, calf-like, they my lowing follow'd, through

> Tooth'd briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss, and thorns,
> Which enter'd their frail shins.
>
> (IV.i.171-181)

To the beat of the tabor, they became a troupe of dancing beasts and Ariel both mischievous Orpheus and ringmaster.

Prospero has power to look into the future, to discern danger afar, to put Miranda into a sleep, to freeze Ferdinand where he stands with sword drawn; but in the main he works through intermediaries, Ariel and other spirits and goblins. It is through these "weak masters", as he calls them, that Prospero composes the play of forgiveness and restitution that is to round out his life. By their aid he mounts the storm, brings the royal party ashore, unites Ferdinand and Miranda, preserves the king's life, confronts the three men of sin with their guilt, obtains the restoration of his dukedom, punishes Caliban and his fellows, and returns in triumph to Milan. It is a simple tale he constructs, more tableau than drama, for it contains no possibility of effective conflict. Prospero's own enjoyment of it comes partly through self-vindication, partly through the discomfiture of his enemies, and in quite large part through the exhibition of his powers. But although these may satisfy him, it seems doubtful that they would by themselves suffice to satisfy an audience. Luckily for us, Prospero and his neat enactment of revenge and reconciliation subsist within a larger framework. *The Tempest* as a whole affords sharper consideration of his motives than Prospero himself would think fit to undertake, and shows the limitations both of his power and of the conception of the world he seeks to impose on reality.

From his first entry, imperfections in his character appear. Traces of the pedant in his manner, of impatience with Miranda, and of needless asperity to Ferdinand, have been often noticed. The violence of his reaction when Ariel pleads (temperately and courteously) for his promised liberty scarcely bespeaks Prospero's self-possession, and there is a troubling impercipience in the absoluteness with which he condemns Caliban. It is not necessary to deny Caliban's real viciousness to feel some sympathy with him, not only in the pathos of his role as beast to Miranda's beauty but also in the gusto with which he enjoys the island and wishes to people it with Calibans. But the terms of Prospero's condemnation are revealing:

> 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. I will plague them all,
> Even to roaring.
>
> (IV.i.188-193)

There is in these lines an understandable feeling of failure. We see that not even Prospero's art could do much with Caliban. But then questions come to mind. Was the unsuccess, as Prospero insists, wholly because of Caliban's irredeemable nature? Could it be that in Prospero's pains, too, something was lacking, patience or tolerance or sympathy? Prospero's vehemence seems suspect: together with justifiable disappointment is there not some less warrantable self-vindication? And is not the disappointment mixed up in the vindictive desire to hurt, to plague them all even to roaring?

Self-vindication, a blind assumption of his own rectitude, appears on a grander scale in the main story. It is not that Antonio was less guilty than Prospero claims, but that Prospero passes with disturbing lightness over what might seem his own share of responsibility. It may be that Prospero's renunciation of his magical powers constitutes some sort of recognition of this, but nothing in the play explicitly connects that renunciation to the remembrance of how these pursuits had led to his downfall:

> those being all my study,
> The government I cast upon my brother,
> And to my state grew stranger, being transported
> And rapt in secret studies.
>
> (I.ii.74-77)

In a play so concerned with authority and legitimacy, the implication there of neglected duties seems unmistakable; but beyond the bare statement Prospero betrays no qualms. If the evidence here seems equivocal, later developments are plainer. The theatrical denunciation he contrives to bring home their guilt to his enemies shows Prospero attributing to his own purposes a far greater sanction. Ariel, reciting the words Prospero has prepared, declaims:

> You are three men of sin, whom Destiny, —
> That hath to instrument this lower world
> And what is in't, — the never-surfeited sea
> Hath caus'd to belch up you.
>
> (III.iii.53-56)

Prospero casts himself, we see, in the role of all-righteous Providence. He even claims for himself, through Ariel's lines, the sympathy and sanction of universal Nature:

> The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incens'd the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
> Against your peace.
>
> (III.iii.73-75)

These, however, are claims the rest of the play fails to endorse. The masque especially performed to display Prospero's Art is abruptly broken up when, at almost the last moment, he recalls Caliban's plot against his life. As Providence, Prospero is strangely forgetful.

There are far more important limits to his power and his purposes. We have seen that he fails fully to understand or command his own feelings. Over the feelings of others, over their souls, he has, and can have, no control. In this respect, manipulate them as he may, the others are autonomous, and Caliban's recalcitrance proves, indeed, his share of humanity. Prospero glimpses this truth, and acknowledges that it is not in his power either to make Ferdinand and Miranda love each other or, when they do fall in love, to guarantee the purity of their affections. The utmost he can do is to bring them together, so that love can have its opportunity, and then to separate them so that love can be put to the test. When Miranda at first sight of Ferdinand calls him a thing divine, Prospero comments to himself:

> It goes on, I see,
> As my soul prompts it.
>
> (I.ii.422-423)

He can't simply make it happen: it is what he hopes for, and rejoices to find. The note of exultation persists, as things fall out exactly to his wishes:

> At the first sight
> They have chang'd eyes.
>
> (I.ii.443-444)

That their love should be spontaneous (spontaneous within the convention of love at first sight) is, of course, from the audience's point of view, a necessary sign of its authenticity. Prospero himself feels towards it in complex ways appropriate to something in the natural world, not a thing of his own fashioning. So, with the tender superiority of age, he can say of the love-lorn Miranda,

> Poor worm, thou art infected
>
> (III.i.31)

and only moments later be moved to call for Heaven's grace upon their "rare affections".

What is true of love holds equally for the baser passions. Magic can neither summon nor dispel them. Prospero has no power to change bad men into good, and can have none because a moral regeneration imposed from without would be meaningless. All his wonders have therefore no profound effect upon the three men of sin. Alonso mourns the supposed loss of his son, but shows small contrition for the wrong done so many years ago to Prospero;

Sebastian shows less, and Antonio none. It has been often observed that the two plotters remain their jeering selves to the very end. That Prospero recognizes as much, and is forced to come to terms with it, usually escapes notice. The fact is that, with Antonio and Sebastian, Prospero's Art fails, he is unable to enforce the resolution he had planned, and must make do with rough pragmatic arrangements. Instead of a reconciliation of purified hearts, the human realities limit him to the compromises of power.

Prospero's grand ambition has been to bring about the moral transformation of his enemies. In the words given to Ariel, he demands of them no less than

> heart-sorrow
> And a clear life ensuing.
>
> (III.iii.81-82)

Under the influence of his magic charm, they are plunged into distraction, temporary madness. When they are in this pitiable condition he resolves on mercy, for, he says:

> 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.26-30)

Distraction, however, is not penitence. When, finally, he confronts them, Prospero makes no reliance upon the supposed repentance of Sebastian and Antonio. Formally forgiving them, he extends to them no warmth or trust. Antonio, he insists still, is unnatural, a

> most wicked sir, whom to call brother
> Would even infect my mouth.
>
> (V.i.130-131)

He can reclaim the dukedom, not because Antonio willingly relinquishes it but because he is compelled by force to restore it. That he and his daughter can return there in security he ensures by threats. Whatever "inward pinches" Sebastian may feel for his past misdeeds, Prospero binds him and Antonio to good behaviour in the future under penalty of exposure:

> But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,
> I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you,
> And justify you traitors: at this time
> I will tell no tales.
>
> (V.i.126-129)

Prospero here, it is manifest, has tacitly abandoned the pretension to induce heart-sorrow and a clear life ensuing. He deals with reality in the terms reality allows.

All through the play, as everyone knows, there are suggestions of an equivalence between magic and poetry. Both work by the

creation of illusion, both transform the world of perception. The equation between them is distilled in the equivocal word used over and over (it occurs eleven times) to denote Prospero's power—Art. But as Prospero has conceived of his art, its function is to reshape reality, make the world again according to the heart's desire. This is more than art can do, Prospero's or Shakespeare's, and that is part of the profound commentary Shakespeare's play makes upon the play Prospero tried to create. I said earlier that in the world of *The Tempest* each separate reality has its existence only as it takes form in the imagination of participant or perceiver. What Prospero has attempted is to enforce his vision upon the others, but such superimposition can never be more than a trick. Caliban and his cohorts will always blunder on to the stage and spoil the enchantment.

Stephano is given a very fine song. He calls it a scurvy tune, but its wry, unbeglamoured earthiness is marvellously right for this play:

> The master, the swabber, the boatswain, and I,
> The gunner, and his mate,
> Lov'd Mall, Meg, and Marian, and Margery,
> But none of us car'd for Kate:
> For she had a tongue with a tang,
> Would cry to a sailor, Go hang!
> She lov'd not the savour of tar nor of pitch;
> Yet a tailor might scratch her where'er she did itch.
> Then to sea, boys, and let her go hang!
>
> (II.ii.47-55)

None of us cares for Kate: a tongue with a tang. But there's no getting away from her, or from tar or from pitch, or from drunken butlers, envious brothers, rebellious servants, ambitious nobles, or from greed, lust, treason, felony, sweat or endeavour. Prospero's play has sought to exclude these things, or subdue them. Shakespeare's play knows better. Whatever direct self-expression Shakespeare may have allowed himself through Prospero's renunciation, we should do him wrong to suppose his conception of art limited to Prospero's. The end of the revels is not the end of *The Tempest*. The spirits dismissed by Prospero had enacted his fancies. Like these fancies, the world itself, as each of us perceives it, is a vision that must dissolve with the perceiver. Our little life is rounded with a sleep, but until that sleep life remains and we have to get on with it. Prospero has still a whole Act full of practical issues to settle, and then a new life to get under way.

Australian National University FRED LANGMAN