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AN IMAGE ON WATER: A READING OF SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

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To my father, Keith Jeffery (1952-2016), in loving memory.

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A Note on Texts

All quotations from *The Tempest* are taken from the Oxford edition edited by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

All other quotations from Shakespeare texts are taken from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (eds. Stephen Orgel and A.R. Braunmuller, New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

Introduction: An Image on Water

1

The topic of this dissertation is a problem of philosophical psychology and its relation to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The problem concerns a capacity of the human subject to fall into a disordered relationship to the world in general: a misalignment of inside and outside in which the individual no longer experiences themselves as "part of" the world the same way as they had previously. In the wake of a traumatic loss, for example, a person might find herself psychologically "uncoupled" from external reality in a manner that had not been true prior to the event. This form of trouble can be called a crisis of integration.

Underlying the idea of this sort of crisis is the thought that the relationship between the inner world of a subject and the external world they inhabit does not have a fixed form, but rather admits to varying modes of organisation, and this also indicates the possibility of the same individual experiencing reality in markedly different ways at different moments in time. The most intuitive example of this phenomenon is perhaps a developmental one: for a child in the early stages of psychological life, the experience of the world is not "shaped" in the same way as that of an adult. But this is also an instance of the more general principle, which is that the structure of an individual's subjective relationship to the world is open to change. The specific type of alteration that I will focus on in this dissertation is one in which a person's experience of reality moves from a consonant to a dissonant form.

In my reading, *The Tempest* as a whole represents something like a hypostatised act of thought about this phenomenon. What I mean by this is that alongside the psychology depicted in the story's human (and non-human) characters, the basic format of the play – the division of the

story between two locations; the confounding nature of the opening scene; the island setting; the presence of magic; the underlying revenge plot; the peculiar dominance by a single character; and the almost explicit concern with theatricality – together represent a deeper, more imagistic mode of thought about the nature and consequences of this type of uncoupling from the world. The wager of my project is that, by looking at the work through the lens of this notion, an important and hitherto unappreciated unity in the play's design can be appreciated. But I do not mean to treat *The Tempest* as merely an illustration of a theory. The set of ideas that I will present is as much a response to (and so, in a fashion, generated by) the play as the play is an illustration of those ideas.[1] In a number of respects, *The Tempest* invites an understanding of itself as a drama about catastrophes and a dislocated form of life that emerges in the wake of catastrophes. Most obviously, the action opens with a disaster – or an apparent disaster – only after which the narrative truly begins. The story is set on an unnamed and strangely placeless island, divorced from the wider human world, and it ends with a return.[2] On a more overtly psychological level, it dramatizes an effort to rid oneself of ghosts and rejoin life.

The Tempest is also beset with concern for what one might call the precarity of union. In all compartments of the play, organised unities prove to be neither as stable nor as unified as they appear – and, by extension, the dividing lines between entities are often shown to be deceptively

[1] The analogy is not a perfect one, because the problematic I am interested in does not (as far as I know) have an existence independent of this study, but I am reminded of Stanley Cavell's remark that, in his view, Shakespeare's mature tragedies are interpretations of what philosophical skepticism is an interpretation of. As he puts it: "The misunderstanding of my attitude that most concerned me was to take my project as the application of some philosophically independent problematic of skepticism to a fragmentary parade of Shakespearean texts, impressing those texts into the service of illustrating philosophical conclusions known in advance. Sympathy with my project depends, on the contrary, on unsettling the matter of priority (as between philosophy and literature, say) implied in the concepts of illustration and application. The plays I take up form respective interpretations of skepticism as they yield to interpretation by skepticism." (Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 1.)

[2] Notionally, the island is located in the middle of the Mediterranean. But it also has obvious connotations with the New World, as well as evoking a dreamlike exit from ordinary life.

frail. Here is one example of this tendency: *The Tempest* is often described by critics as one of only two plays by Shakespeare to obey the neoclassical unities of time and place.[3] But if this judgment is meant to be true in the strict sense, then it is either wrong or impossible to confirm. The opening scene is set on Alonso's ship rather than Prospero's island, and so one only arrives at an unambiguous unity of place by ignoring it. More importantly, however, even if one were to loosen the geographic requirement – so that the island and its orbit counts as a single location, rather than two – this would not make the issue disappear. The connection between the first scene and the rest of *The Tempest* is innately, and indeed purposefully, obscure. This detail has the effect of interfering in a much more serious way with any conception of spatial unity. The same point applies to the subject of time. In the conversation between Prospero and Ariel in the second scene, we learn that it is around two o'clock on the island when the story begins, while in the final scene we are informed that roughly three hours have passed since then (1.2.239-240/5.1.223). Accordingly, if it is true that the first scene coincides with the event that Miranda and Prospero observe from the shore, the action of *The Tempest* easily falls within the frame of a single day. But do we know that this is true? To be certain of it – as I will argue in Chapter 1 – we would have to understand more about the opening scene than it is possible to establish. At best, what the play offers is the appearance of neoclassical unity, not the fact.

[3] By way of example: "*The Tempest*, unlike any other Shakespearean play since the early *The Comedy of Errors*, observes the classical unities of time and place" (David Lindley, "Introduction" in *The Tempest*, ed. Lindley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 3). "It is Shakespeare's one mature play that strictly conforms to the so-called Aristotelian unities of time, place, and action" (René Girard, *A Theater of Envy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, 347). "It could be said to observe all the neo-Aristotelian unities" (Frank Kermode, "The Tempest" in *Shakespeare's Romances*, ed. Harold Bloom, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2000, 241). Anne Barton describes its adherence to the unities as "a straightforward fact about the play" ("Introduction" in *The Tempest*, ed. Barton, London: Penguin Books, 1968, 25). For a general account of the influence of the neoclassical unities on English Renaissance drama, see: Louis Sigmund Friedland's "The Dramatic Unities in England," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 10 (1911): 56-89.

Likewise, within the story what we see dramatized is the *wish* for coherence and order more often than their actualisation. This is perhaps most strikingly exemplified in the set-piece at the heart of the play: the betrothal masque that Prospero conjures for Miranda and Ferdinand, as well as the sorcerer's great speech upon its dissolution. The ceremony is a celebration of well-ordered union in both a literal sense (the impending wedlock) and in a more pervasive and symbolic one. It is introduced by one of the anonymous spirits of the island, playing the role of Iris, the goddess of rainbows, while two other spirits play the roles of Ceres and Juno – the goddess of earth and the goddess of air, respectively. Together they present a vision of glorious, though scrupulously cultivated, prosperity and abundance to the young couple.[4] Scarcity and want are banished, but the resulting plethora of food is framed in terms of human design rather than natural plenty (Ceres is the patroness of agriculture as well as a goddess of earth).[5] "Earth's increase, foison plenty, / Barns and garners never empty" (4.1.110-111). The ceremony enters an even more explicitly magical register when a miraculous defeat of the normal rhythm of the seasons is foretold. There will be no winter: "Spring come to you at the farthest, / In the very end of harvest!" (4.1.114-115) The elision of this part of the year is also the symbolic undoing of the rape of Proserpine, Cere's daughter, the event responsible for the existence of winter in Greek mythology.

[4] John Gillies provides a thorough overview of the masque and the related themes of temperance and fertility in "Shakespeare's Virginian Masque," *ELH*, 53 (Winter, 1986): 673-707. See also: Richard Strier, "Civilization and its Discontents: Montaigne in *The Tempest*", in *Shakespeare and Montaigne*, ed. Lars Engle, Patrick Gray and William M. Hamilton (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).

[5] As Strier puts it: "The masque is, most of all, a celebration of cultivation. In it, nature brings forth nothing 'Of its own kind.' The opening invocation of Iris to the 'bounteous' Ceres evokes her 'rich leas / Of wheat, barely, vetches, oats, and pease" (4.1.60-61). This gives us both a sense of variety and a celebration of the most fundamental, ordinary, necessary, and long-standing cultivars, both grains and legumes. None of these can be counted on to grow wild." ("Civilization and its Discontents", forthcoming) In Gillies's words, the betrothal masque is thereby "comprehensively opposed" to Gonzalo's vision of a utopian commonwealth earlier in the play (2.1.145-162), where abundance is entirely a product of nature rather than work ("Shakespeare's Virginian Masque", 689).

Among other things, the images of agriculture are images of order: "thatched" meadows for livestock, fortified embankments, pruned vineyards, barns, granaries, and trimmed grass (4.1.60-83). Elsewhere, opposites are harmoniously integrated with one another. The collaboration of Ceres and Juno is a marriage of earth and air (topped off by Iris, the rainbow, "Rich scarf to my proud earth" [4.1.82]). At the climax, "temperate nymphs" come together with "sunburned sickle-men" for what the stage directions describe as "*a graceful dance*" (4.1.132-138). Fertility and the generation of new life are celebrated by the masque, but entirely within a matrix of rules that preserve the integrity of the component parts. It is a show of organised combination rather than chaotic merging: life is fortified by distinctions. "This is a most majestic vision, and / Harmonious charmingly", in Ferdinand's awe-struck words (4.1.119-120). The disordering force of desire – symbolised by Venus and her son Cupid – is pointedly excluded from the occasion (4.1.86-101). In a somewhat mysterious image given the surrounding fecundity, Iris describes Ceres's meadows as limited by a "sea-marge sterile and rocky-hard" (4.1.69). But this detail becomes perfectly legible and expressive, as John Gillies suggests, once we see it as denoting a barrier that preserves separation.[6] The purpose of the sterile margin is to keep the shapelessness of the sea at bay.

Before the nymphs and the fieldworkers finish their dance, however, the masque ends abruptly. Prospero "*starts suddenly*" as he recalls Caliban's scheme. "I had forgot that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates / Against my life. The minute of their plot / Is almost come." (4.1.139-142) The player-gods are dismissed and the dancers "*to a strange hollow and confused noise… heavily vanish*." This is the second "*confused noise*" in the play, the

[6] "As a boundary, the sea-shore is both properly 'sterile' and 'rocky-hard' to ensure the continued separation of fertile land and chaotic sea." (Gillies, "Shakespeare's Virginian Masque," 690.)

first having occurred during an even more violent unravelling of organisation during the opening shipwreck. In the immediate wake of the masque's disappearance, Prospero appears to be overcome with rage. "Never till this day / Saw I him touched with anger, so distempered", asserts Miranda (4.1.144-145).[7] The sorcerer notices the unease of the children, regains some of his composure, and then addresses himself to Ferdinand. The passage is among the most famous in English literature:

> You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
> As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful, sir;
> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air,
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vexed.
> Bear with my weakness, my old brain in troubled.

[7] A curious remark, since we have already seen Prospero beset with fury in his daughter's presence, near the beginning of the play when he tells her the history of their life before the island. It is possible that she is trying reassure Ferdinand.

Be not disturbed with my infirmity.

If you be pleased, retire into my cell,

And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk

To still my beating mind. (4.1.146-163)

The words are somehow at once radiant and filled with desolation. The passage also combines three distinct layers of thought. In the first place, it reflects the mind of Prospero, a specific character in the specific circumstances of the plot – and it seems to mark the defeat, implicitly, of some great ambition of his; the end of a struggle that had hitherto consumed him (hence the mixture of aching regret, weariness and relief). At the same time, it is a sweeping metaphysical statement about the transience and insubstantiality of order. In the end, all there will be is an undifferentiated nothingness: there is hence in some vital respect no real distinction between "this insubstantial pageant faded" and the "real" world of the island and Italy. One can see in this moment a rejection of a Platonic understanding of art, in which the latter is (by definition) a shadowy and unfixed realm that exists in contrast with an enduring plane of reality and truth. This seems to be just the contrast Prospero denies. There is nothing more real beneath "the baseless fabric of this vision." The sorcerer's obliterating claim – this is the third level on which the speech operates – then radiates out toward the audience to *The Tempest*, toward us, and the implication is that even the foundational distinction between the real spectators and the unreal world of the drama does not hold. We, too, are such stuff.[8] If Prospero is correct, then what

[8] Barton summarises the scene wonderfully: "From the beginning of the Elizabethan age itself, the actor had been associated with dreams and shadows, had been a symbol of that which is illusory and insubstantial. Here, in *The Tempest*, the condition of the actor and the man who watches his performance in the theatre have become identical, and the relationship of the audience with the play made strangely disturbing. Always before in Shakespeare, the play metaphor had served as a bridge between the audience and the domain of the stage. It guided that relationship of actors and audience upon which Elizabethan drama relied, reminding the latter that life contains elements of illusion,

begins as a seemingly stable nesting of three planes of reality (the audience in the theatre, the dramatic world of the play, and the play within the play, each less real than the last) collapses into confusion.

Even among Shakespeare's masterpieces, *The Tempest* can be described as an exceptionally evasive and manifold work. Anne Barton – a critic who saw this aspect of it very clearly – put the matter well when she observed the beguiling difficulty the play creates for those who try to interpret it:

> *The Tempest* is an extraordinarily obliging work of art. It will lend itself to almost any interpretation, any set of meanings imposed upon it: it will even make them shine. The danger of this flexibility, this capacity to illustrate arguments and systems of thought outside itself, is that it can lead critics to mistake what is really their own adaptation for the play. … As with one of the seminal myths of the classical world, all interpretation beyond a simple outline of the order of events, a list of the people taking part, runs the risk of being incremental. Criticism of this play is often illuminating in itself, as a structure of ideas, without shedding much light on its ostensible subject. It may falsely limit Shakespeare's achievement. Troubling, complex, exasperating, the original is infinitely greater and more suggestive than anything which can be made out of it.[9]

From one angle, this assessment is surely true. Even if one thought of it as a legible goal, there is

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that the two worlds are not as separate as might be supposed. Now, the barriers have been swept away altogether; the play metaphor, like the distinction upon which it was based, no longer exists. As Prospero's explanation reaches its end, the audience in the theatre seems to lose its identity. Life has been engulfed by illusion." (Barton, *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977, 203.)

[9] Barton, "Introduction," 22.

no hope of "solving" *The Tempest* (any more than one could hope to solve *Hamlet*). Such plays are catalytic agents that produce endless varieties of might and matter depending on what they're combined with.[10] Having said that, one of the ideas I want to put forward in this project is that there is a fruitful approach to *The Tempest* that involves thinking of the indeterminacy Barton describes not just as some ultimate fact about the play – a feature which condemns any interpreter to failure in an absolute sense, although I think this is also true – but rather as also being expressive of a type of psychological or existential problem the play is occupied with. To reframe her account slightly, what seems to undergird *The Tempest* as much as anything else is a profound resistance to integration – to the organisation of its parts into a stable and comprehensible whole. And so one might ask: in what type of situation or for what type of person could an issue such as this become more than just an intellectual puzzle? What type of sorrow or need might it convey? This is what the idea of a crisis of integration is meant to bring out.

Before taking up *The Tempest* properly in Chapter 1, the rest of this introduction will be given over (at some length, I should add) to groundwork for the ensuing discussion. In the next section, I will lay out a theory of mind largely based on the work of the psychoanalytic thinker Hans Loewald that helps us to conceptualise – with the help of vignette from Marilynne

[10] Stephen Orgel makes a similar point in a discussion of the conceptual difficulties involved in applying a psychoanalytic framework to Shakespeare, difficulties which essentially boil down to the ever-present temptation to regard the text as a fixed object waiting to be unraveled by the critic. "To take the psychoanalytic paradigm seriously… and treat the plays as case histories, is surely to treat them *not* as objective events but as collaborative fantasies, and to acknowledge thereby that we, as analysts, are implicated in the fantasy." (Orgel, "Prospero's Wife," *Representations*, 8, 1984: 2.) To put it in more general terms, any "object" of criticism is invariably a partnership, inasmuch as it shapeshifts depending on the various personal and cultural frames the critic brings to bear on it. As Orgel observes, the notion of a genuinely stable critical object is even more treacherous with regard to Shakespeare both because of the editorial – and hence unavoidably interpretative – issues involved in the transmission of the texts and because the texts themselves are designed to be performed, hence there is already "space" written into them for the transforming influence of other imaginations. ("Prospero's Wife," 3-4.) In a longer version of this project, these are issues that would bear exploring at much more depth.

Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* – how a disordered relationship between the inner and outer world is possible. In the third section, I will examine how a problem of this form is dramatized in *Hamlet*. In the fourth, I will outline the chapters to come.

2

There is a brief passage in Robinson's *Housekeeping* that illustrates the type of problem I have in mind. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator – a woman named Ruth – recounts the history of her family in the years before she was born. Her maternal grandparents had made their home in a remote town in Idaho called Fingerbone, which sits on the edge of an enormous natural lake. They had three daughters there and Ruth's grandfather made his living working at a railroad company. One night, when his daughters were still very young, the train he was riding slipped its rails on the long bridge crossing the lake and disappeared into the water. It was never recovered. In the aftermath, the townspeople speculated that the machine's momentum had perhaps carried it into a deeper part of the basin, where it could not then be located. In any case it was lost, and Ruth's grandfather vanished with it.

In the wake of this catastrophe, the narrator describes the uncanny feeling of peace that settled on the remaining family members:

> That event had troubled the very medium of their lives. Time and air and sunlight bore wave and wave of shock, until all the shock was spent, and time and space and light grew still again and nothing seemed to tremble, and nothing seemed to lean. The disaster had fallen out of sight, like the train itself, and if the calm that followed it was not greater

> than the calm that came before it, it had seemed so. And the dear ordinary had healed as seamlessly as an image on water.[11]

On a basic level, this passage presents a movement made up of three stages. In the first stage, which we can know through inference, the family's life is ordinary and settled. In the second, their existence is deranged by the trauma of the accident. In the third and final stage, the feeling of normality and order resumes – or it seems to. From one angle, the movement thus has the appearance of a cycle: A and then B, then back again to A. But the truth (as Robinson's repeated use of the word "seemed" suggests) is that the first and last of these stages are not in fact identical. So it would be more accurate to say that we move from A to B to A*; a concluding state that resembles A, and might easily be mistaken for it, but which is distinct. The cycle is not authentic, although for the characters caught up in it the dominant sensation is that of a restoration or return to an earlier condition.

The other eye-catching feature of Robinson's account is the way in which the pain of the disturbance is characterized. By the letter of the text, it is not the surviving wife and children who suffer but the "medium of their lives" – time and space and light. Reality warps and recoils around them. Or we might say: it is as though the experience of grief, here, somehow spills out beyond the ordinary limits of subjectivity. The "inner" and the "outer" become confused. After the initial waves of shock have subsided, it is the external world (rather than the minds of the bereaved) that is said to grow still again. The medium of living heals, not the people.

[11] Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), 15.

Is this all just a manner of speaking? It does not need to be interpreted that way. A more fruitful alternative, I think, is to see a particular idea about the relationship between self and reality evinced in this passage.[12] What Robinson is describing is a situation in which something has come to interfere with the basic organising categories of experience. For the subjects affected, the disruption of time and space is not exactly a change *within* experience, but more like a partial unravelling of its preconditions.[13] Hence its chief effect is to undermine what seems to be the central property of subjectivity; namely, the presence of a self (an interior) marked off from, and defined against, an external world. By the same token, the notion of objective reality as something "out there" and distinct from the self becomes unstable in such circumstances. This is what it means to say that the medium of living is troubled by what has befallen it, rather than the trouble merely taking place within its boundaries.

Psychoanalytic theory offers us one way of elaborating on the type of psychological event Robinson describes here – and this explanation has the virtue of making it easier to understand what the idea of a fallible medium of living might involve. Reaching that point, however, will first require a brief excursion through a set of Freudian concepts before we can come back to *Housekeeping* (and thereafter move back toward Shakespeare). What is at issue is a picture of how inner life first takes shape, and hence how the psychological contrast between "inside" and "outside" that becomes so unsettled in Robinson's description can be thought of as being, in a certain sense, contingent.

[12] Unless otherwise noted, "reality" in what follows should be understood as synonymous with "the external world."
[13] The most famous philosophical treatment of the idea of space and time as "preconditions" of experience is of course Kant's. His contention – far stronger than mine needs to be here – is that space and time are *nothing but* the form of our apprehension of the world; i.e. that they have no existence independent of our minds. Whatever the truth of this, his arguments are clearly helpful for understanding the notion of conditions of experience that are themselves prior to experience. For an elucidation of Kant's view, see Sebastian Gardner's discussion in *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Routledge, 1999), 65-85.

In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud famously argued that the self, or ego, ought to be understood as a developmental achievement.[14] Beginning from the inferential claim that a newborn infant cannot yet distinguish between self and outer world, Freud posits that in a state of primary narcissism (i.e. the condition of the newborn) "self" and "world" form a kind of inchoate whole, one which only then becomes gradually differentiated as the child's mind develops. Over time, and in response to stimuli coming from a reality it cannot initially grasp, "the ego detaches itself from the external world," he writes. "Or, to put it more correctly, originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an external world from itself."[15] As Hans Loewald observes in his interpretation of this argument, what follows from this claim – in spite of Freud's own choice of words – is that prior to the process of differentiation it doesn't really make sense to think of the ego as existing at all within the child, since there is nothing else (i.e. a world) against which it can be defined. In other words, there can be no real subject until there is an object, or a true inside until there is an outside:

> [The] psychological constitution of ego and outer world go hand in hand. Nothing can be an object, something that stands against something else, as long as everything is contained in the unitary feeling of the primary, unlimited narcissism of the newborn, where mouth and mother's breast are still one and the same. On the other hand, we

[14] "Self" and "ego" are not true synonyms, of course, although for the purposes of this argument they can be treated as though they were. A key difference is that it is possible to use "ego" to refer to both the psyche as a whole or – according to its narrower psychoanalytic usage – a component part within the psyche. To some extent, I slide between these two meanings in what follows, although not, I believe, in a way that creates any real obscurity.
[15] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXI (1927-1931)*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), 68.

> cannot, in the strict sense, speak of an ego, a mediator between an id and an external world, where there is as yet nothing to mediate.[16]

We do not need to travel very far into the nuances of Loewald's argument (or of psychoanalytic theory in general) to see that this understanding of the origins of the subject-object relationship entails an important transformation of Freud's concept of the ego. In traditional Freudian theory, the ego is more often than not framed as a "frontier-creature"; an entity that mediates between the various pressures towards instinctual gratification that emanate from within the subject and the constraints imposed upon them by the external world.[17] Roughly put, it is the ego that serves as a mechanism to manage the fact that desire in its most elemental form is not sensitive to reality. Crucially, this conception implies a fundamentally antagonistic relationship between the ego and its counterpart, the outside world, which is represented here as an innately hostile force that will destroy the subject if it is not correctly adjusted to. In Freud's writings, this view is reflected in the necessity of the transition from the *pleasure principle* to the *reality principle* as the governing law of the mind.[18]

But if (psychologically speaking) reality in the sense of an external world comes into being alongside the formation of the ego, then this suggests that such world-resistant defensive

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[16] Hans Loewald, "Ego and Reality" in *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown: University Publishing Group, 2000), 5.
[17] Freud, *The Ego and the Id* in *S.E., Vol. XIX (1923-1925)*,1964, 56.
[18] See, for example: Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" in *S.E., Vol. XII (1911-1913)*, 1958, pp 218-226. I should note at this point that although Freud favoured the view of the ego just given, he never offered a final and consistent account of the ego and its relationship to reality in his work. Rather – as Loewald observes – there is evidence of two divergent ideas of reality which were never quite synthetized by Freud, one in which reality is a fundamentally external power and one in which it is "contained" at first inside the proto-ego of the child. "[But] without doubt the former concept of reality as an essentially hostile (paternal) power… remained the predominant one for him." (Loewald, "Ego and Reality," 8.) The starting point of Loewald's corpus is the effort to bring these two conceptions into harmony. For an overview of this project and its relationship to Freud, see Jonathan Lear's introduction to *The Essential Loewald*, especially x-xvi.

activities are at best only one part of the ego's function – and not the most important part. Beneath its role as a shield, argues Loewald, the ego is also that which *maintains reality*. As Freud claims, within the mind there is originally no distinction between self and world. But this starting point means that the right way to think about their subsequent emergence is not as the coming together of two separate realms, but rather as the gradual differentiation of two parts within a unity. The occasion of this differentiation is the first moment at which it makes sense to speak of a psychological *structure* in place inside the mind, albeit in its most primitive form. The ego – according to Loewald – is the entity responsible for maintaining and enhancing this structure over the course of our existence. As our minds develop, we gain an ever more sophisticated grasp of the difference between what is "in here" and "out there". But this separation is at the same time a connection, in the sense that it is literally how the outer world becomes real for us, and is thus the very basis of our integration and successful interaction with that world. For this reason, instead of thinking of the ego as an entity that primarily serves as a kind of filter and buffering mechanism against a menacing reality, it is better to see it as that which organises the mind in such a way as to maintain (in an ever more complex and refined fashion) our unity with the world.[19]

[19] To put it slightly differently, the idea is that selfhood is the most primitive way in which our bond with the world is articulated or given form. We can also see how, according to this sort of view, it would be misleading to characterise the primary operation of the ego as one of *adaptation* to reality. Even if the ego really does perform all of the adaptive tasks that traditional Freudianism assigned to it – and let's suppose for the sake of argument that it does – the very idea of adaptation supposes the existence of both a subject who adapts and a "something else" to which they are adapting. Loewald's point is that any adaptive function of the ego is for this reason premised on a more basic psychic operation: namely, the identification of that-which-must-be-adapted-to. Hence the first function of the ego is not to adjust to reality but rather to supply the very idea of reality. But again, this phrasing could be misleading insofar as it implies that there is (within the mind) such a thing as the ego prior to an idea of reality. For Loewald, the originary psychic achievement is the simultaneous emergence of these two poles, each of which entails the other: "The infant's repeated experience that something [paradigmatically the mother's breast], in his original feeling a part of him, is not always available, this repeated experience of separateness leads to the development of an ego which has to organize, mediate, unify." ("Ego and Reality," 5.)

It follows from this point of view that the cardinal danger the mind confronts is not that of being invaded and overwhelmed by reality, where the relevant metaphor would be something like the rupturing of a barrier, but rather a catastrophic loss of organisation, where the right metaphor is more that of a composite form dissolving. As Loewald puts it: "What the ego defends itself, or the psychic apparatus, against is not reality but the loss of reality, that is, the loss of… integration with the world".[20] The underlying principle is that, within the mind, the presence of external reality is the first index of psychological structure. But as we've seen, this structure is not a given. If it were to come under sufficient pressure for some reason, it is therefore conceivable that it could fail. In the most theoretically extreme case, the constitutive boundary between self and outer world would be lost entirely, and the mind would regress back to its earliest, undifferentiated state of being. Short of such a collapse, however, the distinction between the subjective and objective realms might nonetheless blur in a time of crisis. The passage from *Housekeeping* gives us one way of imagining what this might be like.

The sequence A–B–A* in Robinson's passage can now be understood in a more sophisticated fashion. By these lights, the motion away from the solidity of ordinary life to the trembling, leaning world and then back again is a description of a wavering between different levels of psychic organisation. Reality in the sense of a fixed contrast between subject and object is sabotaged, and then it returns. Or does it? At least within *Housekeeping*, it quickly becomes clear that the "disappearance" of the disaster from the family's life does not at all mean that its disintegrating effects have ceased. Rather, the pain of the loss is transformed into something more obscure; a concealed wound that continues to fester inside their thoughts. Years later, it leads to the dispersal of the family and the eventual suicide of Ruth's mother. The underlying

[20] Loewald, "Ego and Reality," 12.

message in this case – it seems – is that whatever "came back" when the world reasserted itself was not the same kind of life that had existed beforehand. From our point of view, this difference can be given a sort of formulaic expression: A and A* are not the same. But what is it exactly that's being expressed here?

To reiterate, Loewald's contention is that instead of there being two distinct entities in human psychological life (self and reality) that somehow fuse with one another, there is only a single fundamental relationship (self-and-reality) which takes on various forms. The idea of external reality thereby acquires an inextricably subjective component – it is a kind of mental product, ergo it presupposes a subject whose product it is. Among other things, this marks an important break from Freud, who in his theory of mind typically framed reality as a brute given, something the subject confronts or withdraws from rather than, in any authentic sense, composes.[21] If we accept Loewald's adjustment to this view, then it allows us to understand a number of things that pertain to the question about A and A* posed above. In the first place, it shows us how the character of reality itself might change. Because there is no such thing – psychologically speaking – as external reality absent the synthesising activity of the ego, it stands to reason that any meaningful disruption or change to that activity would be capable of producing a corresponding alteration in the subject's general experience of the world. Conversely, if the character of reality fluctuates, then this necessarily attests to a profound shift in the inner state of the subject. Nothing of this order happens *only* to the inner or the outer realm, in other words, but always reflects some conjoined change in both.

[21] He thus lacked the conceptual resources to think of the character of reality as something that could change. See Lear's discussion in *The Essential Loewald*, xiv-xvi.

A and B and A* can thus be said to denote three different modes of reality – or three different variations of the world – where this is understood to encompass an inner condition as well as an external environment of a certain general character. The contrast between A and B is relatively easy to explain. The former stands for the "ordinary" world, solid and discrete, and it corresponds to the normal functioning of a developed mind as Loewald describes it. Position B, on the other hand, is a world in the midst of disintegration, corresponding to a state of mind in which the organising functions of the ego have (in this case temporarily) regressed. It is closer to what Loewald describes as a "magical" level of integration, where the separation between interior and exterior events cannot be clearly drawn by the subject.[22]

But what of A and A*? Here the distinction is less obvious. Superficially, in each of these two positions the external world appears to be the same in the sense that it displays the characteristic stability and givenness of what Robinson calls "the dear ordinary". Nonetheless, the world is not the same. In schematic terms, we can see straightaway that what distinguishes the subject at A* is that, unlike the subject at A, they have travelled from A to B to the point where they now find themselves. They have hence experienced the world as *perishable* in the sense that they have lived through the "loss" of external reality as a clearly demarcated zone. More evocatively, in their journey from A to A* the subject has been given the revelation – the direct or first-hand revelation – that reality cannot be trusted not to collapse (and this is one way of thinking about the nature of trauma, in the broad sense of that term).[23]

[22] Loewald, "Ego and Reality," 18-20.

[23] As opposed to the more specific meaning that is sometimes given to it in literary and psychoanalytic studies, in which *trauma* refers to a type of injurious psychological event that can only be experienced indirectly or belatedly by its victim. (See: Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996.) Although much of what I will discuss in this dissertation falls under the umbrella of trauma in the more capacious sense, these epistemological issues are not my concern. More generally, I try to use the term sparingly so as to avoid the raft of competing meanings and theories attached to it, which I think make it harder rather than easier to home in on what I am trying to describe.

The question, then, is about what sort of condition this experience produces. I want to say that it produces a *world of appearance*, a phrase which requires some explanation. The first thing to reflect on, in this regard, is the nature of the phenomenal change described in *Housekeeping*. What is it that's so extraordinary about what seems to happen to the world, there? The relatively simple answer is that there is a fluidity perceived where a fluidity is not expected. The tremor in the world's structure is bizarre precisely because it represents an inconstancy which in some sense violates the ordinary contours of experience. But this thought thus implies that our experience – when it does *not* take this warped form – characteristically involves some deep perception of constancy. In order to draw this implication out, we might compare it to an argument made by Kant, who maintained that the very idea of inner mental life is unintelligible absent the supposition of an objective order that stands in contrast to it, and that in turn any such order compels a certain idea of absolute permanence and stability. Subjectivity, that is, contains the notion of an absolutely abiding framework within which objects exist independent of our experience of them.[24] In my view – albeit this is not the place to delve into Kant exegesis – something like this is what accounts for the uncanniness of Robinson's scene. What is subverted or attacked in the characters' experience is the apprehension of the world in its capacity as a necessarily stable background: not something that can be directly altered or acted upon, but rather the precondition for any action or alteration whatsoever; that-against-which change is

[24] This is not a claim by Kant about how the world is or might be in itself, but rather about what has to be the case for creatures such as us in order to make a domain of objects thinkable (cf. Gardner, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*, 173-179). Strictly speaking, the spatio-temporal framework within which our experience takes place is what must be conceived of as absolutely permanent on this account. But since the framework itself is not a possible object of perception – one cannot perceive "pure" spatial permanence, for example – material reality in general is what "plays the role" of the unchanging substratum against which change is perceived. "[What] represents this permanence for us in experience is not any one absolutely permanent thing, but rather those merely relatively permanent objects of perception which, in their relations to each other, yield the one enduring framework." (P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, London: Methuen & Co., 1966, 130-131. For Strawson's full discussion of this argument, which differs somewhat from Gardner's, see: 47-132.)

perceived rather than being subject to change itself. The world in this aspect is a vision of permanence. At what Loewald calls the objective level of integration – where the border between self and reality is settled – this background constancy is a defining part of its character.

But, of course, this appearance of stability and permanence is just what the subject at A* has experienced the failure of. To cast the argument once again in loosely Kantian terms, where subjective experience is no longer fixed in its normal mode, the apprehension (within experience) of a permanent background order is no longer a given. This breakdown is what position B exemplifies. What distinguishes A*, on the other hand, is that while the appearance of the world's constancy has returned to the subject, their stance towards it has altered. The "normal" experiential character of reality now comes before them as in some way wrong or deceptive. It looks the same, but it is understood to be different. Indeed, a deeper way of expressing the difference between A and A* would be to say that it is only in the latter position that the world's appearance of perdurability is registered by the subject *as* an appearance – that is, as a semblance. Ordinary reality, from this perspective, is that which gives the impression of a fixed and changeless background order and yet which is apprehended by the perceiver as false. This is not a transformation that is limited to any particular part or parts of the world. The entirety takes on this new aspect, and this is the basic rationale for the term *world of appearance*.

Note that what this term comprises is not a metaphysical truth claim (although for a subject of a certain kind of religious or philosophical bent, the experience it refers to might form the basis of one). What it aims to describe is an existential position, one that is chiefly defined by a pervasive misgiving in the face of reality. For the subject at A*, the world becomes the object of a kind of involuntary scepticism. It is internal to the idea of an appearance – in this sense of the word – that appearances contain the possibility of *betrayal*. There is always the inherent risk

that they will produce false, even catastrophic, beliefs if they are not treated with sufficient caution. As such, to say that the subject occupies a world with the general character of a semblance is to say that they occupy a world that is felt by them to be fundamentally volatile and untrustworthy.

Another, more subtle dimension to the change is this: in virtue of ordinary reality taking on the aspect of an appearance, the subject also receives the impression that there is something beneath or beyond the phenomenal world. Appearance implies essence. Ergo, part of what it is to confront a world of semblance is to be given the sense of a hidden substratum behind the outward façade, a latent possibility of otherness in the world's manifest order. What is this substratum? The subject need not have any determinate idea about it. By the lights of Loewald and Freud, what they have acquired in the passage from A to A* is indeed an intimation – or perhaps it would be better to say a reminder – of something "beneath" ordinary reality; namely, the more fluid and primitive conditions of mind that preceded developed consciousness. But again, one could easily imagine the same phenomenon being interpreted in a religious fashion, for example. (Or in a nihilistic one: where all that lies beneath the world's surface is void and chaos.) What matters for us at the moment, in any case, is not how a subject understands this zone exactly or what meaning they might attach to it, but simply that they have come to perceive that it exists – the "alterity" which stands in contrast to the world of appearance, making the latter what it is. To put it slightly differently: they live with an apprehension of the hidden.

The above is, of necessity, a highly intellectualised account of what in practice is likely to be experienced on a very different level: as an inarticulate dread or anxiety, or some other form of visceral disquiet. *World of appearance* is a stylised way of trying to capture a particular kind of human trouble. The trouble itself is perhaps impossible for the subject to engage with directly,

however; or at least it is extremely liable to be displaced or concealed behind ostensibly more tangible concerns. This is a function, in a sense, of its all-encompassing quality. By now, the distinction we began with – between the content of experience and its preconditions – has allowed us to conceive of two different categories of problem that might arise in human life. The first is what we could call the mundane variety (although this is not to pass judgement on its potential severity). A problem of this sort occurs *within* the frame of experience. It concerns discrete objects and determinate situations; ends-driven projects. Only a part of the world is at issue. By comparison, the concept of a world of appearance indicates a problem of a completely different logical type. Here, it is as though the frame itself has become the trouble. Reality as a whole, rather than any discrete part, has altered in a manner that sets the subject profoundly at odds with it. Moreover, in a strange way, this change somehow calls their inclusion within reality into question. What I mean by this is that – at least on the face of it – the ordinary sense of being integrated with the world, of participation, is premised on our capacity to act. But this is precisely what becomes so opaque in this position. What it is to act in the face of an unbounded problem? This puzzle is one that will follow us throughout this dissertation. For now, the thing to make note of is simply that it is part of the nature of the second type of problem to bring the subject's feelings of attachment to world into their awareness, by disrupting them.[25]

It may be that there are multiple ways in which the world in general can become a problem for the subject, and so it may be that the world of appearance (a.k.a. A*) is only one

[25] There is an echo here of Heidegger's account of fundamental anxiety as a mood without an object, one which "separates" the individual from the world of particulars and places them in a relation to the world as a whole. This is not Heidegger's exact terminology, and the parallel is not a tight one. But still, the notion of a relation to a generality which is somehow also a detachment from the everyday world is very apposite to our discussion. It is perhaps not a coincidence, either, that an account beginning with Loewald's ideas would generate this Heideggerian resonance. Before taking up his medical training, Loewald was a student of the philosopher's. (Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill, trans. David Farrell Krell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 82-96. Loewald, "Preface" in *The Essential Loewald*, pp xlii-xliii.)

instance of a broader logical type (I think this is the case, in fact, as I will come to in the next section). Nevertheless, if we are thinking about psychic development along the lines of Loewald's theory, then it also seems clear that the sequence A-B-A* must refer to something like an innate, even constitutive, set of risks within the mind. Where B stands for the actual possibility of reality's disintegration, A* represents a situation in which the subject's cognizance of this possibility has acquired a kind of all-informing power over their existence. This statement can be taken in a fairly literal sense. Part of what the idea of the subject coming to occupy a certain type of world is meant to convey, in this context, is the idea that there is a certain type of *form* imposed upon their life. Indeed, this is what the features listed above (the mistrustfulness, the intimations of alterity, the puzzle about action) are together intended to represent. It is not that such a form straightforwardly dictates the subject's behaviour – there are different ways to respond to a feeling of uncertainty, for example – but it does apply a template of sorts, an encompassing shape within which that behaviour is conducted. With respect to A*, underneath the qualities already listed there lies an exceptionally powerful species of fear. This fear is the last essential component of the world of appearance, and explaining it requires another turn towards Loewald's theory of mind.

For reasons that may be obvious from what I've said so far, there is a deep ambivalence in Loewald's theory attached to the idea of psychic unity. Freud himself hypothesised that the infant's departure from primary narcissism gives rise to a lifelong impulse – unfulfillable in itself – toward recapturing this lost wholeness, and Loewald essentially affirms this idea.[26] As he sees

[26] Freud: "The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state." ("On Narcissism: An Introduction" in *S.E., Vol. XIV (1914-1916)*,1964, 99.) In the terms of orthodox psychoanalysis, this impulse towards re-union shows up most clearly in the mother's role as the initial and most powerful focus of the child's erotic life, the so-called "primary love object". Likewise, the same basic impetus subsequently underlies one side of the Oedipal conflict between the child's libidinal attachments and the "paternal" demands of socialisation, and thereafter contributes to the formation of the superego. All of these

it, this striving is what supplies the basic motive force for the ego's synthesising activity. The development of the ego is the solution, as it were, to the conflict between the mind's primal urge toward wholeness and the sheer fact of separation. The inevitable loss of the initial psychic identity between the child and their environment creates a lack which is then satisfied, albeit never perfectly, by the establishment of a progressively more durable and sophisticated psychological structure that preserves unity at the "price" of incorporating more and more differentiation. At the same time, however, the emergence of this structure attaches a new and countervailing layer of meaning to the notion of undifferentiated oneness. For to succeed in attaining this state would now spell a kind of psychic death for the individual. Without some extant border between self and world, there is no subject whatsoever, and this means that the prospect of sliding back into the original "unstructured nothingness" of primary narcissism also represents a terrifying threat to the psyche. Ironically – or perversely – the same sundered unity that generates the ego's core impulse is also "the source of the deepest dread" thereafter.[27] It is the dread of engulfment and dissolution; of self-loss in the most literal sense.

Put together, this model is Loewald's variant on the idea that the ego is an entity that exists in perpetual tension (although it is a productive tension, in his view). Qua organising presence, it maintains itself in a never wholly secure balance between immersion and separation – that is, between engagement with the object-world and the preservation of a certain necessary distance from the same.[28] The logical terminus at each end of this spectrum, in the event of some

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moments can be seen as different stages in the psyche's increasingly complex (as it itself becomes more complex) management of the tension created by the loss of primary narcissism. Loewald discusses how his views modify the traditional notion of the Oedipus complex in "Ego and Reality," 11-16, and at greater length in "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex" in *The Essential Loewald*, 384-404.

[27] Loewald, "Ego and Reality," 16-17.

[28] The emphasis that Loewald placed on this opposition in his work more broadly was immense. "The deepest root of the ambivalence that appears to pervade all relationships, external as well as internal, seems to be the polarity inherent in individual existence of individuation and 'primary narcissistic' union – a polarity Freud attempted to

radical imbalance, is the loss of reality. Reality is lost if the subject is cut off from the outer world altogether (one might think here of certain extremities of psychosis, in which the subject retreats into an entirely hallucinatory realm). Reality is also lost if the barrier between self and world dissolves. The fluidity, or perishability, of the object-world that the subject who moves from B to A* experiences is so frightening precisely because it activates this latter sense of peril. This is one of the primary reasons that the world of appearance comes before the subject as a *problem* and not just an arrangement, as a source of enveloping unhappiness or angst or rage, as something which must be tarried with and which never exists neutrally. In a very real sense, it is a world composed by the terror of self-loss.

But at this point an overview of the argument so far – and a comment about its larger purpose – is in order. The original rationale for turning to Loewald's reading of Freud was to find a way to explain the passage from *Housekeeping* with which we began. The question was this: if we assume that Robinson is depicting a real possibility of experience, what is it that's being shown there? The answer that Loewald's ideas allow us to give is that it is the representation of a slippage in the essential, formative bond between self and world. In due course, we have come to a type of predicament that this theory likewise helps us to represent, one in which the subject is reoriented towards the world in such a way as to fundamentally shake

conceptualize by various approaches but that he recognized and insisted upon from beginning to end by his dualistic conception of instincts, of human nature, of life itself." ("Internalization, Separation, Mourning, and the Superego" in *The Essential Loewald*, 264.) I note in passing that in his excellent book *Shakespeare's Development and the Problem Comedies,* Richard Wheeler offers a reading of Shakespeare's tragedies from *Hamlet* onwards which sorts the plays – along with *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* – into two groups that map directly onto this Freudian polarity. "The fear of and the longing for merger with another provide the primary driving force in the plays of one of these groups [*Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Antony and Cleopatra,* and *The Winter's Tale*]. In the other, a comparably ambivalent relationship to the prospect of omnipotent authority provides the psychic context in which the protagonists seek self-definition [*Troilus and Cressida, Macbeth, Timon of Athens, Coriolanus* and *The Tempest*]." (Wheeler, *Shakespeare's Development*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1981, 201 – more generally, see: 200-221.)

their feeling of kinship with it. This is an example of the type of "formal" dissonance between individual and world that I described at the outset of this chapter.

3

What does this have to do with Shakespeare? There is both a quite abstract and a more specific way of answering this question. Although Loewald's theory begins as a re-examination of the Freudian ego, its deeper import is that it rearranges the idea of the external world. It would therefore be a mistake to think of his account as merely "psychological," if what this means to describe is a theory which is only concerned with the nature of inner life. Instead, what Loewald offers is a psychoanalytically-informed perspective on a fundamental question of philosophy – namely, the nature of the connection between inner life and outer world. It is no great insight to say that this is also a question which appears throughout Shakespearean drama. Lear's crazed rumination on the unadorned relationship between human life and nature ("Is man no more than this?", 3.4.102-103) is perhaps the most famous example.[29] But all of the great tragedies could be said to tarry with the subject, insofar as they are all plays concerned with madness; that is, the fraying of the bond between inside and out.

That all of this represents a connection between Shakespeare and Loewald is true enough as far as it goes, but it still leaves the argument at a high altitude. The more specific meeting place between them concerns the kind of existential displacement outlined at the beginning. As I've tried to show, Loewald's reconceptualization of the outer world as something which is

[29] This line reference is to the Folio text of *King Lear* in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (eds. Orgel and Braunmuller).

(psychologically speaking) an achievement, and which therefore does not admit to an immutable character, allows us to conceive of situations – such as the world of appearance – in which reality takes on a kind of antagonistic form for the subject. The individual's involvement with the world in these cases, although it is not ruptured altogether, becomes somehow deeply problematic or hollowed out in their experience. It seems to me that Shakespeare, in certain parts of his work, was profoundly interested in circumstances where a person could be said to be *in* but not *of* the world in this deleterious way; that is, conditions in which a crisis of integration is felt. Before returning to *The Tempest*, I want to show how the same type of difficulty makes itself known in a more tragic register in *Hamlet*.

As noted, the story of *Housekeeping* is narrated in retrospect, by a character who was only a child when her mother died. Ruth's description of the catastrophe which was visited upon her mother's family when the train disappeared might, for that reason, be understood as one which privileges the experience of the three young children – for it is their experience that comes closest to Ruth's own. This would mean that the trembling world is perhaps essentially a portrait of the disaster as it was felt inside the minds of subjects not wholly formed, who were therefore especially vulnerable to the shock. The narrator does not tell us if her own world shook and went fluid after her mother's suicide, but in effect it appears that she – and her sister, Lucille – were given the same ruinous lesson as their elders years previously. Before the girls were equipped to resist it, the idea of reality as a fundamentally treacherous and uncertain realm takes hold of their lives. Later in the book, Ruth describes the chronic wakefulness that was thereafter the defining mood of their childhood:

> We had spent our lives watching and listening with the constant sharp attention of children lost in the dark. It seemed that we were bewilderingly lost in a landscape that, with any light at all, would be wholly familiar. What to make of sounds and shapes, and where to put our feet. So little fell upon our senses, and all of that was suspect.[30]

In my own terminology, this is a description of the world of appearance. Now compare it to the words of another bereaved child, this time in the first soliloquy of *Hamlet*:

> O that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
> Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
> Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
> His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God,
> How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
> Fie on 't, ah fie, 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely. That it should come to this,
> But two months dead, nay, not so much, not two.
> So excellent a king, that was to this
> Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven

[30] Robinson, *Housekeeping*, 131-132.

Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and Earth,

Must I remember? (1.2.129-143)

How alike are these two situations? On the face of it, the answer would seem to be that they are not very close at all. Even if we were to set aside the sheer historical distance separating an American novel set in the middle of the twentieth century from a play written in England at the turn of the seventeenth, the affliction that Hamlet describes is manifestly distinct from that of the two girls. In the first place – and most obviously – he is a mature subject, not one whose mind is still growing. The dominant mood in his speech is not uncertainty or fearfulness, but a mixture of disgust, rage and despair. The reasons for his misery are likewise different. His father has not killed himself but died (as far as the prince knows) of a snakebite, and moreover the sorrow of this loss is not the only thing which consumes him. He is revolted by his mother's remarriage to his uncle. Lastly, for all of the anguish that Hamlet displays both here and throughout the story, he never once reports experiencing the kind of disintegration of reality that Robinson describes.

And yet – in other respects there is perhaps more of an affinity between the two scenarios than there might appear. To begin with, if we are taking Hamlet at his word, we are told almost straightaway that his unhappiness is not confined to the two specific events which have blighted his life in Elsinore. It extends to the entire world, which now appears before him as fundamentally worthless and corrupt. This is the first and most basic point of contact between the prince and the kind of trouble we have been discussing: the object of his distress is the whole of reality, not simply one of its parts. Moreover, it is evident from the context of Hamlet's

unhappiness that this is not always how the world has appeared to him.[31] The point comes out even more explicitly in his first exchange with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern:

> I have of late – but wherefore I know not – lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof, fretted with golden fire – why, it appeareth nothing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable; in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god: the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? (2.2.265-278)

The bare logic of this passage is as follows: a terrible change within the prince has altered his experience of the world in its totality. Everything – the earth, its covering, and (given what he has to say about its "paragon" animal) all life within it – has become valueless to him. At the same time, written into his words is an admission that this is not the only way in which the world might appear. Hence the strange double-description which he offers to his companions. Everything that is called worthless by the prince is also represented as worthy or even wonderful, only not to him. This is the second point of contact between *Hamlet* and the argument we have been pursuing. As Hamlet frames it, the world in which he now lives is not the same world as

[31] For a discussion of Hamlet as he might have been had Claudius's plot not intervened, see: Richard Strier, "Happy Hamlet" in *Positive Emotions in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, eds. Cora Fox, Bradley J. Irish, and Cassie Miura (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), forthcoming.

that of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and nor is it the world of his former self. Here we find the stamp of the idea that the character of reality can change.

To return to the earlier soliloquy, the third point of contact is the reappearance of the practical distinction between a *mundane* and a *global* problem. Hamlet's opposition – not to any particular state of affairs in the world (or not only to those) but rather to the world as a whole – creates the same puzzle of action as described earlier. One way of putting it, in this case, would be to say that the prince's sense of loss is so all-consuming that the only thing which would count as a significant deed to his mind is one that corrected it. But there is nothing that can correct it, or so he feels, meaning that although in the literal sense he retains the ability to act, it is all within a horizon in which nothing can be done to any true purpose. His father cannot be summoned back to life, and even if something were to happen to spoil Gertrude's marriage to Claudius – even if Hamlet himself were able to find a way of sabotaging it – there is a sense in which this, too, would not alter his predicament. Inasmuch as what distresses the prince is the mere fact that his mother was capable of making such a choice in the first place, then the damage is as irreversible as death. From that perspective, what Hamlet wants is not for something to be corrected, but for something not to have happened; an impossibility. Whence, at the most profound level, the overwhelming feeling of helplessness that accompanies him. ("It is not nor it cannot come to good. / But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue"; 1.2.158-159.)

The problem that Hamlet is submerged in and which *Hamlet* dramatizes is not identical to the world of appearance. Nonetheless, even from this quite basic outline, we can begin to see how the play is absorbed with a logic of suffering that belongs to the same family. The fourth feature shared by the prince's situation is that the crisis which has seized him has a tripartite structure which parallels the sequence A-B-A*. There was first of all the "normal" world of

experience (A; the world before Old Hamlet's death), then there was the acute crisis that sabotaged that world (B; the death of Old Hamlet, Gertrude's remarriage); and finally there is the ascension of a second world, a new norm, in which the crisis has taken on a chronic and all-pervading aspect (A*; Hamlet's condition at the start of the play). In this concluding state, the prince finds himself beset by the world in general – a situation which has the effect of "detaching" him from it.[32] What this sequential likeness reveals is that even though Hamlet does not seem to undergo a dissolution of reality in quite the manner that Ruth describes, if we were to think of A-B-A* in terms of a more general formula, then we will recognise that position B retains a common meaning in each case. What it stands for is the actualisation of something inherent to any prevailing mode of reality; namely, the possibility of its undoing. In a sense, therefore, what B represents is the very possibility of world-transition, the potential for de-organisation which the capacity for reorganisation assumes. In what follows, let us also think of A* in more general terms: not as referring exclusively to the world of appearance, but rather to the disjointed state which concludes this type of tripartite scheme. If B represents the possibility of undoing, then A* is the mode of order that follows the undoing.

This brings us to a fifth connection between *Hamlet* and the kind of trouble represented by the world of appearance – the relationship of the subject to the hidden. When I introduced this idea in the last section, I framed it in terms of the alterity which belongs to the concept of appearance; the "other zone" of truth or actuality against which semblance is defined as what it is. The hidden in this respect stands for whatever is felt to be concealed (in the mind of the

[32] The point may be obscured slightly because I have been using the term *world* somewhat loosely in this part of the argument. Although I've said (for example) that Hamlet occupies a different world compared to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, this is shorthand. Strictly speaking, the right thing to say is that he occupies a different *mode* of the world compared to them. In other words, it is the same world but with a different qualitative character. This is also what it means to say that Hamlet can be "detached" from reality (i.e. he can experience the world in general as having an antagonistic form) without thereby being literally removed from it or sent into a different world entirely.

subject) behind the phenomenal surface of the world. In truth, this is an understanding that has more of an application in *The Tempest* than it does in *Hamlet*, although even in the latter case the traces of its influence are not hard to identify. When Hamlet vacillates over the moral status of the Ghost (2.2.537-542), or contemplates the mystery of the hereafter (3.1.66-82), clearly a part of what is at issue is his sense of an unknown or unverifiable order behind the manifest reality he inhabits. However, there is a second understanding of the hidden that follows more directly from the general formula A-B-A*, and this is what I will consider here.

The essential point is that the position A is related to the position A* in a double sense. On the one hand – as we know – it functions as an origin of sorts, a prior state from which A* emerges after the crisis has struck. On the other hand, A also persists as a kind of informing presence within the world that succeeds it. This follows straightforwardly from the fact that A* is, in its fundaments, a state of privation. One can only understand oneself as "detached" from the world (or as turned against it, disillusioned by it, no longer at home within it, etc.) if one has a comparison available through which the loss is made intelligible. As well as being an origin point to A*, then, the world of A is what functions as this standard of measurement in the mind of the subject, and this is a noncontingent aspect of the transition between the two: there is no such thing as A* absent the enduring presence of A. The experience of the successor world cannot be separated from the idea of the preceding one in much the same way that – to pick an arbitrary example – the perception of a broken jug cannot be separated from the idea of an unbroken jug. To inhabit Hamlet's situation or the world of appearance, or another condition like these, is henceforth to be followed around by a conception of the world *as it was before* (although note, this is not to say that this conception is necessarily accurate, only that it is an

essential component of the subject's experience). We also see from this that A* by its nature involves a type of backwards-facing temporal dimension.

This point requires a little finesse. The old version of the world might live on inside the new in more than one way. For some subjects, it may function exclusively as an object of nostalgia. The present state of affairs would then be perceived as fundamentally deficient because it is no longer able to include what it once included – and the world as a whole is, as it were, felt and judged through this absence. But instead of this (or at the same time as it) the old world may also follow the subject around in the form of a warning. What was lost would then function as a sort of proof of the world's true nature; its essential foulness or untrustworthiness, perhaps. Hamlet's example appears to be a mixture of both of these variations. But in either case, the essential thing is that A* can only be experienced as what it is in relation to something which has been negated through its coming-to-be.

A more colloquial way of putting all of this would be to say that A* is a haunted state. While the world of A is not "real" or present or visible within the successor world in any tangible respect (and this is what it means to say that it is hidden) nor can it be subtracted from the subject's experience of that world. For them, reality as it was disappears, but does not perish. Indeed, one could say that the subject is de-integrated from the prevailing world precisely to the extent that this lost world continues to exert power over their mind. This in turn points us towards something else which is intrinsic to the world of appearance and to conditions like it; namely that – curiously – the very thing which causes the world to manifest as a whole in this troublesome form is the subject's ongoing experience of rupture. To occupy *this* type of world is, by definition, to be caught between an extant state of affairs and one which has vanished. Conversely, to "heal" the division between the world as it is and the lost world would be to no

longer suffer in the same way, i.e. it would be to occupy a different mode of reality altogether. A* is in that sense an irreducibly fractured condition. Consonance is its antithesis.

Hamlet's cry in the first soliloquy – "Must I remember?" – is an encapsulation of this. From one angle, it isn't too much of a revelation to say that the prince inhabits a haunted realm before he ever sets eyes on the Ghost. Even so, it is worth noting how Shakespeare takes the time to emphasise this point just before Hamlet gets word of the spirit:

HAMLET: My father – methinks I see my father.

HORATIO: Where my lord?

HAMLET: In my mind's eye, Horatio. (1.2.184-185)

What we are to make of this presentiment, however, obviously turns on what precisely we take hauntedness to mean. In the context of this argument, the enduring presence of A within A* provides us with a very general principle to work with. Hauntedness stands for some enduring failure of integration. A ghost is whatever lost thing prevents the world from being consonant in the mind of the subject. The precise metaphysical status of these entities may remain open to dispute (perhaps there are varieties). The point is simply to frame the issue in terms of structure rather than content – hauntedness means a division in the subject's experience of the world where previously there had been a sort of wholeness.

When the Ghost appears to Hamlet (it does not matter for present purposes whether it is authentically his father's spirit or not) it is as though the already fragmented quality of the prince's life suddenly becomes personified before him. Here, more literally, is the undying

influence of a vanished world. The message that the spirit delivers to him is framed in terms of the need to excise this phantom presence from the world. In explicit content the Ghost's words, it is in fact interestingly unclear what connection – if any – Hamlet's task of revenge is meant to have with the imprisonment that the spirit claims to be suffering. ("Doomed for a certain time to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away", [1.5.10-13]. Is Hamlet supposed to believe that the act of revenge is a part of this purgation? Are we? More on this in Chapter 3.) But the overall implication of the decree is clear enough. Until the wrongs of the past are compensated for, the phantom will remain attached to the world. Which is to say, in our terms, that the rupture between what-is and what-was will persist.

Putting things like this invites the question of how much of a difference the Ghost's intervention makes to Hamlet's underlying predicament. There are a number of ways to pursue this thought, but all of them tend to reduce the issue of whether achieving revenge has any true bearing on the species of misery the prince is absorbed in at the outset of the play. What I want to focus on, here, is a shift in orientation that the Ghost's command seems to presage for Hamlet, a switch between two very different comportments towards the world (and so two alternate ways of thinking about it). This difference is hinted at in the opposition between the mundane and global categories of trouble. Think of it this way: for a subject whose problem takes the form of a determinate practical task (even if it is not a task that can be completed by them, for some circumstantial reason) there is an important respect in which the world itself cannot be in doubt; meaning it is somehow not a proper object of questioning as a generality. Instead, the world functions as a field of action in which the subject either reaches or fails to reach their goal. The only relevant question that comes before them is something like: *what must I do, in order to*

bring about X? But it is evident that the same question is not available in the same manner to the person who finds themselves in a situation like A*. Here, there is no determinate end towards which the subject can be oriented. Instead, insofar as there is an apt or expressive question for their predicament, it must be one that is somehow directed towards the whole, whatever that entails exactly. It would be more of the form *why are things like this?* rather than *what must I do?* One of implications of this distinction is that the global class of problem functions – or can function – as the impetus to a style of thought which we might call philosophical, in virtue of this essential orientation towards the whole.

On the surface, the Ghost's command to Hamlet appears to have the straightforward effect of swapping one of these orientations for the other. From a condition of all-informing (and hence in a way objectless) misery, where his attention is forced towards the whole, the prince is suddenly confronted with what looks like a clearly delineated task – kill Claudius. But of course, as any reader of the play knows, the substitution of one for the other proves to be nothing like as clean. Indeed, *Hamlet* is in some ways a tragedy premised on the incompatibility between the practical and philosophical frames of reference. The job of taking revenge, considered philosophically, takes on an aspect of futility (what reason is there to think that killing Claudius would redeem the world?). On the other hand, the contemplation of the whole, seen from the perspective of the revenge mandate, looks like an otiose excuse for inaction. There is no need to be overly reductive about the reasons for Hamlet's indecisiveness over the course of the story, suffice to say that from the perspective outlined here part of the problem consists in a type of category error. The whole is what concerns the prince at the beginning, and so on one level it remains stubbornly unclear how any action *within* that whole can be adequate to his trouble thereafter.

The sixth point of contact between *Hamlet* and the world of appearance is one which goes slightly beyond the limits of our discussion so far. This is the sense in which the trouble evoked in is in some way fundamentally a problem of thought – meaning that thought itself becomes the principal danger to the subject. One way of approaching the issue would be this: if we accept the idea that A* is a haunted state in the manner I've described, then what is it that makes this condition perilous? Towards the end of the last section, I wrote that the world of appearance has an essentially fearful texture because it is formed out of the experience of a breakdown in the bond between self and world. The dread of self-loss is therefore internal to its character. It has already been observed, however, that this does not seem to be a particularly accurate description of what ails Hamlet at the start of *Hamlet*. If the prince is telling the truth, for example, that obedience to God is all that holds him back from suicide, then it is hardly self-preservation in the most obvious sense which occupies him. More to the point, he is obsessed with events that have already happened, not dreading those which might. So where is the common territory between the two situations, here?

Let us look again at the idea of self-loss. One of the features of Loewald's theory of mind – as we have seen – is that unity is represented there as a type of basic psychological need. At the very earliest moment of ego-development there is an ur-experience of separation, and this is the provenance of the fundamental sorting process that leads to the establishment of internality and externality, self-and-world; the foundation of individuated psychic existence.[33] This also to say, however, that the ego essentially exists as a way of responding to separation. Its "motive force," as Loewald puts it, is the urge towards union – and this force is what holds it together as a

[33] Cf. footnote 19, above.

structure and well as powering its internal developmental course.[34] To put it schematically, the successful ego is the one which meets the need for union sufficiently whilst also accommodating the fact of the world's otherness; in other words, it is the one which provides the subject with a baseline sense of integration with the world. Now, once again, part of the innate tension of minded life arises because it is impossible to ever satisfy the urge for wholeness perfectly. But all that matters for us here is the notion that ordinary psychological existence is premised, more or less, on the need being met adequately enough in the majority of circumstances.

In principle, there are two slightly different ways in which this system can go wrong. One of them is if the motive force of the ego were to suddenly dissipate or fail for some reason, where it would no longer be able to hold itself together, and thus no longer able to hold on to reality as a differentiated zone. This is the kind of crisis we saw depicted in *Housekeeping*. By contrast, the integrating system may also come under pressure if the urge towards union remains powerful, but for some reason cannot be adequately satisfied, in which case the strain on the mental apparatus would increase correspondingly. The difference between these two possibilities is essentially that of a total loss of tension as opposed to a drastic rise in tension (one assumes the latter may also lead to the former, in some eventualities). But in either case – for the person who feels themselves threatened by the first possibility as much as the one who finds themselves mired in the second – the matter of integration becomes deeply and viscerally fraught. The world is made into a problem, ergo the need for union becomes problematic; and this, ultimately, is what offers a general explanatory principle for the pain that such circumstances create.

[34] Loewald, "Ego and Reality," 17.

Returning again to Hamlet, there are a number of meanings (not necessarily incompatible ones) which might be read into his professed wish for suicide at the outset. But the most straightforward is simply that the prince wants to die so that he will no longer suffer. Alongside its other connotations, "Must I remember?" also functions as an expression of pain. This pain is not, however, only the sorrow of what he has lost. By the lights of what we have been exploring here, it is the pain of disunion, too. It might be true that Hamlet despises the world and sees no value in belonging to it. But the absence of any feeling of kinship with his surroundings does not remove the need for it. This is the dilemma. And its effect on the prince is much the same as if any other basic need was being starved: he suffers intensely. This can also be read as the source, I think, of the profound ambivalence – if not the clear antipathy – that runs through the play with regards to the very phenomenon of thought. Strictly speaking, the desire conveyed by Hamlet in the first soliloquy is not for death as a means of exiting the world, but for death as a means of escaping his own mind (forgetfulness, if it could be commanded, would serve just as well). Later in the play, he underlines this distinction when he remarks that a reason to *forgo* suicide is the fear that death won't mean the end of thinking.[35] At risk of stating the obvious, these are not remarks expressive of a melancholic whose chief problem is a loss of investment or interest in the world, where what this amounts to is a kind of smothering deadness of inner life. The problem Hamlet gestures towards is almost the opposite: a tortuous *overload* of inner life; a mind which has become exhaustingly restless and ungovernable, inundated with tension. Thinking has in some sense turned against the thinker.

Another passage in *Hamlet* – also taken from the first meeting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern – gives a picture of how this decompensating state of mind knits together with

[35] "[To] die, to sleep. / To sleep, perchance to dream. / Ay, there's the rub…" (3.1.64-65).

some of the other characteristics of A*. Hamlet is asking his friends why they have come "to prison" to see him:

> GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my lord?
>
> HAMLET: Demark's a prison.
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.
>
> HAMLET: A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' th' worst.
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: We think not so, my lord.
>
> HAMLET: Why, then 'tis none to you, for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: Why, then, your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too narrow for your mind.
>
> HAMLET: O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams. (2.2.242-257) [36]

One doesn't need to look too closely at this exchange to see how it reproduces the distinction between a bounded and an all-encompassing problem (Demark is a determinate site, "the world" is not) as well as the idea of the world as an antagonist and that of the mutable character of

[36] This passage appears in the "Folio-only Passages" section of *Hamlet* as reproduced in *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, 1344.

reality. What Hamlet adds to this list is a gloomy sentiment about the omnipotence of thought. The reasoning behind Rosencrantz's first response seems to be that the prince is making the word *prison* meaningless. If all of Denmark is a prison, this is only to say that we no longer have a legible idea of what being in or out of prison refers to. But Hamlet's riposte is that nothing is a prison unless it is experienced as such. Ergo, imprisonment is not a physical situation but a power of thought – just as everything else "good or bad" is. Does he mean the final part of this statement to be taken seriously? It is hard to know. But what stands out in the context is the reference to nightmares which follows it. Bad dreams are another type of haunting, maybe. In a more straightforward sense, however, what they exemplify is simply unbidden and distressing mental activity, thought as something one suffers rather than directs. The spectre – the thing which ruins Hamlet's capacity for peace, in his own words – is therefore once again the disordering power of the mind. By the same token, the "nutshell" he refers to, inasmuch as it is the emblem of a supremely enclosed space, is an image of a tomb. So here, too, we find an intimation of some bottomless uncertainty about what can be done can be done to make the mind cease. For any subject caught in the type of crisis I have been describing, there is invariably a point where this becomes the salient issue. How can they bring their own thoughts to heel, or expel them, or appease them; or – if none of those things can be done – how can they escape them altogether?

The thought of suicide is also apposite to the sort of world-encompassing trouble we have been considering, inasmuch as it might come to seem (for the person who suffers) like the closest thing there is to an action which takes the world as a whole as its object; something adequate to the wish for *everything* to be different. More broadly, when it comes to a crisis of integration, one of the lessons to be drawn from Loewald's theory is that there is no meaningful difference

between an internal problem and a disorder in relation to the world as a whole. From the first principle that the organisation of the self and the presence of a relationship to the external world are not contingent partners, it would seem intuitive that whatever threatens one's sense of attachment to reality with sufficient force will also threaten one's sense of psychological cohesion. Experientially speaking, the kind of horror that Hamlet evokes at being stranded in *this* world is not separate from the horror of being stranded within a convulsing mind. The medium of living is what goes awry. Yet it would hardly be right to say that the world is the medium of human life, while thought is not, or vice versa. The idea necessarily accommodates both.

But perhaps there is still a question about what exactly the feverish mental activity summoned by the crisis is straining toward. The answer is already implicit in what's been said. It represents a compulsive effort toward reintegration. The dilemma for the subject arises in situations where this effort is at the same time thwarted, for one reason or another – and the mere fact that such a thwarting is possible would seem to point us towards yet another type of psychological dependence. What is it that the de-integrating mind lacks, after all? Evidentially, something which it had previously received from the outside world. Within the initial vignette from *Housekeeping*, for instance, there is a clear implication that the cohesion of inner life is in some way contingent on the persistence of a certain kind of order or stability in the external world, such that a radical disruption in the latter would be capable of causing a breakdown in the former. What constitutes a radical disruption, in this sense? Perhaps there is no perfectly general answer. Nonetheless, if nothing more, the examples to hand would seem to suggest that the rupturing of family bonds is a common enough trigger. The instigating event might be the sudden death and disappearance of a parent; or the death of a father followed by the perceived treachery of a mother; or the fatal disobedience of a favourite daughter – whatever the case,

something is removed from the world that the mind seems to require for its sense of wholeness. And in response, the psyche mobilises to recapture a type of accord which the world may no longer offer. In that sense, a crisis of integration is also a form of searching (it has something of the logic of a romance tale, perhaps). For the same reason, the kind of story which takes up such a crisis as its subject-matter is also very likely to be a story about the recovery of identity, or at least its attempt.

Hamlet is sometimes described as though *he* were the ghost of the play which contains him. Cavell, for example, speaks of the prince's alienation as a kind of spectral phenomenon, meaning that through it, or because of it, Hamlet is unable to fully inhabit the world or his own life.[37] There is something right about this. To my way of thinking about it, the ghostliness of the character is a consequence of the fact that a crisis of integration creates something of a problem for the subject about where to "place" reality (and here I mean *reality* in the sense of what's real, rather than in the sense of the outer world). What are we to say has more reality to the grieving prince, for example – the world of the Danish court as it is, or the vanished world of the time prior to his father's death? It is a mark of his condition that this becomes a question at all. On the other hand, Hamlet himself is drained of reality not only because there is a way in which he still "belongs" to the vanished world of his father's court, but because he has lost his grip on the idea that he can affect himself upon the world as it is. In some deep respect, the extant world has become utterly unresponsive to his wishes – and it is impossible to occupy such a condition for long without coming to experience oneself as (in a bizarre way) not entirely real. One remains joined to life, phantom-like, without being fully included by it. One moves and talks and acts,

[37] "His bar – his lack of 'advancement' into the world – is expressed in one's sense (my sense) of him as the Ghost of the play that bears his and his father's name, a sense that his refusal of participation in the world is his haunting of the world. (As if he is a figure in a play.) He overcomes his refusal only in announcing his death." (Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 188.)

and yet somehow cannot impress any meaningful change on the world. Existence and presence seem to come apart.

In Hamlet's example, too, it is important to appreciate how the kind of division implied by the persistence of A within the world of A* is not quite as simple as a clash between something unreal and something real in the experience of the subject. More accurately, each side of the formula suffers from a sort of unreality in virtue of the split, although the nature of the imperfection is different on either side. The world of A lacks substance in the obvious respect we have been discussing – it has no positive being. The successor world, on the other hand, lacks substance in what we might call a normative capacity. Beyond the purely political aspects of the question, it is as though part of what *Hamlet* means to illustrate is a situation in which the world itself can come to seem illegitimate. Insofar as it is felt to exist within the shadow of a negated but rightful order, extant reality becomes unworthy of allegiance or acceptance. It is "merely" real, if you like; null in the sense of being unable to exert a certain kind of authority over the subject's mind. (It may compel obedience but cannot command loyalty, so to speak.)

It should also not be too difficult, I hope, to intuit how this extension of the idea of legitimacy beyond questions of political rule and towards questions about the experience of reality might have a special application in *The Tempest*, a play which is enormously concerned with the nature of service, and of the difference between coercive power and authority therein.[38] For the moment, however, I only want to linger with the thought of an extant world that somehow becomes less real to the subject as they become less real to themselves (where this means the loss of some basic assurance of substance or presence which they previously drew

[38] See: Richard Strier, "'I am Power': Normal and Magical Politics in *The Tempest*," in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Derek Hirst and Richard Strier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10-30.

from the world). *Hamlet* is often enough characterised as a play about mourning, or the inability to mourn, and this is surely true in some important way. Mourning, qua process of setting ghosts to rest and rejoining the world, clearly has a relation of some kind to the types of situation I have been describing.

Equally, however, a crisis of integration offers us a perspective on what successful mourning might entail. Loewald once observed that the purpose of psychoanalytic therapy is to turn one's ghosts into ancestors, and one of the ideas contained in this image is that of a distinction between a past which acts upon the subject as a quasi-alien force and one which is brought into a more integrated (and hence fuller) relationship with their present and future; where it is owned by them in a different way.[39] The movement from the first to the second is a form of reorganisation, and might be thought of as the positive equivalent to the destructive undoings and reconstitutions we have been exploring. What it also suggests is that the process of return to the world (as in mourning) is not simply a matter of accommodating oneself to a new state of affairs but of somehow finding a way to make both the world and oneself real again, an endeavour which – as Loewald's way of thinking might lead us to expect – is not really two separate tasks. From this point of view, the tragedy of *Hamlet* is bound up with the impossibility of this operation for the prince. What exactly makes it impossible is a further question – for our purposes, though, the main thing is only to get a sense of the idea of success that Hamlet's failure

[39] "Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost life and laid to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow life. Transference is pathological insofar as the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts, and this is the beginning of the transference neurosis in analysis: ghosts of the unconscious, imprisoned by defenses but haunting the patient in the dark of his defenses and symptoms, are allowed to taste blood, are let loose. In the daylight of analysis the ghosts of the unconscious are laid and led to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life, of the secondary process and contemporary objects." (Loewald, "On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis," in *The Essential Loewald*, 248-249.)

puts forth. A problem which is insoluble in a tragedy may not be insoluble by definition, and this, in outline, marks the distinction between *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*.

4

The Tempest and *Hamlet* are each stories premised on an act of betrayal and usurpation within a ruling family. Both plays are dominated by a central male figure who understands himself to be pursuing recompense for some violation of a rightful and bygone state of affairs, and each is deeply intertwined around questions of revenge and legitimacy. Where *Hamlet* might be said to be more concerned with the foulness or debasement of the world, *The Tempest* lays greater focus on its transience and mutability. But in some ways, this is a difference in emphasis rather than kind. Each of these perspectives summons an idea of all-encompassing treacherousness, for example; that is, an idea of the world as a place that might suddenly, and pervasively, become opposed to the individual's wishes. In *The Tempest*, this disordered relationship between inner and outer is more closely entwined with the structure of the drama itself, however, and this is one of the main points I will try to illustrate in what follows. The play induces something like the world of appearance in the audience, by repeatedly unsettling the idea of a clear distinction between reality and appearance not simply within the story, but outside it too (think again of the confusion intimated by Prospero's speech in Act 4).

In Chapter 1, I concentrate on the "hinge" in *The Tempest* between the first scene and the rest of the drama – a transition which (setting aside the epilogue as an indeterminate case) moves us between the only two locations employed in the story: the royal ship and the island itself. The story begins in the middle of what appears to be a natural disaster or an act of God. The crew of a

ship fight in vain against a storm and their vessel is to all appearances "split" and ruined by the end. Within moments of the next scene beginning, however, we discover that far from being a product of nature or divinity, the storm corresponds to a human purpose. It has been under the control of Prospero (via Ariel, his living instrument) all along. What looked like a manifestation of the sequence A-B-A* proves to be otherwise, or so it seems.

Three features which are critical to the underlying logic of *The Tempest* are brought into play via this transition. In the first place, a kind of ontological fracture is signalled within the world of the drama. The key detail in this regard is that nothing included in the first scene suggests to us that the storm is in any sense artificial, or points towards the human agent who lies behind it. As such, even after we have discovered the truth about what has happened, there is a way in which the appearance of catastrophe is preserved. Although we "know" retroactively that what we confront in the opening is not what it looks like, the appearance remains immaculate, so to speak. This is enough to confer a logically distinct character on the first scene. It is only here – and nowhere else in the play – that the audience encounters a wholesale separation between appearance and actuality. There is a dimension that exists "for us" in this scene (i.e. the misleading image of what is taking place) that has no analogue in anything that follows it. The significance of this division is subtly emphasised within the plot when, for example, Ariel gives Prospero a report of what took place onboard the ship which does not match what we saw in the first scene. The effect of this and of other corresponding details, I argue, is to inject an irreducible dose of uncertainty about the precise ontological hierarchy with the dramatic world we encounter. It is not that we are confronted with an unambiguous contradiction between the scenes so much as we are able to see that the world of *The Tempest* does not "add up," in the

sense that the events of the opening scene are not, and cannot be, cleanly assimilated to what comes afterward.

The second product of the transition between the first and second scene is the installation of a theatrical frame around the events that take place on the island. The shipwreck as it initially appears creates a type of identity between the audience and the characters who are involved, an identity which is then broken by what we subsequently discover about the event. At first, the audience shares the ignorance of the men onboard (neither they nor we understand what is really happening) and we are kin to them inasmuch as what is represented, or what appears to be represented, is an instantiation of a universal human vulnerability to misfortune and to powers beyond our control. Once the context around the scene is filled in, however, this identity no longer holds. This is not – after all – the type of unlucky event that might befall anyone, but rather a sorcerous event. Combined with the obvious suggestiveness of a journey into a magically orchestrated world, I use this shift in the spectator's position relative to the first scene to argue that, in a certain figurative sense, the twin poles of audience-subject and dramatic-object are not present at the outset of *The Tempest* but rather come to be in the course of the movement from ship to shore. What the play accomplishes through this process is a kind of self-representation that doubles as an argument about the nature of theatre. The third and final product of the transition is that the entry onto the island and "into" theatre is associated with a symbolic erasure or denial of suffering – and yet the fissure between the first two scenes also implies that this effort is in some sense incomplete, limited or illusory.

Chapter 2 encompasses a discussion of the plot of *The Tempest* with a particular focus on the nature, uses, and origins of Prospero's magic in the story. In functional terms, the degree of the sorcerer's power is such that he effectively acts as a different category of agent in

comparison to all of the other characters in the play. The way I put this is that Prospero bears a relation to the whole – to the totality of events within the story – that is not matched by any of the other figures. I go on to discuss some of the puzzles in the narrative about the nature of his magic. In broad terms, the sorcerer's power is based on a model of Neoplatonic thaumaturgy. As Richard Strier notes, however, it does not seem right to view the character as an "ordinary" Renaissance magus, because his magic seems to obey a distinct spatial limit: he can only employ it on the island.[40] What are we to make of this fact? I offer a response to Strier's reading of the play that interprets Prospero's magic (and its limitation) as a symbolic expression of the colonial structure of power in the island. I argue that although this view is not wrong, it is partial – and in order to get a complete picture of what the magic represents we need to understand what Prospero is trying to achieve with it in relation to his brother, Antonio (an aspect of the story that is not directly linked to the colonial dimension of the play). On the other hand, Strier is perfectly correct to point out that one of the principal hopes the sorcerer invests in his magic is to have the ability to morally transform his enemies – and that this ambition is largely thwarted, highlighting another crucial limit on Prospero's power. In the final section of the chapter, I illustrate the manner in which the degree of this power nonetheless *does* create a kind of intangible structure on the island, one that in a certain way forces all of the rest of the characters to inhabit the sorcerer's thinking.

In the third and final chapter, I turn my attention toward the type of psychology that, in my judgment, is at the heart of *The Tempest*'s plot. As noted, the entire drama is premised on a revenge tale. Counterfactually, nothing we see in the play would have taken place absent one brother's treachery and the other brother's desire to avenge himself. In view of this, I employ the

[40] Strier, "'I am Power'," 16-17.

term *grievance* to name a concept – of my own design – that is meant to highlight the psychological or, as it were, self-contained aspect of the revenger's predicament. The first analytical purpose of this concept is to separate thought from action. From this perspective on the matter, the revenger's motivation is not, fundamentally, to bring about a certain state of affairs in the world (say, the deaths of their enemies) but rather to give their own thoughts peace – in other words, to subdue the state of psychic distress and agitation that accompanies the longing for revenge. In broader terms, all-consuming vengefulness is one way – although not the only way, Hamlet at the start of *Hamlet* represents another – of being overcome with a sense of the world as something fundamentally degraded or intolerable. It therefore forces the question, for the would-be-revenger, of what it would be for the world to be restored, if indeed such a thing is possible. In this manner, it can be seen as an instantiation of the type of world-encompassing problem outlined above.

In order to substantiate this idea, I argue in Chapter 3 that the pursuit of this goal seems to involve a logical puzzle of sorts. Although revenge naturally – perhaps even necessarily – lends itself to an economic metaphor (in common parlance we talk of getting even, paying back, settling scores, etc.) it is obvious that any such metaphor must be deeply imperfect since there is no such thing as a strict equivalence to trade in. Moreover, inasmuch as the aggrieved subject is motivated by an injury or loss that is cemented in the past it is not even clear to what extent the cause of their distress is an actionable target. These two factors (the imperfection of the economic metaphor and the apparent lack of a worldly object) combine to create the possibility of the vengeful subject being consumed by a malign infinity, an unfulfillable psychological task. I argue in addition that *The Tempest* draws a comparison between the type of psychological displacement that the aggrieved person suffers (the sense in which they feel themselves

"swallowed up" by their wound) and the nature of theatre. In the first place, there is a certain literal way in which this connection is made: our "entrance" into the theatrical frame as we move from the first to the second scene corresponds to an entrance into a world that is governed by Prospero's wish for retribution. The play therefore invites the question of whether there is any deeper similarity between these two conditions, grievance and theatre, even when they appear so categorically different on the surface.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero in a sense functions as a personification of the human will; or rather the will as it would appear if it were unencumbered by the contingent frustrations and inadequacies of ordinary life. His inability to depart the island under his own power therefore speaks to the manner in which grievance embodies a more intractable conundrum of purpose: one cannot simply elect to be free of it. This understanding returns us to the thought that in a deep sense vengefulness is better viewed as a disordered relationship to the world as a whole rather than a task with a determinate goal. The real question at issue in *The Tempest* is not whether revenge – or some adequate substitute for revenge, such as contrition from one's enemies – can be achieved but whether the world can be apprehended as something one is able to rejoin, thus escaping A*. I argue that *The Tempest* depicts an overcoming of this quandary where *Hamlet* does not.

Chapter One: This Fearful Country

At the start of *The Tempest* we are given the image of a catastrophe. The play begins inside a storm and, on a royal ship, order is being destroyed by the elements. We are made to imagine – if we are reading – the darkness as well as the tremendous background noise. Men run back and forth; the topmast is brought down; the chain of command eventually buckles. The episode is famous. But its fame, no less than its speed and compression, is also a quality that can hide it from us. Samuel Coleridge perhaps caught it better than he knew when he said that the opening of *The Tempest* is a spectacle from which "the real horrors are abstracted," and which is purposefully designed to avoid drawing too much attention to itself.[1] This is one of the most interesting things about it: the impression that something in the scene's composition is meant to encourage a kind of inattentiveness, as if it isn't there to be remembered clearly.

Part of the reason for this impression is the subtle way in which the scene blurs its characters together, by leaving out or underplaying the information that separates them from one another. There is no clear sympathetic focus. Unlike the storm scene in the third act of *Pericles*, for example – the closest analogue in the Shakespearean corpus – the action does not revolve around a heroic central persona. Nor are there any special, individuating displays of courage. Instead, amidst the tumult of the storm we find a suggestion of anonymity and equivalence. Although a number of *The Tempest*'s significant characters appear onstage for the first time, in the dialogue nobody's name is employed. Hierarchies are alluded to but made to seem

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. R.A. Foakes (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 166. The full passage reads: "The romance opens with a busy scene admirably appropriate to the kind of drama, and giving, as it were, the key-note to the whole harmony. … It is the bustle of a tempest, from which the real horrors are abstracted; therefore it is poetical, though not in strictness natural (the distinction to which I have so often alluded), and is purposely restrained from concentering the interest on itself, but used merely as an induction and tuning for what is to follow."

insubstantial. The figure who dominates proceedings, as much as any can be said to, is an everyman of sorts – the ship's boatswain; a character who is not assigned a name, and who will not be heard from again until the very end of the play. His commands to the crew are part of the frantic effort to avoid running aground (we do not know where the ship is, of course; another point that contributes to the disorienting effect) and the futility of this struggle is an omen of yet another and more dreadful type of levelling anonymity, an unmarked death at sea.

Why does *The Tempest* begin this way? The role of this episode proves to be a complex one. The analysis of the scene can be divided into two main areas: an *ontological* dimension and a *reflexive* one. These two dimensions intersect in certain ways, but in their fundamentals the former refers to what the scene (and its relationship to the rest of the play) indicates about the nature of the world of *The Tempest*, and the latter refers to the peculiar, shapeshifting relationship that the scene establishes with the audience. The elusiveness of the scene is compounded by the fact that by the time we come to analyse it, our initial receptive state – defined by an ignorance about the story to come – is something we can only infer or reimagine after the fact, whilst our knowledge of the context in which it occurs has a strangely deceptive influence. Misdirection is an essential component of *The Tempest*, and this is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than by the presentation, and subsequent reframing, of the cryptic episode with which it begins.

It seems to me that the most effective technique for understanding the opening scene is to carefully work through its manifest content, so that we can come to appreciate the difference between what we are shown there and the meaning the event is retroactively assigned in the narrative. For that reason, the perspective I adopt in what follows often has a type of as-if quality – what if we were an audience watching this unfold for the first time? Of course, the idea of an

"unblemished" receptive state has something wishful about it, since in reality there are any number of ways in which a person might come to learn something about *The Tempest*'s plot (and thus its opening scene) before ever encountering the play first-hand. But such issues are secondary. The important question is: what does thinking about the play with the assumption of ignorance in mind help us to understand? This is what I will try to illustrate in what follows. The chapter will have four parts. First, I will examine some of the peculiar surface qualities of the shipwreck scene and remark on its content. In the second, I will discuss how the narrative of the play seems to assimilate and alter this content, and then I will highlight some of the countervailing forces which undermine this process. In the third section, I will discuss the ontological implications of this tension, and in the fourth and final section I will examine the way in which the transition to the second part of the drama creates a theatrical "frame" around the ensuing action of the plot.

1

Even in the context of Shakespeare's work more broadly, the shipwreck scene at the start of *The Tempest* is a peculiar episode. The play as a whole is divided into two distinct spatial sections – the first scene onboard the ship, and then the rest on the island – although in itself this does not make its structure unique. The pattern has a clear parallel in *Othello*, for instance, another play that begins in one location and then travels (through a storm) to a second one, an island, where most of the story takes place. Similarly, there are works such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *As You Like It* which are meaningfully split between two locations; in these examples an "ordinary" world and a more magical or "green" counterpart, another pattern which bears a clear

affinity with *The Tempest*.[2] But in none of these plays – nor in any other work of Shakespeare's reasonably thought of as having a two-part setting – is the first location confined to an isolated opening passage.[3] One thing that distinguishes the shipwreck, therefore, is its slightness in relation to the rest of the story. The point can be pushed further: in a sense there is no first location in *The Tempest*. By its nature, the ship is a transitionary environment, a vessel; it is a setting that we instinctively grasp as existing in contrast to, and drawing its meaning from, some more permanent human placement (dry land, a home, a community, and so forth). The scene itself has the appearance of being no more than a prelude to the rest of the drama. The story can easily be imagined functioning without it. Whatever we gain from its inclusion, it is not information about the plot.[4]

So again, why this scene? Part of the answer is surely to do with spectacle and the wish to seize the audience's attention from the outset. But even aside from the fact that there are plenty of different methods to generate excitement – and what we want to know is why Shakespeare chose this one in particular – in a way this suggestion only deepens the puzzle of the scene. For it seems to me (and again I think this is what Coleridge was gesturing towards) that the truly curious thing about what happens is how an episode that manages to be so vivid and memorable

[2] On the distinction between the "first world" of the cosmos, the "second world" of imaginative art, and "green world" (the representation, within a work of art, of a metaphorical space that stands apart from the first world) see Harry Berger Jr.'s wonderful essay: "The Renaissance Imagination: Second World and Green World," in *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 3-40.

[3] *The Taming of the Shrew* is perhaps a partial counterexample, although the Induction in that play is separated from the main body of the work to such an extent that the first section and the rest of the play can be fairly regarded as two distinct worlds, rather than two locations within the same world (they share no characters, for example). This is not how *The Tempest* is organised.

[4] The frequency with which the first scene is altered or even removed altogether from productions of *The Tempest* attests to how puzzling its role in the play can seem. Lindley notes the tradition of deleting it from performances, especially in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century. He also observes the regularity, "almost a cliché of modern performance," of Prospero or Ariel being made to appear in the storm scene (Lindley, "Introduction", 10). As I'll come to, although such alterations might be justified and made compelling for all sorts of reasons, I would argue that they betray a fundamental misunderstanding of what is at stake in the play.

in its outlines could also feel as if it slips by without lodging too firmly in the mind. We are thrown into the event *in media res* and without being able to locate what is happening. Later on, we are told that the ship was somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean, on a path from Tunis to Italy, when the storm hit. But since neither Tunis nor Italy is a location within the play, and since we also never see the arrival or the departure of the tempest, even after we gain our bearings the scene retains the air of a dislocated episode. As with a dream, the experience feels somehow detached from a cause, a quality that can also add to the remote sense of terror it might inspire in the audience; the intimation of a world beyond human foresight or control, full of events that might suddenly destroy us.

It is important to register that the mysteriousness of the scene is also what diverts the audience's attention away from it. As noted, in the dialogue we are given no names, next to no background information, barely any sense of the relative importance of these people for the ensuing story, and only a brief window in time before they all appear to be swallowed up by what has befallen them. Taken by itself, the episode provides the audience with a preliminary sketch of the characters and not much more (in some cases rather less; Ferdinand is present but does not speak, for example). One of the effects of this poverty of information is that our ability to evaluate what we are seeing in the moment is suspended. The characters' predicament may inspire a kind of reflexive pity or awe in us – it may inspire any number of reactions – but in a deeper sense the resources we would need to come up with an informed response are not available here. Perhaps all of these men are villains and we should be glad that they are suffering (or at least feel that it accords with some form of justice). Perhaps the storm is a blessing in disguise. Perhaps this is only the prelude to an even more fearful catastrophe. The scene does not exclude such possibilities. We are made to wait to find out who these characters are, what the

significance of this disaster is, how it all fits together within the larger story, and so forth. In short, we are manoeuvred into a state of expectation, and so already primed to look beyond what we are shown.

As anyone acquainted with *The Tempest* knows, of course, even within the world of the play the "catastrophe" is not real, but rather a device created by Prospero in order to draw his enemies towards him. The angry and frightened men we see are not in peril from the storm – they never were. Once they reappear on the sorcerer's island the point is made and then repeated to us that the wreck has had no tangible effects on their bodies. Their clothes are not even wet. "But are they, Ariel, safe?" asks Prospero, to which Ariel responds: "Not a hair perished. / On their sustaining garments not a blemish, / But fresher than before" (1.2.217-219). In the next scene, Gonzalo twice comments on the miraculous preservation of the royal party's attire: "But the rarity of it is, which is indeed almost beyond credit… That our garments, being, as they were, drenched in the sea, hold notwithstanding their freshness and gloss, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt water." (2.1.59-64). And later: "Sir, we were talking that our garments seem now as fresh as when we were at Tunis at the marriage of your daughter, who is now queen" (2.1.94-96). The uncanny dryness of the men is emphasized all the more by the fact that we have already seen drenched characters appear during the catastrophe following the stage direction toward the end of the first scene: "*Enter Mariners wet".*[5] It is as though the men aboard the ship have not simply been protected from whatever had assaulted them, but that the very nature of the

[5] Barton points out the deep familiarity this device would have held for contemporary audiences: "On the Elizabethan and Jacobian stage, wet actors seem to have been almost as mandatory a shorthand for disaster at sea as alarms and excursions were for a battle." ("Enter Mariners wet": realism in Shakespeare's last plays" in *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 199.) Along similar lines, Lindley observes that Jacobian audiences would have been "readily disposed" to understand the storm as an indication of supernatural forces at work within the story, and yet, as he says, the shipwreck also resists such an interpretation in its deliberately unembellished and comparatively realistic presentation of the crisis ("Introduction", 6). In part, then, the opening scene appears to be designed to muddle the audience's prior sense of what ought to be accepted as reality within the world of the play.

antecedent event is obscured. A magical disruption of cause and effect has taken place; something has "happened" without all of its natural consequences, where a type of identifying proof is missing. (What sort of thing is a shipwreck that leaves you dry?) All of this suggests that the first scene might not be quite as intelligible as it looks, even after the fact.

What does seem to be clear, in any case, is that the progression from the ship to the island in *The Tempest* is not just linear but also has a retrospective influence. After we arrive on the shore and the context is filled in, the opening scene suddenly acquires new meaning. Although it may not be correct to say that the characters on the ship were in the grip of an illusion (the wind and the waves seemed to be real enough, after all) their panicked responses were based on a misunderstanding of what was happening to them, albeit one they were completely powerless to avoid. From our perspective, the cries of distress invariably take on a different aspect. The emotions were authentic but – we now realise – the danger they responded to was not. It is surely no accident that one of the things this situation resembles is that of a person caught inside a nightmare. The association is reinforced by the nocturnal darkness of the storm as well as the frightful quality of what takes place; a pseudo-terror from which we collectively (spectators and characters alike) "awaken" once we reach the daylight calm of the island. And, of course, this is also an analogy for the retrospective change that comes over the scene.

The analogy with nightmares is useful in another way. It is a fact about dreams that there are (at least) two different ways of relating to them – the direct experience while we are asleep, and then the memory of them after we are awake. These are two distinct forms of cognition. Within a dream, we have little or no capacity to tell truth from appearance.[6] Whereas when we

[6] Cf. Jonathan Lear, writing on allegory in Plato: "In dreams, we experience images without recognizing them as images and without understanding their deeper meanings. It is not quite correct to say that in dreams we think we are awake. Part of what it is to think we are awake is to exercise the capacity to distinguish between waking and dreaming states, and it is this capacity that goes to sleep when we sleep. Thus dream states do have a reality and

are awake part of what it is to contemplate a dream is to understand it in terms of just this distinction: we recognise the dream *as* a dream only because we can situate it as something other than waking life (and in that respect grasp it as "unreal"). Part of the slipperiness of the beginning of *The Tempest* is that the drama is organised in such a way as to encourage us to lose sight of the fact that the "wakeful" position is not the only way of thinking about the shipwreck. As a result, we are predisposed to assign a kind of unreality to what takes place there without pausing to reflect on what the experience itself, or indeed the diphasic nature of the scene, might signify.

But before developing this point any further, we ought to take a closer look at the content of the scene itself, since I have only described this in rather loose terms so far. The thing I want to emphasise the centrality of disorganisation to what happens there. In terms of the dialogue, the substance of what occurs lies in the quarrelsome series of exchanges between the boatswain and the various members of the royal party. A.F. Falconer, in a commentary on the realism of the nautical instructions delivered by the seamen here, writes that on a king's vessel the crew would be disciplined to such a standard as to be able to work in silence even in the most adverse conditions, to better facilitate communication from their officers.[7] This is why the repeated interruptions from the royal party drive the boatswain into such an exasperated temper – the distractions could be fatal. The conflict comes to a head in the following passage:

power for us, *not* because we think we are awake, but because the capacity to distinguish between waking and sleeping has temporarily shut down. …there is disorientation: we lose the capacity to recognize our dream as a dream and thus to determine what it is about." ("Allegory and Myth in Plato's *Republic*", in *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, ed. Santas, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 30.)

[7] For Falconer's account of the ship's maneuvers, see: A.F. Falconer, *Shakespeare and the Sea* (London: Constable, 1964), 34-40. An extract from this appears as Appendix A in the Oxford edition of *The Tempest* edited by Orgel, 207-8.

ALONSO: Good boatswain, have care. Where's the master? (*To the Mariners*) Play the men.

BOATSWAIN: I pray now, keep below.

ANTONIO: Where is the master, bos'n?

BOATSWAIN: Do you not hear him? You mar our labour. Keep your cabins – you do assist the storm.

GONZALO: Nay, good, be patient.

BOATSWAIN: When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin; silence! Trouble us not.

GONZALO: Good, yet remember whom thou hast aboard.

BOATSWAIN: None that I more love than myself. You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more – use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap. (*To the mariners*) – Cheerly, good hearts! (*To the courtiers*) Out of our way, I say! (1.1.12-27)

The king and Antonio ask the boatswain the same question ("Where is the master?") and they are answered with another ("Do you not hear him?"). In this exchange, a great deal of *The Tempest* is rehearsed in miniature. The theme of the master-servant relationship is established, for example, and beyond it are the hints of more purely political and metaphysical questions about the ultimate origins and nature of authority.

In the same passage there is also a pointed idea about the fragility of established order. The boatswain has sometimes been characterised as a leveller by critics – which is debatable –

but in any case his rebukes to the royal party illustrate something vital about what is going on aboard the ship.[8] In his response to Antonio and Alonso's repeated question, what the sailor is referring to explicitly is the sound of the shipmaster's whistle (mentioned in passing at 1.1.6-7). But given the cacophony surrounding them, his words carry an obvious double-meaning: the storm is our master. Untrammelled nature has cancelled "the name of king." As such, the boatswain's impatience – even if it does not amount to an attack on hierarchy *tout court* – is certainly a mark of the abrupt irrelevance or uselessness of a certain kind of social pattern in conditions of mortal peril. The storm is the men's "master" in that it is what dictates the entirety of the crew's behaviour. Practical knowledge, rather than status, is the only qualification which matters in the circumstances. As if to underscore this point, the sailors all work while the noblemen bicker and contribute nothing.[9]

But as it turns out, direct action is just as useless as social standing. Within a few lines the crew's efforts fail, their discipline cracks, and they break their silence: "All is lost! To prayers, to prayers! All is lost!" (1.1.51). What we observe, then, is not an isolated moment of political subversion – or a proof of the natural limits of authority, depending on how we interpret it – but rather a cascading loss of order as the storm scene unfolds. In the first place, conventional or symbolic power is undermined (the name of king is annihilated by the storm, normal authority on the ship dissolves). After this, labouring power, the capacity to impose shape on the world, is

[8] David Norbrook writes that the boatswain has "[so] little respect… for traditional hierarchies" that he refuses to answer his king's question at first. ("'What cares these roarers for the name of king?': Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*," in *The Politics of Tragicomedy*, eds. Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 21.) By contrast, Richard Strier argues that the Boatswains rudeness to his superiors belies his real attitude towards hierarchy. "Shakespeare's Boatswain is keenly aware of the limits of political authority in the face of nature… but he questions 'authority' only metaphysically, not socio-politically." ("'I am Power',"15.)

[9] As Strier observes, the refusal of the noblemen to help in the first scene is in pointed contrast to the narrative given in William Strachey's account of the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, from which Shakespeare took details for his own story. Strachey comments that everyone aboard the ship – even the aristocrats – weighed in to help during the storm that drove them to Bermuda (Strier, "I am Power," 15). An extract from Strachey's letter appears as Appendix B in the Oxford edition of *The Tempest*, 209-219.)

defeated in turn. At that point, all that seems to remain is blind faith (or the optimism of comedy, depending on how one sees it). In response to the boatswain's recrimination of him, Gonzalo jokes: "I have great comfort from this fellow. Methinks he has no drowning mark upon him – his complexion is perfect gallows" (1.1.28-30); a reference to the adage that a man who is born to be hanged will never drown.[10] He repeats his joke as the situation deteriorates; first, after Antonio and Sebastian begin to argue with the boatswain (1.1.46-48), and then again as the drenched sailors enter crying ruin and the boatswain flees the scene. "He'll be hanged yet," Gonzalo declares, "Though every drop of water swear against it, / And gape at wid'st to glut him" (1.1.57-59). But what ensues is the final moment of disintegration. Comedy and faith also seem to fail: on the one hand, the body of the ship splinters, and on the other "*a confused noise*" (as the stage direction has it) emanates from its interior; the mingled and unattributed cries of despair, as if a collective soul were being cut loose. "'Mercy on us!' – 'We split, we split!' – 'Farewell, my wife and children!' – 'Farewell, brother!' – 'We split! we split! we split!'" (1.1.60-2)

It is helpful to suspend what we know about the larger context here. Although it is true that the shipwreck in *The Tempest* is not an "authentic" catastrophe, it nonetheless presents an implicit argument about what the nature of catastrophe is. Catastrophe, here, is associated with a radical loss of organization. More specifically, it is linked to occasions where the forces that bind parts together into a whole are made to fail devastatingly for one reason or another. Established authority can suddenly become meaningless; structured, goal-directed activity may prove futile (we should note that as soon as the situation becomes hopeless, the crew's collective integrity disappears); wooden hulls can be breached; and human bodies break and drown. In each case,

[10] Cf. Orgel's note on p.98 of the Oxford edition.

something that existed hitherto as an organised, unified entity – a hierarchy, a shared project, an artefact, a person – loses some or all of its reality.[11]

It would not be misleading to say that the fragility of ordered space is what, somewhat ironically, organises the entire scene as a dramatic spectacle. Even in isolation, the image of a vessel at sea foregrounds the idea that certain barriers against nature are essential for the sake of human togetherness.[12] One of the marks of the terrifying force of the storm, on the other hand, is that from the perspective of the men aboard the ship it seems to decompartmentalise reality. Nature, from the position of those assaulted by it, appears to exceed or erase its own categories. Darkness comes in the middle of the day (we are told in the next scene that the storm has occurred somewhere between noon and two o'clock), air and water merge, and the horizon vanishes. Then there is the rising sea itself, the symbol *par excellence* of a merciless and obliterating natural power, perfectly indifferent to the lines humans draw. In the network of storm scenes and allusions to storms in Shakespeare, the idea of dissolving boundaries is deeply characteristic. So, too, is the use of the language of tempest and flood as metaphors for a calamitously disordered mind. In Northrop Frye's gloss, tempests are Shakespeare's preferred emblem for "the abyss of disorder" underneath the ordinary world, as well as for the annihilating effects of time and the unravelling of identity. "The subjective equivalents for storm and tempest

[11] The joke that Gonzalo makes in response to the boatswain's final recrimination ("I have great comfort from this fellow. Methinks he has no drowning mark upon him – his complexion is perfect gallows", 1.1.28-30) is a reference to the adage that a man who is born to be hanged will never drown (cf. Orgel's note on p.98 of the Oxford edition). In the context, then, Gonzalo's hope for survival is bound up with the idea that insubordination and capital punishment still mean something, and hence that – despite all appearance to the contrary – this does not really spell the end of their collective participation in a certain kind of political order.

[12] This is surely part of the reason for its long life as a metaphor for the political state. The storm-tossed ship as an emblem of the vicissitudes of life is likewise familiar. The canonical survey of this "strange paradox… that human beings living on land nevertheless prefer, in their imagination, to represent their overall condition in the world in terms of a sea voyage" is Hans Blumenberg's *Shipwreck with Spectator* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997, 8).

are madness, illusion, or death itself."[13] More specifically, John Gillies observes that the shipwreck at the beginning of *The Tempest* "can be read as an Ovidian symbol of primal chaos, one of several Shakespearean versions of Ovid's opposition of sea and land."[14] All of this is in the background of the scene.

Moreover, it would be remiss not to observe how the beginning of *The Tempest* recalls the sequence A-B-A* from our previous discussion. We are shown a generalised breakdown in order (and beneath it a threat of undifferentiated nothingness, the terminus of disorganisation) whilst at the same time it is an almost automatic inference, for us, that there must have been a pre-crisis state when the normal order reigned. We thus have an equivalent for both A and B. By the lights of our formula, what we would expect happen next – and what *does* happen in a story like *Hamlet* – is a transition into a somehow damaged and ruptured world in the wake of the acute moment of the crisis. But this is not what occurs. Or rather, it is not straightforwardly what occurs. It is important, even so, for us to be conscious of this omen of ruin – the manner in which A* appears to be foretold. We shall return to this.

2

To review: we have seen how in the first scene of *The Tempest* there is a sort of incompletion written into the fabric of the episode, a deficit of information which is then "answered" by the content of the second scene, and which works to transform the meaning of what we had

[13] Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p.137. In a similar vein, G. Wilson Knight identifies tempests as one of two fundamental symbols in Shakespeare – the other being music – and although he denies that a symbol can be reduced to any single meaning, allows that tempests can be broadly construed as "Shakespeare's intuition of discord and conflict" (*The Shakespearian Tempest*, London: Oxford University Press, 1932, 16). The prime example of storm imagery employed by a Shakespearean character is surely Lear howling at the tempest he is caught in and thereafter claiming that "the tempest in my mind" makes it a triviality by comparison (3.4.12).
[14] Gillies, "Shakespeare's Virginian Masque," 691.

observed. The enigma of the shipwreck provokes an appetite for narrative, a desire to make sense of what we have just witnessed, while at the same time drawing our attention away from the content of the scene itself, since the desired explanation cannot be found there. Thereafter, when the explanation is given to us (which it is very promptly, the mysteriousness of the wreck is not dwelt upon) the uncertainty seems to vanish. We now know, or appear to know, what to make of the event. Yet this transformation is not secure. What I want to bring out in this section is, first, how the purported metamorphosis of the shipwreck aligns it with what follows; and second, the degree to which the play also resists and undermines this assimilation.

The first thing to note is that – as it is written – the opening scene of *The Tempest* communicates nothing explicitly that would tell us that the appearance of danger is false. Despite how the shipwreck is later explained to us, at the outset there is no sign of Prospero or Ariel or any controlling intelligence behind the storm. We might infer that the event cannot be as bad as it threatens to be since this is only the beginning of the story, we know the vessel is near land, and it would be an unusual plot indeed that began with the unqualified slaughter of these barely established characters. But the point is that there is nothing inside the scene that conveys this information to us directly (let alone the absence of any immediate peril). The image of disaster is uncompromised. As a result, when we arrive at the truth – when we discover that the men on board are all safe and part of a design – what this amounts to is not the resolution of an uncertainty but a kind of denial or erasure of what we were shown. We witness X and are then assured not-X. The ship is preserved; no one has died; the men's clothes are all perfectly dry. The reversal bears a loose analogy to a conjuring trick in which we are presented with one thing (a treasured item destroyed; a person disappeared or cut in two) only then to have that image dispelled before our eyes.

In fact, in order to appreciate the extent to which the second part of *The Tempest* "refutes" the content of the first, we need to momentarily expand our perspective to cover the strangely placid atmosphere that surrounds all of the subsequent events of the play. In affective terms, the transition from the first scene to the second is something along the lines of a movement from tension to reassurance for the audience. In one bound, we are transported from a situation of peril (for the characters) and uncertainty (for us) into one of understanding and order, where we seem to reside for the rest of the play. The change is a comprehensive one. Dramatic conflict, as David Sundelson puts it, "is strikingly absent from *The Tempest*":

> Brothers try to kill brothers, servants stalk their masters, and the union of attractive young lovers is delayed by an old man's whim, but none of these things creates suspense. Once we have seen Prospero calm the raging waters with a wave of his arm, danger and difficulty cease to be more than a prelude to the inevitable harmony. The movement of the plot toward fulfilment is the most serene and secure in Shakespeare.[15]

It is worth pausing for a moment to notice how strange this description sounds. A story that features no conflict and manufactures no suspense would – on the face of it – seem to be barely a narrative at all; maybe something akin to a story an adult might tell to a very young child, in which an unadorned sequence of events is enough to seem wondrous. It could be that Sundelson exaggerates slightly, and surely he cannot mean that the play lacks suspense in the minimal

[15] Sundelson, "So Rare a Wonder'd Father: Prospero's *Tempest*" in *Representing Shakespeare*, eds. Schwartz and Kahn, 33. Sundelson's assessment is echoed by Barbara Tovey in her comparison of *The Tempest* and Plato's *Republic*: "It is a singular tribute to Shakespeare's genius that a play so lacking in dramatic suspense, so deliberately calculated not to arouse the emotions of pity or fear in the spectator, is nevertheless capable of so engrossing his interest." (Tovey, "Shakespeare's Apology for Imitative Poetry", *Interpretations* 11:33, 1983, 281.) Barton notes that *The Tempest* is "often criticized for the singular lack of suspense" ("Introduction", 12).

respect of making its audience want to see what happens. Even so, he is not wrong about its peculiar texture. *The Tempest* is built around an almost explicit promise of safety. What Sundelson and critics like him are responding to is the construction that elevates one character – Prospero – to such a position of power and authority that his control over the action is never seriously challenged, either by misfortune or the interference of other parties. This is not a formula found elsewhere in Shakespeare, and its effect is to give the drama a profoundly insulated quality.[16] It is as though the order of this world is set hermetically in place. There are no fantastic interventions from the outside, nor are there ruinous or capricious agents from within who need to be expelled or corrected. The villains in the play, though transparently wicked men, are never allowed any genuine disruptive potential. They do not really function as *obstacles* to the more sympathetic characters as we might expect them to; rather, they simply represent one more set of components for the sorcerer to manipulate.

The impression of security in *The Tempest* is also not quite the same as its equivalent in one of the comedies. An interesting comparison in this regard is *The Comedy of Errors*, a story which is also set in motion by a shipwreck and which boasts a device that seems to offer the audience a similarly explicit feeling of reassurance and good order. As C.L. Barber and Richard Wheeler put it, in the earlier comedy:

> [The] key to making the dramatized mistakes disappear is always visible to the audience – the presence of two identical brothers. The play permits the confusions of the

[16] Duke Vincentio in *Measure for Measure* is in some ways a prototype for Prospero, but his power over the events of the story he manipulates is far less ironclad. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon and Titania are full participants in the story (unlike a figure such as Jupiter in *Cymbeline*, for instance) and certainly wield a different order of power compared to the mortals, but they also have to contend with one another. Prospero has no such rival figure. Moreover, even if Oberon nonetheless occupies a superior position over Titania, his servant is not the faultlessly reliable Ariel but rather the capricious and irresponsible Puck. This introduces a type of contingency into the fairy king's commands which has no equivalent in *The Tempest*.

> wandering twin and the troubles of the Ephesian couple to proliferate within a firmly established comic contract that promises to clear them up and make everything right once the mistakes are corrected.[17]

It is true that this description only captures part of the play (there is no equivalent guarantee around Egeon's fate, since the audience has no certainty about the means by which his life will be spared until it happens). But the point can still be taken that the story is making something explicit which is more often left implicit. By the device of the twins, we could think of *The Comedy of Errors* as providing an unusually overt version of the generic comic promise, in which the audience – but not the characters – are given to understand that all of the mistakes and the possibilities of loss encountered in the drama cannot possibly prevent a happy ending. In *The Tempest*, however, Prospero is in a position of active and magically reinforced mastery over events. What we perceive is not a conventional storytelling formula – one necessarily hidden from the dramatic personae themselves – but rather the machinations of a singularly powerful agent within the plot. The sorcerer impersonates fate. This, again, is what feeds the sense described by Sundelson that the action of the play obeys a serene and impregnable order. The suggestion in *The Tempest* is not so much that misfortune or threat will inevitably be defeated, but that they have no opportunity to arise in a true form; the sorcerer's presence negates them.

Now, this impression conceals many things. But the tranquilised atmosphere it creates is not a contingent part of the play. Although Sundelson does not have a particularly sentimental reading of *The Tempest*, he takes it as given that "the island holds no real dangers" to its

[17] C.L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1986), 82, fn.14.

inhabitants.[18] As it happens, this strikes me as a significant mistake. The island is full of rage and anguish, both mental and physical (Caliban and the clowns are set upon by spectral dogs and then tortured by Prospero's minions, to give only the most transparent example; 4.1.255-264). Nonetheless, it is a mistake the play courts. The impression given to some critics of an island free of danger and pain is not created by the content of the story so much as the beguilingly asymmetrical relation of power that shapes it: everything feels under control, because it is.

Along these lines, we should also register how – in contrast to the other three romances – there is never any direct sign of an order of being "above" the world of the characters. *The Tempest* has no equivalent to the interventions of Diana or Jupiter or the message from Apollo's oracle exonerating Hermione. When the sorcerer addresses the spirits of the island at the beginning of Act 5, he makes it clear that they are servants to his thaumaturgy, "weak masters" (5.1.41).[19] Likewise, the facsimiles of the gods who appear in the masque in Act 4 are "actors… all spirits" (4.1.148-150). Caliban declares that Prospero's "art is of such power, / It would control my dam's god Setebos / And make a vassal of him" (1.2.371-373). Although Prospero makes fleeting allusions to both providence and Fortune, they refer to events that are not part of diegesis (1.2.159/178). Gonzalo's declaration that it is the gods who have "chalked forth the way" to the happy unions at the end does not correspond to anything shown inside the story (5.1.203). In the same scene, when the counsellor cries out "Some heavenly power guide us / Out of this fearful country!" it is Prospero alone who steps forward (5.1.105-106).

Every one of these details reinforces the impression that there is no active authority in the play beyond Prospero. Notably, *The Tempest* is also the only one of the romances in which not a single character dies. Power is monopolised – at least ostensibly – in the hands of a single figure,

[18] Sundelson, "So Rare a Wonder'd Father", 38.
[19] The nature of Prospero's magic will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

and power is seemingly equated with the preclusion of death and destruction. To come back to the first scene, the immediately relevant part of all of this is that the integration of the shipwreck with the surrounding narrative is at the same time the revelation of a world that appears to be systematically organised to exclude chaos. The quality of Prospero's influence here is exactly the same as it is throughout *The Tempest*, in that not only do things hold together in the wake of the initial "catastrophe" but – as it turns out – they were never not held together in the first place. Even the intimations of dramatic tragedy are waved away by his commands. Prospero describes Miranda's naïve reaction to the shipwreck as a combination of fear, pity and wonder: the full Aristotelean response to tragedy. But he tells her that this response is not appropriate.[20] By implication, within the orbit of this world tragedy does not exist.

Despite all this, it is not the case that the initial version of the first scene – its "dreaming" form, as it were – is simply erased from the play. What is left behind is the semblance of disaster; the misleading surface itself. As much as anything, this is a point about the logical status of the episode. Although there are a number of other moments in *The Tempest* where characters are deceived by magic, the opening scene is the only place where the audience is actively misled alongside them. It is thus also the only part of the drama that is radically transformed in our understanding. It appears first of all as an act of god or nature – something totally beyond human control – and its thereafter exposed as a manmade plot, a creation of sorcerous art. But again, this transformative information is situated entirely outside the scene,

[20] "No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart / There's no harm done." (1.2.14-15; cf. Orgel's gloss on p.102.) Given the issues of intelligibility in *The Tempest* that will soon arise, Stephen Halliwell's commentary on Aristotle's idea of wonder as part of the response to tragedy is worth noting: "The 'sense of wonder' to which he refers is an experience which startles and challenges our capacity to understand what we witness in a play, but it is not one which allows for a deep or final inscrutability: wonder much give way to a recognition of how things do after all cohere through 'probability or necessity'." (*The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Stephen Halliwell, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987, 111-112.) This giving way to intelligibility *seems* to happen to Miranda – and to us – but as we shall see it is not so simple in reality.

which means that the scene itself has a duality that the rest of *The Tempest* lacks: the image it puts forth and the reality obscured by the image.[21]

What is logically unique about the opening scene is simply the presence of this overlaying image. "Behind" the manifest content of the shipwreck is a reality continuous with the rest of the story, one in which events are arranged according to Prospero's power; a world of magic and purpose, without destruction. By contrast, on the surface of the scene is the vision of a counter-world, one of death and instability, where identities are lost and there is no magic to divide catastrophic events from their consequences. This second world has no substance in the official narrative of *The Tempest* – it is never "real" – but its semblance is where the story begins. There are a number of nested ironies here. From the point of view of performance, the shipwreck is perhaps the most artificial scene in the entire play (in the sense of being the furthest removed from the fixity of the stage).[22] What it most closely depicts, however, is a world without enchantment, bleakly realistic in its own way, and yet for all that a world positioned as an illusion within the greater logic of the story. In short order, then, at least three different perspectives on the status of what is taking place are opened up. First, the nature of the performance we are beholding (what sort of reality does this fiction have?); second, the view of external reality this fiction projects (what sort of world do we inhabit?); and last, the internal consistency of the fictional world itself (how does the first scene cohere with all of the others?). What I want to propose is that the fluctuating sense of what's real at the start of *The Tempest* is a

[21] As a possible counterexample to the idea that the first scene is unique in the way that I have described, one might point to the two conspiracy scenes involving Caliban and the clowns (2.2 and 3.2). Given that Prospero later seems to have known about their plot all along (cf. 4.1.139-142) it could be argued that this is an instance where a sense of danger is created from the audience's perspective only to be later exposed as false. But the two cases are clearly different in kind. Notwithstanding the fact that it's difficult to take the threat posed by the clowns seriously, the conspiracy never involves the illusion that something is happening that is not. There is no equivalent here to the magical preservation of the ship and its men. The transformation of the first scene remains unparalleled.

[22] In *Pericles*, Gower presages the storm scene with an address to the audience: "In your imagination hold / This stage the ship, upon whose deck / The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speak." (3 Cho.58-60).

coded address to the audience. The scene has a quality that exists "for us" that can be found nowhere else in *The Tempest* – namely, that of presenting an image that sits apart from the truth of the story.

The relative autonomy of this image is subtly underlined in a number of ways in what follows. When Prospero asks Ariel for a report of his actions aboard the vessel, for example, the events his servant describes conspicuously fail to match those of the first scene:

> PROSPERO: Hast thou, spirit,
> Performed to point the tempest that I bade thee?
> ARIEL: To every article.
> I boarded the King's ship; now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
> I flamed amazement. Sometime I'd divide
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
> The yards and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet and join. (1.2.194-201)

Most obviously, although we have no clear reason to doubt Ariel's involvement in the shipwreck, he does not appear in the first scene at all – not even in the "invisible" form he takes at other moments in the story (cf. 2.1 and 3.2). Nor was there any sign of the flames the spirit tells Prospero he transformed himself into, and nor did we hear the words he attributes to Ferdinand ("the King's son Ferdinand… cried 'Hell is empty,/And all the devils are here.'", 1.2.212-215). Although Ariel assures his master that everybody on the ship "felt a fever of the

mad" (1.2.209), it is also not obvious how far this matches the behaviour we saw there. For all the extremity of their situation, the men in the first scene did not seem to have been driven out of their senses. In themselves, none of these discrepancies make it impossible to square what Ariel tells Prospero with the events of the opening scene. Perhaps all of this happened at a different moment, out of our view; we can only speculate. But the lack of overt corroboration lends weight to the faintly detached quality of the first segment of the play.[23]

At the beginning of the second scene, moreover, Miranda – a proxy for the audience – exclaims that she has seen the ship dashed "all to pieces" and heard the cries of dying men, after which Prospero tells her that there is "no harm done" (1.2.8-15). The sorcerer does not deny what his daughter has seen and heard. He only says that these perceptions do not reflect the truth of what has taken place:

> I have with such provision in mine art
> So safely ordered that there is no soul,
> No, not so much perdition as an hair
> Betid to any creature in the vessel
> *Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink*. (1.2.26-32, emphasis mine)

[23] Gwilyn Jones observes another significant contrast between the first and the second scene: the linguistic style. In the former, poetic language is kept to a minimum and – Jones argues – the boatswain's dialogue tacitly communicates the idea that "the survival of those on board is dependent on the absence of metaphor: the language of his commands is therefore direct and unambiguous. Figurative language [is] an extravagance." (Jones, *Shakespeare's Storms,* Manchester University Press, 2015, p.131.) In the second scene, Miranda's narration of the shipwreck is manifestly poetic: set in iambic pentameter and heavily imagistic. In short, "[the] opening scene withholds the poetic; the second scene revels in it." (p.137) The lack of poetic embellishment at the beginning is also brought out by a comparison to 3.1 of *Pericles*, which, in diction, essentially fuses the scenario of the opening scene of *The Tempest* with Miranda's mode of speech in the second (*Pericles*, 3.1.1-14).

It is important to appreciate the sense in which this is no more than a restatement of the discrepancy, rather than a solution to it. The contradiction between appearance and reality is not accounted for, or rather it is tacitly explained as an act of magic and invisible design, another mysterious lacuna in cause and effect.

Does the existence of the sight and sounds of a shipwreck and yet the nonexistence of the shipwreck itself mean that Miranda has been the victim of something like an induced dream or hallucination? Perhaps so. It could be that this is the most coherent way of explaining what has happened.[24] But even if it is, all she is told by her father is that in virtue of "such provision of mine art" her perceptions of the wreck are not joined up with reality. By any ordinary standards of coherence, we ought to share Miranda's confusion about the "direful spectacle" (1.2.26). Are we to assume that the first scene only brought us to the very edge of the catastrophe, but that in reality the events never proceeded any further? What do we imagine the "break" between the first and the second scene conceals? Indeed, the perplexity we confront here is deeper than its equivalent inside the plot. After all, it remains possible to explain any erroneous perceptions by characters in the story in terms of illusions or psychological tricks. But however plausible such theories might be, they obviously have no application to our own sense of a discontinuity at work – we did not dream or hallucinate the beginning of the play.

Needless to say, the ordinary standards of coherence do not apply here. *The Tempest* is a fable. And even then, it is not the case that we find an unambiguous break in consistency between the first and the second scene. My point is slightly different. There is a gap between appearance and reality in the play that knowledge is meant to close, but which is not closed. The miraculously dry clothes, the undamaged ship, Miranda's bewilderment and the discrepancies in

[24] Karol Berger's analysis of Prospero's magic and its parallels to Ficinian theory makes plenty of room for this explanation. See: Berger, "Prospero's Art" in *Shakespeare Studies* 10 (1997), 211-239.

Ariel's report: all of these are details which combine to preserve the residual alterity of what we encountered to begin with. It is not proof that the two parts do not join, but what it *does* mean is that the nature of their connection is impossible to demonstrate.[25] As a consequence, the image of disaster and disorganisation retains a quasi-unrefuted quality which it would not possess if we had seen – as we might have – Ariel at work in the opening tumult, or Prospero summoning the storm in advance, or any other signs of the real explanation for what takes place. This is what I mean when I say that the first image of *The Tempest* is never entirely erased from the play.

Another way of thinking about the ambiguity is to reflect that even after we discover that the environment of *The Tempest* is not the catastrophic, ungovernable place it is made to appear at the outset, there is still a puzzle about how exactly the first scene ought to be understood in light of this knowledge. What happens at the climax – does the ship split or is that merely how it appears to the men onboard? Does the whole episode have the status of an illusion or a dream? (But whose dream?) Is Ariel telling the truth when he describes the events to Prospero? Does the first scene belong to a parallel world completely? Have the men died, and is the island an afterlife? We can feel the pressure towards such an explanation – something like this *ought* to

[25] In *The Dream of Prospero* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), D. G. James argues that there must be two tempests in the first act of the play: one which aligns with what Miranda and the audience observe (a "natural" storm) and a magical counterpart which accords with Prospero and Ariel's plans. The former ends in destruction and the latter with the secreting away of the ship in a "deep nook" of the island (1.2.227) where it is restored to pristine condition (5.1.224). The relation between the two storms, James writes, "is not to be clearly discerned; there is strain and contradiction here that Shakespeare was at no pains to resolve." He concludes that the first, natural tempest must have been an illusion, or "so far as it had substance and truth, it must belong to a metaphysical order not continuous with the succeeding action of the play." (*The Dream of Prospero*, 34.) In outline, James's instincts are good here. The idea that the catastrophic spectacle at the start of *The Tempest* is not merely an illusion but represents something like a fracture in the "metaphysical order" of the play is precisely the impression I have been trying to cultivate. The limitation of James's account, on the other hand, is that he notices this possibility but then makes nothing of it, merely concluding (rather lamely) that "we do not, and need not, when so much is visionary and ideal, worry our heads much about these things" (36). Yet even this judgment is informative in its way. I have already indicated something about how the fracture within *The Tempest* seems to be designed to be overlooked or dismissed by the audience; a dramatic slight-of-hand intended to make us assume more consistency in the drama than there is, or not to linger on the disparities where we notice them. Even in his abandonment of the issue, then, James is reflecting something meaningful about the play.

apply to the scene – but there is no definite answer. The doubt is not really an epistemic one. It exists within the fabric of the play, and thus prevents us from ever "placing" the opening event once and for all. One of the deeper effects of this mystery is to cast doubt on the pervading sense of order that subsequently takes hold of *The Tempest*. Once the basic uncertainty about the first scene is registered, it ripples outwards through the rest of the dramatic world and one might be left with the flickering sensation of a reality that has a fundamentally shapeless or indecipherable core. Either the truth about the event is inaccessible to us or there is no fact of the matter. The world may or may not cohere. But this is about as much as we can say with certainty.

3

There are places in *The Tempest* where a superficially misleading or inaccurate statement proves, upon examination, to convey a deeper truth about what it describes, and Ariel's boast to Prospero about the madness aboard the ship is one of these. Let's suppose, for the moment, that the relationship between the first scene and the rest of the play is as we are told it is, and the pseudo-disaster is all along part of the harmony of Prospero's design. Let us also think of insanity (very generally) as representing a breakdown in the subject's ability to locate what's real – that is, to divide truth from appearance. In that case, even if the men we saw on the ship were not driven mad in the sense of being deprived of their faculties, Ariel's remark identifies something true about their situation. The same confusion of categories infects Miranda as she watches, with utter credulity, the shipwreck from the shore of the island. This loss of discerning power echoes the dreamlike state of mind described earlier.[26]

[26] Cf. footnote 6, above.

Is madness the same as or different from being tricked by an illusion? It is different, clearly. Phenomenologically speaking, it might be impossible to tell the two forms of experience apart in some cases, inasmuch as each involves (or can involve) the subject mistaking something unreal for something real. But the conditions underlying the mistake would be profoundly different even so. In a strange way, although an illusion deceives the subject as to what's real, on a deeper level it preserves the idea that she is fundamentally aligned with reality. Even if the subject has no practical means for recognising the error which has taken hold of her, it only makes sense to describe them as the victim of an *illusion* if there is, in principle, some position they could occupy from which the mistake would become legible to them. Madness is not like this. Although it might involve a superficially similar confusion of reality and unreality, the underlying issue is not that one thing has been mistakenly categorised as another, but rather that the subject is losing hold of – or has never adequately developed – their ability to sort the phenomena of experience into these categories. It hence does not preserve the idea that they are capable of recognising their mistake, even in principle.

On the surface, our experience at the beginning of *The Tempest* seems to resemble the process of waking up from a dream, or of coming to recognise an illusion for what it is, insofar as we move from one situation into another which *prima facie* seems to be incompatible with it, but where there is also a principle to hand which allows us to make a coherent whole out of the disparate parts – by classifying one of them as less real than the other. (Analogously, if I dream that I am on the surface of the moon, I have no difficulty in assimilating this experience to my earthbound life after I'm awake.) The world of chaos and accident which we encounter at first is succeeded, and then subsumed, by a world of order and purpose. The latter is thereby framed as reality in the play and the former as a merely illusory or imagistic surface.

But the rift between the first scene and the rest of *The Tempest* spoils this model. It is as though a fluid quality of the play suddenly comes alive within our mind as we bring our attention to it. Do we know that the second world – the world of Prospero's magic and protection – is really more ontologically fundamental than the first? No. It has the appearance of primacy, and (of course) it contains the vast majority of the plot. But the text includes enough discrepancies to permit doubt and by the same token withholds conclusive proof one way or the other. What is so uncanny about this is not that we can no longer be sure where to assign the categories of reality and appearance (although this is true) but that it is no longer clear how far these categories are fit to describe what we encounter. We have two surfaces which do not seem to be straightforwardly aligned with one another, but which also do not answer to a definite ontological hierarchy. Almost instinctively, the mind strains against this perception, and we might discover – as I alluded to at the end of the last section – that we have the impression of some further, hidden substratum where the truth of the relationship between these parts is concealed, even if we know perfectly well that this is no more than an effect of our trying to make sense of what we see. When Ariel describes the sailor's experience as being akin to madness, it is this bizarre unmooring from the categories of reality and appearance which gives the remark its concealed resonance. We should recall, once again, how our own experience of the first scene mimics that of the characters involved.

As an aside, it is possible see how this confusion of categories is also redoubled in a slightly more specific way by the play's imagery. I remarked earlier on some of the dreamlike aspects of the first scene, and of course a number of critics have made similar points in this regard (see footnote 26). One complicating factor, however – which I have not seen observed – is that the metaphor of a shift between a dreaming and waking state can only do so much to

illuminate the meaning of the transition between the play's two locations. This is because it is not clear whether we are metaphorically entering or exiting the dream state. Is the shift from the storm scene to the island like waking up from a nightmare? Or, on the other hand, is our arrival at the island more like falling into a dreamworld; a retreat from externality into a magical realm where the ordinary laws of nature do not seem to apply? Either answer can be given and each complicates the other.[27] Whatever the exact nature of the progression from ship to shore, then, it cannot be straightforwardly thought of as a symbolic movement from sleep to waking life, or vice versa. The two sites are not clearly divisible in that way (a point that Miranda subtly reinforces when she describes life before the island as being "like a dream"; 1.2.45). This is another level on which *The Tempest* invites a kind of mirage of intelligibility, as with the purported adherence to the neoclassical unities remarked on at the beginning of this dissertation.

In light of the endemic uncertainty in *The Tempest*, we discover that all of the themes of dissolution, boundary-loss and chaos which are dramatised so vividly in the opening scene now reappear on a higher level. The utter negation of destruction and lawlessness which seemed to have taken place is subverted by the ontological rift. The vision of the shipwreck is not resolutely

[27] The second option would accord with the more general pattern Marjorie Garber identifies in Shakespeare's use of dream, the core motif being the entrance of the subject into a transformational dreamworld, for the sake of some ultimate regeneration upon their return to reality. Of *The Tempest*, Garber writes that the first scene "is itself a nightmare of sorts, a dark scene cut through with thunder and lightning," but then adds almost straightaway that when the action moves to the island "[we] are immediately transported into a world of dream and dreams". She does not acknowledge the puzzle this seems to create – in what sense can one be "transported" from a dream into another dream? (Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974, 188.)

Northrop Frye observes that a distinguishing feature of romance stories is that the categories of reality and illusion are not in fact equivalent to those of dream and wakefulness, but rather "reality" is whatever aligns with identity and "illusion" is what signifies the loss of identity. This schema draws its meaning, he argues, from the more general tendency of romances to dramatize a cyclical movement between a loss of self (often symbolized by exterior calamities, such as shipwrecks) and its restoration. This perspective seems more faithful to the construction of *The Tempest*, inasmuch as the storm represents a nightmarish destruction of identity and the island the benevolent, dreamlike site of its restoration (the place where the wanderers are at last able to recognise "all of us ourselves/When no man was his own" as Gonzalo puts it; 5.1.212-213). Even so, if it seems obvious how the first scene corresponds to the negative pole in this schema, it perhaps remains less clear to what extent the island truly stands for reality or positive identity – a point I will try to bring out in what follows. For Frye's comments on romance, see: *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), especially 53-61 and 102; and *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 186-206.

contained within a larger and more organised field of thought (and in that respect is significantly *unlike* a dream or an illusion) and as a result it takes on the quality of a more pervasive and insidious symbol of disorder, a quality which is reflected in the fact that the phenomenon cannot be clearly situated in any one compartment of the play. The same "event" simultaneously has an existence within the frame of the narrative, interferes with the consistency of that frame, and manifests a peculiar bond between *The Tempest* and its audience (existing "for us" in that special fashion). It spills out across categories, not unlike the storm itself in the experience of the beleaguered men at the outset.

The absence of an ultimately verifiable order in *The Tempest* does not prevent us from projecting any sort of coherence onto the play whatsoever. The impossibility of secure integration is not the impossibility of integration *tout court*. From here on I will use the term *official reality* to stand for the ostensibly correct scheme of the dramatic world, the one which glosses over the rift and ratifies the sorcerer's power over what we see. This perspective is not incontrovertibly true, but nor is it demonstrably false; and one of the broader implications of this is that it seems impossible to conceive of any *other* way of combining the play's parts which would be categorically superior. In other words, however else one might imagine the connection between the ship and the island (say, that the former represents the mortal plane and the latter a form of purgatory) no possibility of this sort is going to be verifiable in a way that the official version of reality is not. Ergo, there is no way of arranging *The Tempest* so as to exclude a sense of the world's fundamental mutability and uncertainty; the unsettled feeling that things might be other than we imagine them to be. This is the true background for every reading of the play.

As for the narrower consequences: in relation to the plot, the most obvious implication of *The Tempest*'s groundlessness is that it ought to qualify our view of Prospero's power. Within

official reality, this power remains uncontested and all-encompassing. Yet we now have a deeply ingrained reason to think that there is something profoundly illusory about it. The magic is a vision of holistic might in a context where the whole is unknowable or unreal – this, in some obscure but elemental respect, would seem to give it the status of a pretence. In fact, the connection between the overall coherence of *The Tempest*'s world and Prospero's magic is more complicated than even this thought implies. From the preceding, it might sound as if the basic obscurity of the play is what gives the lie to the sorcerer's claims of omnipotence. But there is a level on which this gets the direction of causation backwards. What I have called official reality in *The Tempest* is founded on an assertion of the Duke's power. The principle which "creates" this version of the world in our minds – precisely because it is what allows us to integrate the first scene with everything that follows – is the idea that the sorcerer has command over everything that takes place within the play. As such, the ultimate incoherence (or non-coherence) of the dramatic world can be read as a *failure* of Prospero's magic. The former is meant to follow from the latter. This also gives us an entry-point for adding a psychologised layer to this ontological aspect of the play. It is as though the sorcerer's power is wielded for the sake of making the world whole, but can do no more than create an image of this wish.

At the end of the first section of this chapter, I observed how *The Tempest* seems to evoke but also defy the pattern A-B-A*. To reiterate, by the logic of this sequence we would expect to enter into a somehow damaged or divided world in the wake of the catastrophe. But it is as though the opposite happens. Official reality comes to the fore and appears as the very antithesis of A*, in that it seems to embody a wholly bound together and unruptured condition. By now, we know that this smooth appearance is unreliable. So, of course, this also allows us to return to the question of whether A-B-A* applies to *The Tempest* or not. Unsurprisingly, I think it does,

although one has to learn how to see it. The first part of this is coming to see how official reality in the play is a post-catastrophic world. It is an uncanny image of stability and wholeness, not the real thing. The shipwreck we perceive is contained and neutered on the level of the story; it is not a "true" disaster. But this only implies that the real event B lies further back in the murk of the projected past. On a formal level, however, the shipwreck is exactly what gives *The Tempest* its haunted structure. That first surface we encounter – the symbolic antipode to everything else that seems to come after it – is the unreal though indispensable component of the play. It is neither part of the extant dramatic world nor uncoupled from it, but persists, standing in the way of its coherence. Official reality has the form A*.

4

In this final section, I will say a little more about the bond *The Tempest* forges with the audience as we move beyond the first scene. As noted, when we first encounter Miranda she occupies a kind of surrogate-audience position. It is also worth registering, then, that her response to the shipwreck goes through a progression of its own. Prior to Prospero's explanation, the girl's commentary on the event is as follows:

> If by your art, my dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
> The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
> But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,
> Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
> With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel –

Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her –
Dashed all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart – poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed, and
The fraughting souls within her. (1.2.1-13)

Although she is aware of her father's magical abilities, Miranda seems – like us – to have no explicit reason to doubt the truth of what she sees at first. Hence the same pattern of false (or "false") spectacle followed by true (or "true") understanding is recreated in her experience. Before Prospero's revelation, the girl is wholeheartedly absorbed in the spectacle, to such an extent that she frames herself as being joined together with the men aboard the vessel. ("O, I have suffered/With those that I saw suffer… O, the cry did knock/Against my very heart".) The power of the illusion is directly associated with a type of bond between object and spectator.

This is the first stage. In the second, Miranda goes from being (or understanding herself to be) a witness to something authentic to understanding herself as having been a spectator to something unreal. After Prospero soothes her distress, the bond she projected onto her relationship with the seafarers is replaced with a more detached curiosity about the event. This, of course, would seem to indicate a clear disanalogy between our own situation and hers. Although we both appear to make a journey from illusion to revelation, in our case we are moving between two different ways of perceiving an event we know to be fictitious, whereas Miranda is discovering that an event she thought was entirely real is not. This disanalogy is

undeniable in the most obvious respect. Nonetheless, in a less obvious sense, the categorical shift which Miranda undergoes tracks a change in our own relationship to the first scene, one which also involves a figurative absence and then an assertion of distance.

To step back for a moment: it is an interesting fact about *The Tempest* that the more familiar we are with the play the more inured we are likely to become to the idea that there is something alien about its first scene. If and when we return to the episode in performance, the framework of official reality will already be set in place. We no longer find a group of unknown men struggling for their lives against misfortune, but rather characters that we know and recognise: the abstracted counsellor Gonzalo, the villains Antonio and Sebastian, the guilty king Alonso – agents who have, in some sense, brought this terror upon themselves. Prospero and Ariel can be imagined working invisibly in the background, unseen but providing the basis for what is happening. In a certain sense, the beginning of the play disappears into intelligibility. Per official reality, after we are able to recognise that the first scene gives us a misleading picture of the world we are entering – after it is no longer mysterious in the old way – the shipwreck episode might also seem to become just another part of the play (in fact, it is possible to think of it as the least important part). The key thing, however, is that prior to any of these qualitative changes taking place, the scene is a moment of unique and unrepeatable identification between the audience and what we observe. Although (presumably) none of us share the sailors' mortal terror or their belief in the literal reality of the storm, we are placed in a structurally analogous position: we are under the sway of an image. Like these distraught characters, we are on the edge of the discovery that this world is other than it appears. For a vanishing moment, our own experience of the drama and the experience it depicts are brought into a kind of unity.

I referred to this convergence of experience in the previous section, without drawing out one of its more important implications. Though I have been employing psychologically inflected terms, the most important feature of the first scene in this regard is a formal or logical one. Whatever our initial response to the shipwreck might be, we have no way of knowing that it is a pseudo-catastrophe until after we exit the scene. This dictates our experience of the event: if one has followed *The Tempest* correctly, one cannot fail to have gone through the transition from ignorance to knowledge about its beginnings, which is at the same time to say that one cannot fail to have been moved from the position of unity I have described to one in which this unity is broken. In the first moment of this process we are quasi-participants; in the second we are merely observers. What is more, when the moment of identity is broken – as it unavoidably is – it never comes back. In the abstract, we can reconstruct our shared position with the characters in the opening scene, but we cannot place ourselves back into a condition of ignorance. From that point onwards, at the beginning of *The Tempest* we will find the trace of something that we have been irretrievably separated from, and which we can only return to in memory. This estrangement is subtle but it changes us. Whether or not we ever notice it, we have suffered a division in the movement from the first to the second scene. In more evocative terms, *The Tempest* first contains and then expels its audience. Once we are free of the catastrophic image, however – once we know it *as* an image – these assimilating effects disappear. We are left on the outside of the scene, placed at a distance we have no power to close.

Needless to say, the identity we enjoy with the men aboard the ship does not mean that we are somehow transported into their situation wholesale, or that the distinction between audience and drama abruptly disappears from our minds. As I have said, we are united simply in our relationship to the false appearance. For the characters this image means (variously) fear,

rage, misery, defiance, antagonisms between social classes, and anguished pleas to God. For us it may mean pity or excitement or curiosity or any number of things. The key element, however, is not how we feel but what we share with the behaviour on show. All of us (audience and characters alike) are put in a position from which it appears as if the storm is a real manifestation of danger to these men's lives. As a result, what we encounter there looks like something that *we ourselves* are vulnerable to: not shipwrecks per se, but the general possibility of sudden and catastrophic misfortune. Once the narrative surrounding the event is filled in, this universal aspect of the scene disappears. This is not, after all, the type of unlucky event that might befall anyone. It is a magical occasion brought about by a particular figure, Prospero, against the specific men who betrayed and exiled him. We have learnt their names and histories. The shipwreck shrinks into the confines of their story.

At this point, it might be useful to tie things back directly to the question with which the chapter started. Why does *The Tempest* begin as it does? In general, the answer we have assembled thus far has been as follows: the movement from the first location to the second, from the mysterious shipwreck to the island where the story is told, exists for the sake of creating a dynamic pattern. This pattern works to establish a frame around the events of the play, and this frame in turn acts as a kind of ontological measure. It tells us how to put the parts of the drama together and how to sort what is real from what is not therein. But our analysis has also shown that there is a false bottom to this process. The "official" organising effect, which may appear so natural and obvious to us as to be invisible, turns out to be neither self-evident nor assured when one presses on it. Up until now, I have largely focused on the ontological aspect of the dynamic, meaning that part of it which has to do with the uncertainty of where or how to apply the category of reality within the play. But there is another, more directly reflexive component which

follows a similar pattern in that it makes an object of reflection out of an almost invisibly basic aspect of our relationship to the play. This is the other part of the play's beginning.

The underlying thought is this: in a certain stylized respect, we only *become* an audience to *The Tempest* after the first version of the opening scene has passed. This is what our "separation" from the shipwreck and its characters amounts to. As I've said, in our initial state of receptivity we are quasi-participants in the disaster; not-wholly-distinct; bonded with the panicking men in our ignorance. Our departure from this position therefore amounts to the creation of a new distance between *us* and *them*, *here* and *there*. And in this figurative way the categories of audience-subject and dramatic-object only come into conclusive focus *after* we enter the main body of the drama. In short, we gain our full identity as spectators – that is, the non-involved – through losing the initial attachment we bore. Paradoxically, although we remain no less frozen and removed from the action of the drama as it unfolds, it is as if our part in the theatrical situation is itself being subtly dramatised in this change; as though we are being brought into our own role.

Theatrical audiences are not uniform types.[28] Nonetheless, the pattern laid out within *The Tempest* arcs towards one very familiar and (in the context of scripted drama) intuitive notion of spectatorship. In direct contrast to the first moment of identity, the succeeding phase of our relationship to the play and its opening scene is defined by the presence of knowledge; a

[28] Susan Bennett's introduction to her book *Theatre Audiences* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990, 1-20) sketches one way in which we might think about the mutability of audiences. There is a historical progression, in her account, from the idea evinced by ancient Greek and medieval theatre of the audience as a co-participant in "a common act of devotion" (2), towards the model of the audience as a passive recipient of drama from the seventeenth century onwards, to what Bennett refers to as "emancipated audiences" (audiences not subjected to naturalist assumptions about the spectator-performance relationship, who are more like co-producers of the dramatic occasion) in forms of twentieth-century avant-garde. Bennett's interest is largely in theorizing the last of these three categories, but in her concern with thinkers and performers who try to de-naturalize the assumptions of the second category she also attests to the latter's pervasiveness. For example, on the topic of Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, she observes that theatrical performance, "hitherto almost hermetically sealed, demanding of the audience only the role of a receiver, became an essentially co-operative venture" (31).

perception of purposeful structure; and the vanquishing of danger and chance. It is a position in which the audience's otherness and our insulation from what we behold are figuratively reaffirmed. And all of these qualities have their equivalent in a certain model of theatrical spectatorship. This model, loosely described, is one in which the audience occupies a "passive" role in relation to the action; where a categorical distinction between the spectator and the dramatic personae is assumed; and where the spectator is conscious of watching a fiction, the progress of which has been laid out in advance (and so in which there is in an important sense no such thing as luck). In this configuration, information is one of the factors that separates the spectator from what they behold, at least in the naïve version of the contract. The audience is conscious of a higher level of reality – a design – that the characters are not.

My interest is not to argue that this idea of theatre is a perspicuous one or even that it is necessarily true to the phenomenon it purports to describe, but simply to say that it is a recognisable idea, and that *The Tempest* summons it in the transition from the shipwreck to the island. Our arrival at the play's second location is thus at the same time an arrival into a reiterated or restaged theatrical framework. This point is reinforced if we consider the nature of the fictional world the movement reveals. Within the story, the substance of what goes on is scripted by a controlling intelligence – Prospero's – whose power negates chance, and in the orbit of whom death and destruction are simulated but never made real. It is a theatrical world-within-a-world. Our own *becoming* an audience to the drama (or a "second" or "true" audience, the important thing is simply to keep the diphasic progression in mind) is of a piece with this larger pattern. More generally, what seems to be evoked is an entrance into a theatrical bond that removes us in some symbolic respect from the ordinary realm of life. After all, the departure

from our initial position is also a waving goodbye to what looks like reality – our reality, a world in which catastrophes seldom prove to be mere illusions or feints of magic.

The plot of *The Tempest* is replete with audiences. Miranda watches the shipwreck from the island. Prospero and Miranda contemplate Ferdinand as he pursues Ariel's music. Prospero oversees the children's courtship and creates the masque for them to behold. The royal party marvel at the magic banquet ("A living drollery!", 3.3.21) while the sorcerer looks on from above. Ariel spies on Caliban and the clowns. Prospero pontificates for an invisible assembly of spirits. Alonso and his companions are witnesses to the revelation of Miranda and Ferdinand at play in the last scene. Characters who are watched at one moment in the story become watchers at another, and vice versa. Throughout the plot the distinction between spectators and spectacle is fluid and occasionally breaks down completely, as when the royal party are assaulted by the magical performers they had been mesmerised by in Act 3. Certainly, all of this enough to give us the inkling that the category of *audience* – and by implication *theatre* – is being actively interrogated within the play.[29] It is especially worth noting, however, that the play dramatizes the idea that an audience is a transient entity. Characters take on the role of spectator as a matter of circumstance, and when those circumstances change (as they invariably do) this role is vacated. As such, the identity spectatorship bestows on them is secondary: one first has to be something else before one can be an audience. This seems just as true of ourselves as it is for any of the characters. Equally, spectatorship both inside and outside the world of the play is contingent on

[29] David Young puts it succinctly: "Most of the events of *The Tempest* acquire a theatrical quality by virtue of the fact that they consist of actors and audience." (*The Heart's Forest: A Study of Shakespeare's Pastoral Plays*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972, 157.)

its object. An audience forms in relation to an event or a performance (or what have you) and – again, qua audience – without this object it fails to exist.[30]

But of course something similar must also be the case in the opposite direction. We can see how this reciprocal form of dependence shows up in *The Tempest* if we only consider one of the more puzzling aspects of Miranda's first response to the shipwreck. As quoted above, at the very beginning of the second scene she narrates her impressions of the disaster out loud. Strangely enough, however, it isn't entirely obvious whether these impressions should be possible in the first place. How is it that the girl is able to see anything at all through the darkness of the storm, or hear human voices above the cacophony? (As we know, the deafening noise of the tempest is insisted on in the first scene.) From a certain angle, these questions might seem stupidly literal-minded, but it would be a mistake to dismiss them, because the obscurity reveals something important about the nature of what takes place. Miranda sees and hears the shipwreck-phenomenon because that is the medium through which such an entity exists. To put it more generally, an illusion of this sort is an entity that *lives through* those who apprehend it. It depends on a receptive consciousness for its being. Obviously, this has a powerful theatrical connotation. The play qua spectacle is kin to the shipwreck inasmuch as it *exists for*, i.e. in relation. The world of *The Tempest* acquires its substance (as all theatrical worlds do) only through the presence of an audience-subject which accepts it – that is, one which actively takes on the role of an audience in relation to it; devotes their attention.[31] All of which is to say that

[30] Two remarks from Herbert Blau help to bring this idea out: 1.) "An audience without a history is not an audience." 2.) "The audience is what *happens* when, performing the signs and passwords of a play, something postulates itself as a response." (*The Audience*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990, 16 and 25.)
[31] Stanley Cavell has something like this in mind, I think, when he speaks about the power of an audience to "confirm" a drama. No performance can in the end force its spectators to commit to it in the right way – i.e. to behave *as* an audience – and yet drama requires such a commitment in order to exist; it can't happen otherwise. Cavell draws an analogy to funerals and weddings as other cases in which spectators' participation amounts to a kind of confirmational power over what is taking place (Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge*, 87 and 97).

there is a manner in which audience and drama bring each other into being, and this mutually generative dependence is precisely what we see evoked in the opening movement of the play. The audience "becomes" an audience as we leave the shipwreck, while at the same time a world of theatre "emerges" in opposition.

The import of this is twofold. On the one hand, in saying – as I have – that it is as if the audience acquires a role within the drama itself, what I am trying to highlight is a process by which *The Tempest* works to represent its own preconditions. The play knows an audience to be an ephemeral and contingent thing. We can assume that it also knows itself to be radically dependent on that thing. Strictly speaking, however, there is something about this state of affairs that cannot possibly be expressed inside the confines of the drama. To the extent that the audience is a necessity for the dramatic world's existence, the transience and perishability of that world-sustaining consciousness is (so to speak) an unthinkable thought. By analogy, it is like someone trying to imagine their own nonexistence. So, by framing the twinned emergence of audience and theatrical world in the way that it does, one of the things *The Tempest* accomplishes is an indirect representation of this essential and yet in absolute terms unrepresentable fact about itself. This world and everything that happens in it rests on the vapours of our attention.

The second and more significant aspect of the co-formation of audience and theatrical world is that through this change *The Tempest* presents a kind of argument about what the nature of theatre is. In dramatizing the bond between ourselves and what we observe, the play at the same time makes room for a symbolic space in which this connection is absent – in other words, a space *outside* the frame of theatre, where there is no audience or drama or constituting tie between them. This is first of all a matter of logic. If the essential theatrical relationship is treated

as something that comes to be within the play, then it follows that whatever precedes it has the metaphorical status of not-theatre. But this also means that this area becomes the space against which the theatrical is defined. From what I've already said, it may be obvious that there is only one element in *The Tempest* that can be set in this contrasting role – namely, the fearful vision that confronts us at the very outset. Here we seem to have the antipode to drama. By inference, outside the realm of theatre lies accident, ruin, anonymity, and death. Outside is nature as the pulveriser of human design. Outside is time's dread movement: the devouring storm.[32] These are the things represented before our entrance into the theatrical frame and also the things that seem to recede from view afterwards. Thus, the contract that binds us to the play is marked as (in some way) their obverse. Whatever theatre is by the lights of *The Tempest*, it is at least the apparent exclusion of these phenomena. Moreover, because our perception of the opening scene is rewritten such that, in a way, even the appearance of catastrophe is lost, the anti-theatrical pole in *The Tempest* seems to dissolve. It is as if once we "enter" the frame of theatre, we turn around to discover that there is no longer anything outside it.

This is to say that our arrival, so to speak, onto the island signals the disappearance or suppression of what threatens the theatrical world. According to the bare sequential logic of *The Tempest*, the theatrical is what succeeds the catastrophic. In a deeper sense, however, the drive or wish it appears to be bound up with is something like a longing to erase discord. The theatrical is the active antithesis of what we confront at the outset. It works to undo chaos. Chance, perishability, and untrammelled nature – generalised forces of rupture – are wiped away from the dramatic world as the theatrical frame arrives. Likewise, the formative movement from unity to

[32] The ideas of storm and time – and hence of their annihilating effects – are fused in the etymology of the play's title. *Tempestas* is the Latin word for "*time* with respect to its physical qualities, *weather*" (Oxford Latin Dictionary).

disunity that takes place (from our initial state of immersion into the distinct positions of audience and object) can also be read as the confirmation, on a new level, of a differentiated harmony that the theatrical creates. What this change appears to show us is that the division between the drama's two main sections is immaterial in comparison to an underlying wholeness that we are part of. The duality of the play is represented as a mere semblance, not the truth. This world obeys a single set of laws. We might say: theatre is the proof of coherence.

Or rather, this is what it purports to be. I have been trying to articulate the idea that theatricality, within this play, should not be thought of as only a structure or a particular mode of relating to an object but as something akin to an expression of desire – a kind of striving towards wholeness. But it is just as important to recognise that this desire remains unfulfilled. This is another way in which the quasi-independence of the first scene acts as a spoiler. Given that we have seen the possibility of psychologising the ontological rift, it also seems natural to wonder how the theatrical component of what occurs might be connected to this.

Here is one suggestion: the rift in *The Tempest* expresses a form of pain. Taken as a discreet unit, the first scene of the play shows us an unanswered catastrophe. At a certain level of generality, then, the "theatrical" forces that rise up in response to this moment can be read as the manifestations of an impulse to make suffering disappear. And in a way this is precisely what happens. Theatre is a cure, on this image.[33] But the fault-line in *The Tempest*'s construction means that in another sense the shadow of pain never leaves it; cannot possibly be expunged.

[33] Particularly in Act 1, Prospero's magic is associated with the nullification of suffering in some strikingly literal ways. The royal party arrives untouched on the shore of the island, whilst Miranda's distress is soothed by her father's assurance that the shipwreck she witnessed was unreal. In each case, destruction – the very reason for pain – is conjured into nothing. Note that the transformation of the opening scene works, for us, in a way that parallels the magical disappearance of the catastrophe within the story. A source of anguish is deleted. If initially the shipwreck scene resembles a mirror in which an unhappy fact about our own fragility can be perceived, this mirror is then covered over. More than that: it is effaced, subtracted from the world we behold, and exists now only in retrospection.

The opening scene is recast, "rewritten," claimed by the narrative, it may even be forgotten in its original aspect – nonetheless, it is always possible to point out how the episode is designed to look on first sight. That much is a datum of the text. It is the same insoluble residue which gives us the structure A*. If in formal terms the shipwreck *were* wholly assimilable to what follows it, the symbolic result would be the smooth elimination of tumult from the architecture of the play. But this isn't what happens. Instead, the effect is a kind of spectral persistence. The catastrophe is never quite solved, if I can put it that way; it vanishes and remains. By inference, inside the latent emotional logic of *The Tempest* incoherence and mystery are associated with an inability to make pain disappear.

Coleridge was therefore profoundly, if perhaps unwittingly, right when he said that the horrors are abstracted from *The Tempest*'s first scene. The calamity we confront there is unreal in the sense that the destruction and loss it seems to presage never materialise in the world of the drama. That much is obvious. What is less easy to recognise is the liminal way in which the disaster survives. It has the form of something that ought to be banished from the play, but isn't – not quite. Or, to speak more figuratively, it resembles something that the play *wants* to be rid of and attacks and yet cannot finally escape or remove -- like a cursed memory. "And now I pray you, sir," says Miranda to Prospero, "For still 'tis beating in my mind, your reason / For raising this sea-storm" (1.2.175-177). She never receives an answer. Within her remark, though, is a glimmer of the structural role the image plays inside the drama itself: it is what fails to cohere, but refuses to be wiped out; demanding an explanation that never comes – a reminder of death and misery. It spoils the mind's peace.

The idea of theatre that *The Tempest* presents is joined with this disquiet. Two things happen to us simultaneously as we advance through the opening moments of play. We become

implicated in the theatrical bond – that is, we take on the role of the audience in the stylized fashion that I've described. At the same time, we move through the catastrophic image, absorb it in a way, so that our identity as spectator is bound up with the tumult and shadow divisions the ghostly shipwreck phenomenon gives rise to. Just as the image is immanent to the construction of *The Tempest*'s dramatic world, it or something it represents is internal to what it means to be an audience – at least here, by the lights of this play. We seem to carry a phantom with us. How this ought to change our idea of the theatrical is a new question.

Chapter Two: Any God of Power

One of the central features of *The Tempest* to emerge from the last chapter was the association that exists between the coherence of the official world of the play and the mind of its central character. What makes the two parts of *The Tempest* into an intelligible whole (per official reality) is our awareness of Prospero's design. This is what functions as a binding agent between the first scene and the rest of the play. In the present chapter, I will consider the issue of the sorcerer's psychology and its relation to the structure of the drama in a more concrete sense, via an examination of the nature and origins of his magic in the story – the sorcery being the device that allows him to act as the play's unifying principle.

What is it that Prospero wants? The first chapter has already given us a broad outline of how this question might be answered. The sorcerer's underlying motivations would seem to be tied up in some way with the containment or dispelling of the type of disorder represented (on various levels) by the shipwreck. His power is what evokes and also neutralises catastrophe, where the latter is understood as the destruction of cohesion, and in turn imposes a unity over the elements of the play on both a narrative and a formal level. The three sections that follow in this chapter the shared aim of producing a more concrete account of his desires. The first will consider some of the superficially puzzling aspects of the magic's presentation in the story. The second will consider the relationship between the magic and the colonial dimension of the play, via a discussion of an essay by Richard Strier.[1] The third will take up the question of the origins of the magic in the story.

[1] Strier, "'I am Power'," in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. Hirst and Strier.

To begin with, a quick note about what the focus on Prospero's role entails. Morally speaking, the Duke of Milan is – to say the least – a problematic figure. Although he displays moments of kindness in the story and has an obvious if complicated love for his daughter, he is also erratic, vain, bitter, reflexively tyrannical, and prone to bouts of rage and cruelty which (given the powers at his disposal) are often harrowing for those around him.[2] On a more associative level, it is also not difficult to see the character as a symbol of patriarchal misrule, colonial appropriation and racist violence.[3] For obvious reasons, such concerns tend to have the effect of making Prospero's dominating part in *The Tempest* into a fraught issue, something to be criticized. This will not exactly be my approach here. Whatever his moral status might be, there is an unambiguous respect in which his magically elevated position (as well as the hermetic

[2] The classic critical account of Prospero's temperament is probably Harry Berger Jr.'s "Miraculous Harp," which argues explicitly for a "hard-nosed" as opposed to a "sentimental" reading of the play. Berger depicts the sorcerer as a utopian dreamer, a type unable to cope with reality as it is and therefore eternally susceptible to bitter disillusionment with the world (*Second World and Green World*, 147-185). In his introduction to the Oxford edition, Stephen Orgel provides a useful overview of the strong tendency towards sentimentalized readings of the play for most of its critical history ("Introduction" in *The Tempest*, 4-56). An older hard-nosed account of Prospero's character by Clifford Leech describes the Duke as a "unpacking his heart with words of hate and striving to sate an unappeasable hunger for revenge," and notes how this quality chimes with a "recurrent harshness of tone and… burden of moral exhaustion" in the play's final scenes (*Shakespeare's Tragedies and Other Studies in Seventeenth Century Drama*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1950, 137-158 [quotations 149 and 154]). For two psychoanalytically-informed essays about Prospero and narcissism, see Joseph Westlund's: "Idealization and the Problematic in *The Tempest*" (in *Subjects on the World's Stage*, eds. Allen and White, Lincoln: University of Delaware Press, 1995, 239-47) and "Omnipotence and Reparation in Prospero's Epilogue" (in *Narcissism and the Text*, eds. Layton and Schapiro, New York: New York University Press, 1986, 64-77).

[3] Gayle Green puts it bluntly when she asserts that "*The Tempest* is arguably the most sexist and racist of all Shakespeare's plays" (in "Margaret Laurence's *Diviners*," 178 fn.5; quoted in Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, "Introduction" in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's The Tempest*, eds. Vaughan and Vaughan, New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998, 9). Janet Adelman views *The Tempest* as a regression from the "astonishing psychic achievement" of *The Winter's Tale* to a reassertion of the need for masculine control against the dangers – for the male psyche – of the maternal body (*Suffocating Mothers*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 235-238). Rob Nixon gives a comprehensive overview of the history of the colonial commentary on and reworkings of *The Tempest* in "Caribbean and African Appropriations of 'The Tempest'," (*Critical Inquiry*, 13, 1987: 557-578). Roberto Fernández Retamar's essay "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America" is perhaps the most well-known statement of Caliban as an icon of anti-colonialist struggle, although it is only glancingly an analysis of *The Tempest* itself (*The Massachusetts Review*, 15, 1971: 7-72). Meredith Skura offers a pushback against some of the more forceful New Historicist readings of the play in "Discourse and the Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," drawing attention – among other things – to prototypes for Caliban figure in earlier Shakespeare plays (in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's The Tempest*, eds. Vaughan and Vaughan, 60-90). I will comment more explicitly on the colonial themes of the play in the second section of this chapter.

nature of the environment he presides over) sets him apart from the other characters and gives his desires a different order of importance in relation to theirs – not in the sense of being more valuable, but in terms of their power of effect.

The degree of Prospero's power is such that he effectively functions as a different category of agent. To put it in slightly more formal terms, what makes the sorcerer a godlike or authorial presence in *The Tempest* rather than simply a mighty one is that *he bears a relationship to the whole* which is not mirrored in the other characters. It is possible for Prospero – and he alone – to think of himself in active relation to something like the totality of events within his realm. By comparison, the other characters are acted upon by a coercive force that they are unable to match or even meaningfully resist in certain ways, a fact that precludes any such influence (and this is without considering the general ignorance that envelops most of them for most of the plot). The mechanism that allows Prospero to play this role is, of course, his magic. The nature and origin of the sorcery in *The Tempest* is obscure in a number of respects. But to begin with, what matters is simply to make note of this primary function. The magic is that which puts Prospero in relation to the whole. It is the instrument that gives the sorcerer at least the appearance of being able to take the entire plot as his object.

This also means that the analysis of Prospero's motivations tends to spill out beyond the ordinary bounds of character psychology. In the last chapter, I observed that *The Tempest* is kin to a more conventional comedy in that the entire plot, once we arrive on the island, is suffused with a beguiling sense of security and reassurance (as though nothing ultimately will be allowed to go wrong). But it is also distinct from such a story in that this feeling is not an impersonal part of the play's framework but rather a result enforced by a single character therein.[4] This point can

[4] *Measure for Measure* is the closest parallel, although at noted in the previous chapter, Duke Vincentio's power is far less pervasive and ironclad than Prospero's.

be filled out a little further. In a number of ways, *The Tempest* also fulfils what Northrop Frye describes as the archetypical comic plotline: at the end of the story, there is an impending return from exile as well as the recovery of a lost identity; a marriage has been arranged amongst the younger generation; and we are presented with at least an image of renewed social harmony.[5] But all of these outcomes are themselves more or less the direct handiwork of the Duke. Likewise, in a slightly looser way, it is Prospero who "prevents" the story from becoming a tragedy, insofar as it is his actions which divide the incipiently tragic events (the shipwreck, the separated family members, the attempted murders and usurpations) from their full realisation as catastrophes.[6] Genre and individual psychology are brought into a strangely close relationship. Does it make sense to say that Prospero *wants* comedy, then? Or if not, are we being asked to consider what it might mean to try and impose a comic shape upon one's life? Such questions have a puzzling aspect because they seem to blur the line between what properly belongs "inside" the dramatic world and what belongs "outside," to our evaluation of that world.

In what follows, I will discuss the magic in *The Tempest* largely as an internal phenomenon, not in terms of the frameworks discussed in the last chapter. Ultimately, however, I think the innards of the story cannot be properly understood in isolation from the issues of theatricality and world-formation explored in the previous chapter. Whatever else it is, Prospero's magic is the device which brings the psychology of the play up to, and beyond, the borders of its world. In a way, the apt question to ask of the sorcerer is not *what does he want?* but rather *what sort of desire is being expressed through this figure?* A very provisional answer to the latter question – based on what has already been said – would be: he stands for a type of

[5] See the fourth chapter of Frye's *A Natural Perspective*, especially 118-119. The subject of genre is one that I will return to in the next chapter.
[6] As noted in the last chapter, Prospero's response to Miranda's distress over the shipwreck at 1.2.14-15 seems to carry this metatheatrical connotation.

desire that has to do with the whole, somehow. To anticipate the argument of the next chapter, my view is that Prospero is meant as an embodiment of a disordered relationship between an individual and the world in general. What he "wants" (it is not how he would understand it himself) is for the world to be restored, where this means a reintegration between inner life and external reality. The background uncertainty of what is real and what is appearance in *The Tempest* is in part an expression of this lost sense of attachment – of being in the world without being part of it, somehow. Among other things, the sorcery in the play is a means of exploring whether it is possible to recapture such integration by a feat of will. The broader purpose of the present chapter, however, is simply to illustrate how the treatment of magic in the story points us in this direction.

1

The magic and the island in *The Tempest* both ought to be understood as extensions of Prospero's psychology in a quasi-literal way. By this, I do not mean that the events of the story are merely figments of the character's imagination (although it is not impossible to think of them as such).[7] Rather, one cannot properly understand Prospero's wishes without grasping: 1.) how they have brought him to the island; 2.) in what sense they – in conjunction with the island – have transformed him into a sorcerer; and 3.) in what manner they seem to confine him to the island. Within the story, there are various interesting puzzles about the nature and origins of the magic, as well as how the sorcerer seems to define his power in relation to other characters who

[7] There have been productions that have presented the story in this way. Sarah Beckwith identifies Tim Carroll's 2005 Globe production of *The Tempest*, with Mark Rylance in the role of Prospero, in which Rylance took on all of the speaking parts in the first scene, thus presenting the shipwreck as the product of Prospero's imagination. I agree with Beckwith that the risk of this sort of interpretation is that it elides the extent to which the Duke's troubles are bound up with his difficulties in recognising the reality of other people (Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012, 163).

are themselves either real or figurative magicians. I want to begin by outlining these puzzles, because each provides a helpful window onto the relationship between the magic and the mind of its user.

The basis of the sorcery in *The Tempest* appears to be Neoplatonic thaumaturgy, and in practice the core instruments of power are the animistic spirits that belong to the island (Ariel first among them).[8] Although the principles of this art are never spelled out explicitly, as a rule it seems that Prospero relies on the mediating activity of the spirits in order to exert control over nature, whereas he can impose himself directly upon other humans if he so chooses.[9] The Duke does not – even in a coded manner – ascribe his powers to God, a detail that amplifies the sense of heterodoxy that, in the contemporary setting, would have attached to even the most perfectly virtuous mage (which, as we'll see, Prospero is not).[10]

[8] Frank Kermode outlines the principles of Prospero's thaumaturgy in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play, although in my view he also draws a falsely sharp divide between the Duke's magic and Sycorax's ("Introduction" in *The Tempest*, ed. Kermode, London: Routledge, 1964, xl-xli and xlvii-li). Robert Hunter West's *The Invisible World* provides an in-depth account of thaumaturgic principles. West also supplies a good general definition of the animistic ethos in the Renaissance: "[Its] fundamental article was that behind or within sensible things existed certain supra-sensible living essences which, in the order of God's providence, sometimes wielded the materials of the physical world though separate from them all. These animating essences, called spirits, were of two kinds: *souls*, which were spirits vitalizing or withdrawn from bodies; and *angels*, otherwise *daemons*, which were spirits unattached, even by history, to vitalized bodies. All unbodied spirits – that is, daemons and souls of the dead – were conceived to inhabit non-spatial realms suitable to their natures, but to apply their powers sometimes also to the corporeal world and even occasionally to be represented by some temporary sensible form. As beings existing in a grade above the elementary, they were believed God's agents for the suspension and redirection or perhaps even the constant control of nature's normal courses, and to them man could address himself by means of magic." (*The Invisible World: A Study of Pneumatology in Elizabethan Drama*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1939, 2-3.) For more on the physiological aspect of Ficinian magic see: D. P. Walker's *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1958).

[9] We never see the Duke exert unmediated control over nature. We do, however, see him paralyze Ferdinand in their first encounter, apparently without the aid of any spirits (1.2.465-474).

[10] "In the Christian providence there was no provision for any influence of the mundane upon the supernal world except the dependence of the created on the creator. It was this which necessitated the reduction of ceremonial magic to terms of worship, and eliminated from the Christian scheme the conception of such magic as a thing efficacious in itself." (West, *The Invisible World*, 45). On the inherent tensions between Renaissance theories of magic and Christianity, see also: Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic* Magic, 75-84. Walker also comments on the dialogue between Ficino and Giovanni Pico with respect to the effort to divide "good" (i.e. theologically acceptable) magic and astrology from "bad" (54-59).

Of more direct concern to us, however, are some of the obscurities of the magic that appear to be specific to the design of *The Tempest*. For example: when did Prospero acquire his power? Superficially, the answer seems to be that it happened during his self-imposed exile in Milan, when he retreated from politics to books, "transported / And rapt in secret studies" (1.2.76-77). Yet even with this piece of information in hand, the precise history of his sorcery is hard to pin down. Whatever power the Duke might have gained in Milan was evidently not enough to help him during Antonio's rebellion, nor was he able to exert control over the elements that buffeted his and Miranda's voyage to the island (1.2.149-151). Nonetheless, upon reaching the island Prospero *was* able to set Ariel free from the pine tree Sycorax had trapped him in, a feat that had apparently been beyond the witch's powers (1.2.289-293). *The Tempest* offers conflicting evidence, in this sort of way – a quintessential technique of Shakespeare's, at this point in his career – as to whether the Duke's books or the island itself (and its denizens) are the real basis of his sorcery. The fact that Prospero renounces his magic before leaving for Italy, and has seemingly been unable, or unwilling, to depart from the island before the events of the drama, certainly gives us the impression that his sorcery has a spatial limit. But again, this leaves the connection between what he learnt in Milan and what he acquired during his exile unclear. We know Ariel came into his service only on the island. Yet the spirit goes free at the end of the story, and earlier makes reference to a mission Prospero once sent him on to Bermuda (1.2.229). It does not seem, therefore, as if the sorcerer's reason for staying on the island is that his magical servant is fastened to it. But in that case why *does* he remain, given the awesome command over nature we otherwise see him display?

Could it be that the Duke has enjoyed his life on the island, and has not really wished to depart? Again, the evidence is ambiguous. It might appear indisputable – from the basic setup of

the story – that Prospero regards his exile as a burden and an insult, and wishes desperately to escape it. But this point is not really so self-evident, and there are enough clues in the text to raise a question about what his true motivations for leaving the island might be. In the midst of recounting his betrayal in Milan, he remarks to Miranda: "Me, poor man, my library / Was dukedom large enough" (1.2.109-110). It isn't entirely clear whether this is meant as a genuine self-assessment or whether Prospero is merely ventriloquising his brother's contempt, but in either case we know that he chose his private library over his duties of office and that – upon his banishment – it was a stroke of good fortune for him that Gonzalo, "Knowing I loved my books… furnish'd me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom" (1.2.167-168). Significantly, as he says this Prospero moves from the past to the present tense: he *still* values his books above Milan. So it is puzzling – when considered in isolation – why he would wish to give up the insulated study he enjoys on the island for the trappings of a dukedom that he had once effectively fled from in favour of those very books. We are presented with no hard evidence, during the action, for the idea that the Duke has mustered any substantial new enthusiasm for his lost duties in Italy (albeit he now knows he must be more vigilant). Indeed, he uses the same verb – "retire" – to describe both his original, world-abandoning studies and his impending return to Milan at the end, which if anything suggests that his attitude toward the work of civic governance has not significantly changed during his exile (1.2.91/5.1310).

Nonetheless, that Prospero *does* want to leave for Italy is an axiom of *The Tempest*'s plot: his whole scheme is geared towards that end. There are two broad ways of interpreting this, neither of which necessarily excludes the other. On the one hand, we can imagine that Prospero wants or needs to leave the island for the sake of something that only Italy can provide him with (such as a priest who will marry Miranda to Ferdinand). Alternatively, we could suppose that he

is motivated not so much by a desire for Italy but by a desire to be removed from the island itself. If that were so, then the detail about how he continues to value his books above Milan might be understood as a mark of just how unhappy his present situation is: he would give up his most prized possessions in order to be free of it. But this would then return us to the question of why, in that case, he has not simply left under his own power, and hence back to the question of the precise nature – and limitations – of that power.

What does seem to be clear is that, even if the reasons are never made explicit, the renunciation of magic is in some way a condition of Prospero's departure. The passage in Act 5 in which he prepares for this is also the only moment in *The Tempest* where the sorcerer reflects at any length on his own magic. It contains another puzzling detail. The relevant extract is this:

> Ye elves… by whose aid –
> Weak masters though ye be – I have bedimmed
> The noontide sun, called forth mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
> Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
> Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
> With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
> The pine and cedar. Graves at my command
> Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
> By my so potent art. But this rough magic
> I here abjure… (5.1.33-51).

Clearly, the sacrifice of magic will not be painless for the Duke. (After it is gone: "what strength I have's mine own, / Which is most faint" [5.1.320-321].) Accordingly, one way to read this burst of self-glorification is that he is mustering his courage for what's to come. Purportedly, the speech is being addressed to the spirits of the island – "Ye elves" – but in the text there is no direct indication of any other creature onstage, and it is easy to feel as though the words are meant chiefly for his own benefit. As the fateful moment looms, it may be that the sorcerer allows himself time to reflect on his achievements and to celebrate them; perhaps as a way of saying goodbye to this portion of his life, and perhaps also as a way of reassuring himself about the qualities still at his disposal. (After all, if he has the strength to give up all *this*…) Whatever the case may be, he puts his own augmented capacities at the front and centre as he prepares.

The puzzle is the reference to necromancy. "Graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth / By my so potent art." Although it seems to take the pride of place in a series of escalating boasts about his power, this claim is also the only one we are given no evidence for in the rest of the play (either directly or indirectly). We know that Prospero can wield unchallenged authority over the magical spirits of the island. We have also seen proof, from the very beginning, of his ability to raise "roaring war" between sea and sky, and to exert a mastery over nature more generally. So although the splitting of "Jove's stout oak" is an unverified and somewhat mysterious event, it is hardly inconceivable, especially since we know the sorcerer split open a pine in order to free Ariel (1.2.291-293).

In comparison, the assertion of necromantic powers appears to be completely baseless. Save in a purely figurative sense, nobody comes back to life in *The Tempest*. Nor is the claim repeated elsewhere in the play. Even the practicalities of it seem mysterious: as far as we know,

the only person who *might* be buried on the island is Sycorax. But there is no indication that Prospero has ever interfered with her tomb, if it even exists, and in any case it still wouldn't explain enough – he tells us he's raised more than one corpse. There is the possibility that his experiments took place in Milan, before his exile. But this is also somewhat difficult to make sense of; firstly, because of the aforementioned doubt concerning the sources of his magic, and secondly because both intuition and the order of his boasts in Act 5 would seem to suggest that necromancy is a more formidable power than mastery over nature. Yet we know that Prospero was unable to command the elements in his journey to the island, which at least makes it harder to credit the idea that he would have had the capacity to perform still greater feats earlier in time. Alternatively, perhaps the sorcerer is lying for some reason, or deluded, or there are tombs on the island that we aren't aware of. None of those answers give much depth to his words, however.

Insofar as there is a consensus among critics about what purpose the claim to necromancy serves, it seems to be either that it is not meant to cohere literally with what we see in the play so much as function as a poetic intensifier in the moment, or that it is designed to inject a crucial dose of ambivalence into the play about the moral status of Prospero's sorcery.[11] It is this detail above all which appears to sabotage the idea that there is a genuinely clear distinction between the white magic practiced by the Duke and the black magic practiced by Sycorax. The point is reinforced because the passage immediately preceding the sorcerer's description of his own powers is famously modelled on words spoken by Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, another

[11] Leech makes note of critics who argue the former, although he disputes this interpretation (*Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 143). Kermode notes the lack of evidence for Prospero's claim, but writes that the speech is primarily delivered for poetic effect rather than being "informative" (*The Tempest*, ed. Kermode, 115). As noted above – fn.5 – this assessment may stem from the fact that Kermode posits a difference in moral quality between Prospero's magic and Sycorax's.

way in which the play implicitly aligns the sorcerer with pagan forces.[12] This way of thinking about the boast seems true enough as far as it goes. But if the explanation isn't supplemented, this conspicuously strange detail becomes little more than a moral signpost – not trivial in itself, but somewhat underdetermined.

We will come back to this issue at the end of the chapter. Before delving into the relationship between the magic and Prospero's psychology more thoroughly, a last topic I want to flag in this section is one of the more straightforward aspects of his motivations: the desire for revenge on his brother and his brother's accomplices. This desire is obviously limited to some extent. Prospero does not kill Antonio, and moreover does not give many signs that he might have wanted to at any point (presumably, had he felt otherwise, it would not have been too difficult a task once Antonio strayed into the orbit of his power). So, the revenge is not bloody in the way that it might have been. Nonetheless, striking back at his brother, stripping him of his stolen title, and cutting him off from the possibility of succession are among the most concrete aspects of the Duke's plan.[13] The puzzle arises in relation to what *else* Prospero might want from him. Evidently, the sorcerer's ambitions are thwarted in one respect, or they certainly appear to be. In the exchange with Ariel prior to the final confrontation in the play, Prospero states: "The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent, / The sole drift of my purpose

[12] On the link between Prospero and Medea (and Sycorax), see: Orgel, "Introduction," 20-23 and 53. The extract from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is reproduced as "Appendix E: Medea's Incantation" in the Oxford edition, 239-41. It appears as Appendix D in the Arden edition, 147-150.

[13] On the statecraft of Prospero's scheme, Orgel writes: "[If] Miranda is the heir to the dukedom, Milan through marriage will become part of the kingdom of Naples, not the other way round. What this means is that Prospero has recouped his throne from his brother only to deliver it over, upon his death, to the King of Naples once again. The usurping Antonio stands condemned, but the effects of the usurpation, the alliance with Alonso and the reduction of Milan to a Neapolitan fiefdom are, through Miranda's wedding, confirmed and legitimized. Prospero has not really regained his lost dukedom – his 'dukedom yet unbowed':" he has usurped his brother's. … Prospero has now arranged matters so that his death will remove Antonio's last link with the ducal power. His grave is the ultimate triumph over his brother. If we look at the marriage in this way, giving away Miranda is as much a means of preserving Prospero's authority as of relinquishing it." (Orgel, "Introduction," 54-55.)

doth extend / Not a frown further" (5.1.28-30). But the conditional clause in this statement is never satisfied. Alonso repents and expresses remorse, yet Antonio – far more the object of the Duke's ire – never does. Alonso returns the dukedom to Prospero at 5.1.118, after which Prospero nonetheless insists on performatively re-taking it from his brother himself. Nothing is offered or exchanged by either. Orgel's gloss on the sequence seems apt:

> The point is not only that Antonio does not repent here: he also is not *allowed* to repent. Even his renunciation of the crown is Prospero's act: "I do… require / My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know, / Thou must restore" (5.1.131-134). In Prospero's drama, there is no room for Antonio to act of his own free will.[14]

Does this mean that Prospero's wishes have been satisfied by the end, or not? The question takes on an added resonance in light of the fact that – beyond Sycorax and Ariel – Antonio is the other significant figure of magic in the play. This is how Prospero describes him to Miranda:

> Thy false uncle…
> Being once perfected how to grant suits,
> How to deny them, who t'advance, and who
> To trash for overtopping, new created
> The creatures that were mine, I say: or changed 'em,
> Or else new formed 'em; having both the key
> Of officer and office, set all hearts i'th' state

[14] Orgel, "Prospero's Wife", 11.

To what tune pleased his ear… (1.2.78-85).

Are Antonio's machinations so extraordinary? From one angle, they may simply appear as the standard business of Renaissance courtly politics. Strier – in an essay centred on the contrast between the "normal" politics beyond the island and the magically informed politics upon it – stresses the fundamentally mundane nature of Antonio's doings here, even if the latter practiced his political art with exceptional skill.[15] But, as Stier notes, this is evidently not at all how the manipulations strike Prospero, who struggles to find as much as the right ideas to describe them, variously assigning his brother quasi-divine powers of creation, form-giving, and control over the inner lives of other men as he recounts the fateful transformation of the Milanese court.[16] As well as being a means with which to express his incredulity, the comparison of Antonio's skill to magic appears to serve a defensive function for Prospero. Presumably, if your followers betrayed you under the influence of an evil spell (or something like it) then you don't need to think too hard about what you might have done to alienate them. The metaphor is clearly doubled-edged, though, since it has the effect of blurring the distinction between the Duke qua magic user and a figure he holds up as his moral antithesis. Elsewhere Prospero establishes a similarly unintended equivalence between himself and Sycorax.[17]

The larger point, in any case, is that Antonio is symbolically positioned not just as Prospero's chief antagonist in the story but as a rival magical power. This is a tremendously odd piece of framing by the former Duke. After all, this here is a character who really *does* wield

[15] Strier, "'I am Power'," 12-13.
[16] Strier observes that the break between lines 81 and 82 ("new created / The creatures that were mine…") for a moment gives Antonio the aspect of the Christian God, "creating out of nothing, rather than the Platonic demiurge creating out of matter. … This is an image of political power as truly transformative and godlike." (Ibid., 12-13.)
[17] Prospero unwittingly identifies himself with Sycorax when he threatens to reenact the witch's punishment of Ariel (1.2.274-280 and 294-296).

sorcerous power comparing a thoroughly nonmagical skill to sorcery. The category of "magic" seems to function here, for a moment, in the more colloquial sense – as way of gesturing towards something Prospero cannot entirely understand.[18] Beyond being an important piece of information about the Duke's personality, this also implies an essential difference (from his perspective) between his sort of magic and Antonio's. His brother is able to do something wondrous that Prospero cannot. What is it? There are two things, in fact. On the one hand, it is as though Antonio possess a kind of mastery over thought. What Prospero marvels at is not his brother's ability to get others to do as he wishes (coercive force is no mystery to him) but rather his apparent capacity to have them think and feel as he wishes. Indeed, it is not just *other* people's thoughts that seem to offer no resistance to Antonio. Prospero says that his brother, in his theft of the dukedom, was "like one / Who, having into truth by telling of it, / Made such a sinner of his memory / To credit his own lie" (1.2.99-102). Even inside his own mind, then, Antonio is not held in check by truthfulness, apparently able to believe whatever is most expedient to him.

This is only Prospero's image of his brother, of course, and so hardly impartial. Yet it chimes with what we see of Antonio for ourselves. When the rest of the royal party are magically put to sleep, he quickly and easily persuades his parallel, Sebastian (Alonso's brother), to agree to a murder plot against Alonso. At the same time, Prospero's brother displays a supreme confidence in his own ability to win compliance from the surviving men – except Gonzalo – after the deed is performed ("They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;" 2.1.286).[19] Moreover, by Antonio's own admission, there is nothing within him that threatens to interfere with this purpose, just as there was nothing in him that interfered with his treachery against Prospero:

[18] Ergo, genuine magic is the opposite of "magical" for the sorcerer in one respect: he understands how it works.
[19] Cf. Strier, "'I am Power'," 13-14.

SEBASTIAN: But for your conscience?

ANTONIO: 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! (2.1.273-278)

Beyond being evidence of Antonio's bedrock cynicism and his powers of manipulation, his answer to Sebastian's question corresponds with Prospero's description of his brother as someone for whom (so to speak) thought is not an obstacle. Whether "candied" chiefly means "frozen" or "sugared" can be debated.[20] But if it is the former, it squares more explicitly with something Antonio says earlier in the same exchange. "Well? I am standing water," says Sebastian, as he waits to hear the details of the incipient plot. "I'll teach you how to flow," responds the brother. On the basis of what we see, water is not an inapt metaphor for the quality of Antonio's thinking in general – though it might be constrained by external barriers, it is incapable of creating an obstacle for itself. His complete lack of conscience as well as the pliability of his memory (added to his contempt for fear and idleness; 2.1.221-226) means that Antonio's inner life seems never to produce the types of conflicts or impasses that might bedevil a more scrupulous mind. Obstacles of the soul melt away before they touch him. In this much,

[20] Kermode argues for "sugared" in the Arden edition, for example (58). Orgel, Peter Holland and David Bevington prefer "frozen" in – respectively – the Oxford edition (140); *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare* (eds. Orgel and Braunmuller, 746); and *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (ed. Bevington, Glenview: Scott, Foresman & Co, Third Edition, 1980, 1510).

his closest counterpart in *The Tempest* is the other figure of unfettered (and inhuman) spirit – Ariel.[21]

The antagonism between the two Milanese brothers seems to prefigure a contest between two different areas of magical power. On one side is a sorcerer who has dominion over the outer world, and on the other is a "sorcerer" with control over inner life. But the freedom of thought is not the only quality Prospero assigns to his brother's magic. As we've seen, he also describes Antonio as a creator. Why? The most obvious reading of this part of the passage is that Antonio's powers of persuasion are such that (at least in his brother's heated memory) he can effectively fashion wholly new people out of those who fall under this sway. Still, it is not entirely obvious why Prospero's imagination reaches for the metaphor of creation – as opposed to corruption, for example, which might seem to be a more obvious analogy – and, as Strier points out, the power the sorcerer hints at goes beyond just transmutation and into the realm of truly miraculous creation out of nothing.[22] The significance of this comparison only becomes fully legible, I think, if we understand it as essentially a reflection of the frustrations and uncertainties Prospero has bound up with his own power. But in order to get that far, we need to move more directly onto the topic of how the sorcerer conceives of the purpose of his magic, and what he is and is not able to do with it.

[21] Having said this, Ariel does seem to suffer from an attack of conscience in at least one instance – when he fatefully refused Sycorax's commands, for which he was punished with imprisonment ("thou wast a spirit too delicate / To act her earthy and abhorred commands," in Prospero's retelling; 1.2.272-273). In that sense, Antonio is even *less* constrained than the spirit.
[22] See: fn.16, above.

Strier's analysis of the relationship between Prospero's magic and his psychological needs presents a good framework and foil for all of these issues. The starting point of his essay is the idea of employing texts which had appropriated *The Tempest* to elucidate colonial situations in the twentieth century – principally Dominique O. Mannoni's *Psychologie de la colonisation* (1950) and Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) – as resources for understanding Shakespeare's play.[23] The core suggestion is that *The Tempest* lends itself so well to these appropriations because it is already, at its heart, a play about the psychology of colonialism (a point which its latter-day interpreters help us to appreciate). This view also provides a powerful explanation for the centrality of magic to its plot: "What Shakespeare seems to have intuited and embodied in the figure of Prospero is that the Renaissance idea of magic and the idea of colonial administration have the same fantasy content: namely, the idea of omnipotence."[24]

From this perspective, the magic in *The Tempest* is both the instrument and illustration of a certain fantasy of dominance. It "belongs" on the island inasmuch as the island – qua colonial site – is the place where this type of fantasy finds a special opportunity for its expression, via the governing structure of the colonial overclass. Whence the peculiar spatial limit on Prospero's power. It cannot be right, as Strier notes, to think of Prospero as a "straightforward" Renaissance magus because an ordinary magus would be able to employ his (or her) sorcery anywhere. But if the Duke's magic is in some way dependent on the political situation in which he is embroiled, then it makes perfect sense that it would not be able to operate beyond its limits.[25] It is as though,

[23] Césaire's *Une Tempête* appears in English as *A Tempest*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: TCG Translations, 2002). Mannoni's *Psychologie de la colonisation* appears as *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland (New York: Prager, 1964).
[24] Strier, "'I am Power'," 16.
[25] Ibid., 16-17.

in composing *The Tempest*, Shakespeare made note of the fantasy of compliance which seems to be written into the idea of the Renaissance mage – the thought of having special servants, wholly obedient to one's will – and likewise how the colonial situation might appear to be the best concrete opportunity for the indulgence of such a fantasy, and then he synthesised these two thoughts together, so that the identities became in a way co-dependent. If one is a colonial ruler, then one is thereby a kind of magician; and in order to be a magician (a "real" magician) one needs to be a colonial ruler. The character of Prospero is a result of this conflation.

This perspective also offers us a picture of the sorcerer's central motivations. The defining feature of the character, on this view, is his wish to wield power over others (if it were not, he would be neither a coloniser nor a magician, per the fantasy-logic Strier describes). Strier quotes Mannoni's comment that the role of a colonial administrator is the ideal occupation for someone who possesses "a grave lack of sociability combined with a pathological urge to dominate."[26] Not only does this seem like an apt description of Prospero in a number of ways, *The Tempest* appears to deliberately foreground the psychological dimensions of his rule. By the standards of Renaissance England, observes Strier, the Duke looks like a "very odd colonizer" because he displays no interest whatsoever in cultivating the land. "He is not, in fact, by the English definition, a colonizer at all. … Cultivation, farming, and building were central to the English conception of colonization; they were what made colonization a 'civilizing' process."[27] But there is no evidence that any of these operations have taken place during Prospero's reign, either because he does not know how to instruct his servants in the work, or because he doesn't care to. When Caliban explains to Stephano and Trinculo how he might best serve them, the

[26] *Prospero and Caliban*, 102; quoted in Strier, "I am Power," 18.
[27] Strier, "'I am Power'," 17.

model of life he describes to the clowns is subsistence off the land.[28] Magnificent images of agriculture and cultivation appear in the betrothal masque in Act 4, but their status as apparitions becomes all the more conspicuous against this backdrop of entirely untended nature.[29] The island seems to feature no architecture and no livestock at all.

The absence of cultivation, however, presses the point that *The Tempest* is about the mindset rather than the spoils of colonisation: "Shakespeare's emphasis… is not on what Prospero has done but on the relationships that he has established."[30] The character of the Duke is hence only fully intelligible in connection to the master-servant bonds he has with the non-European characters on the island. I cannot, for the sake of concision, do justice the riches of Strier's analysis on this point, but suffice to say that there is no shortage of evidence in the text for the idea that Prospero is driven by a compulsive need to impose his will upon others. The merest suggestion of disobedience from an underling is enough to trigger his rage. When Ariel (quite mildly) reminds Prospero of the conditions of the contract of service they have agreed to, the sorcerer berates the spirit for his ingratitude and forgetfulness of duty, the admonishment which ends with him vowing to re-enact Sycorax's punishment – a dozen years confinement within a tree – if Ariel so much as "murmur'st" any more displeasure (1.2.294-296).[31] Caliban is

[28] "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 clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee / Young scamels from the rock." (2.2.161-166) Earlier, Caliban recounts similar services when Prospero and Miranda first came to the island (1.2.337-338).

[29] On the images of cultivation in the masque and their broader significance for the play, see: Gillies, "Shakespeare's Virginian Masque. Strier also takes up the topic in "Civilization and its Discontents."

[30] Strier, "'I am Power'," 18.

[31] "'Murmuring'… was the standard English term for biblical reluctance toward God's commands," notes Strier (Ibid., 20). The relationship between the Duke and Ariel is marked by affection in places, but the condition for this is perfect servility on the part of the spirit. Prospero refers to Ariel as "my spirit" (1.2.206 and *passim*) or "servant" (4.1.33) when his mood is cheerful, but when he is displeased by Ariel the label changes to "slave" (1.2.270). For Ariel's part, he refers to Prospero as "great master, grave sir" in his first line of dialogue (1.2.189) and later makes sure to refer to him as "sir" or "master" when the Duke's temper frays (1.2.256, 260, 268, 293, 296, 299). It is evident in such moments that even if the relationship between the two is far less hostile, generally, than the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, it is not fundamentally different in kind.

told that he will be punished if he so much as obeys his master's orders "unwillingly" (1.2.367). Ferdinand is called a "traitor" (1.2.461/470) and an "imposter" (1.2.478) in his initial encounter with the Duke – reprimands that are partly meant as show for Miranda, but which nonetheless carry the peculiar suggestion that Ferdinand somehow owes loyalty to Prospero, a man he has only just met. As a matter of course, the sorcerer frames his displeasure with other characters in terms of some recognition that he has a right which is, unjustly and outrageously, being withheld from him.

What becomes clear in the aggregate is that Prospero does not understand his authority as being limited to his subjects' behaviour: he stakes a claim to their inner lives, too. This is why anything short of wholehearted obedience is classified by him as a betrayal. The same dynamic means that the Duke asserts a right to decide on his subjects' behalf who (and even what) they really are. He attempts this manoeuvre with both Ariel and Caliban; trying, in effect, to force his own view of his servants' identities upon them. Orgel notes that the sorcerer has never met Sycorax – who died before his arrival – and so all or most of what he knows about the witch must have been gleaned from Ariel.[32] Nevertheless, in his response to the spirit's whisper of disobedience, Prospero commandeers the story of Sycorax and uses it as a cudgel to "prove" how Ariel's loyalty is owed to him, something which he also claims to have needed to do many times in the past ("I must / Once in a month recount what thou hast been, / Which thou forget'st", 1.2.261-263). He takes a similarly blunt approach with Caliban, combining physical coercion with a percussive insistence on his own opinion of the islander's irredeemably foul nature (1.2.344-348). In both instances, Prospero equates a lack of perfect adherence to his version of events with deliberate falsehood. Caliban is called a "most lying slave" for omitting mention of

[32] Orgel, "Introduction," 19.

his attempted rape of Miranda – not the same thing as lying about it – and Ariel is likewise accused of lying when he denies having forgotten his debt to Prospero (1.2.344/257). "For Prospero," writes Strier, "not to understand and tell one's story as he understands it is to lie. Power is quite clearly shown here as including the capacity to impose upon others one's own version of their history."[33] Whether the Duke genuinely believes his accusations or whether they represent a more cynical tactic of control, it is the most unadorned evidence in the play of his wish to extend his power into the hearts and minds of his subjects.

Yet this desire is essentially unenforceable. It is not, of course, that one person can never deliberately engineer a change in the inner life of another (Antonio's success in politics is proof of that, and by the play's end even Prospero has managed to elicit something of a transformation in Alonso). But there is no way of *guaranteeing* such compliance. Although the sorcerer can exert unchallenged control over the bodies of those on his island, he is fundamentally helpless, for example, to rewrite Caliban's heart.[34] ("Thought is free," sing the clowns as they plot to murder the Duke [3.2.121].) From this angle, Prospero's repeated efforts to force his own view of reality upon others has an air of wishful self-deception. "Shakespeare may here be pointing not to the emptiness of the fictions of power but to the fullness of their fantasy-content, to the capacities that those in power wish they had."[35]

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[33] Strier, "'I am Power'," 23.

[34] The Duke acknowledges this incapacity, albeit he dresses it up in the language of moral opprobrium: "A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-189). "His spirits hear me, / And yet I needs must curse," is Caliban account of the same deadlock (2.2.3-4); a remark which at once attests to the inescapability of the sorcerer's power and to its essential limitations. GOOD

[35] Strier, "'I am Power'," 27. When Prospero paralyses Ferdinand in their initial encounter, he tells the prince that the reason he cannot move is because "thy conscience / Is so possessed with guilt" (1.2.471). The moment is ambiguous enough to make room for the competing possibilities we have been discussing. We ought to assume, given what we know about Prospero's power, that this claim is untrue. But if so, then what is the reasoning behind it? We can read it as a cynical tactic of domination, an effort to convince Ferdinand of something – a sort of moral debt to Prospero – that will make him more acquiescent to commands in future. Alternatively, and more unsettlingly, it might be taken (as it is by Strier) as something less calculated, where Prospero's fantasy of mind control is momentarily exposed.

In this light, the Duke's inability to draw remorse from Antonio at the conclusion looks like a sign of a recurrent and fundamental problem in his ambitions. In Strier's words:

> [Just] as the play is explicit that Prospero renounces his power [at the end], it is explicit that he desires to transform his enemies. He wants to affect their minds, their hearts, their consciences. This… is one of the great fantasies of power in the period, in and out of the colonial context. Prospero's aim, repeatedly highlighted, is not only to get his dukedom back; he could do that merely by revealing himself. His aim is to produce genuine contrition in his enemies, "heart-sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" (3.3.81-82) – the precise Protestant definition of penitence.[36]

But only God can produce this penitence.[37] The human impossibility of commanding such a response can be expressed in more purely conceptual terms, too. Contrition, like loyalty or respect, has to be freely given in order to be what it is. It is not, therefore, that Prospero's magic only *happens* to be unable to force heart-sorrow from his brother (where perhaps another sort of power would be effective). It is that – short of being God – there is no unilateral way of satisfying a desire for this type of change. Antonio's political art is a one-way magic only in Prospero's imagination. Indeed, the fact that the sorcerer resorts to this image at all perhaps attests to what Strier calls his fundamental inability to acknowledge the independent reality of other people.[38] If we were to judge solely from this example, the only way the Duke can even conceive of persuasion is as a process which in no respect depends on its object's volition.

[36] Ibid., 26.
[37] Ibid., 27.
[38] Ibid., 21 and 24.

There is much to agree with in Strier's reading. To take only the most general points: it is surely true that the spatial limit on Prospero's power means that one has to think of the magic as being connected to the island in some noncontingent fashion. Moreover, it is also intuitive to regard the magic as being somehow an extension of Prospero's psychology, meaning that these three phenomena (the sorcery, the island, and the Duke's psyche) ought to be interpreted in tandem. Finally, it is hard to disagree with the idea that the connection between these three elements has something to do with power and its limitations. Prospero qua coloniser-magician functions as a personification of the human will; or rather, the will as it would appear if it were unencumbered by the contingent frustrations and inadequacies of ordinary life. But this means he exemplifies a deeper sort of finitude, too. If the sorcerer is unable to get what he wants, it is obviously not through lack of might at his disposal but because the objects of his desire are in some way beyond the will's purview.

Looking at the play through the lens of the idea of omnipotence, we can see an insuperable tension underlying all of Prospero's ruling activity on the island. Once a fantasy of untrammelled power strays toward a desire for recognition and not just compliance, a dilemma emerges. The subject is at once compelled to try and seize what cannot be had by force, and yet dissuaded from being able to recognise the impossibility of this wish, since to do so would require acknowledging their own lack of control over others (another violation of the fantasy). The Duke's strange performance with Antonio in the final scene makes more sense if we see it as an expression of this contradiction. Giving his brother the freedom to speak in this crucial moment would represent an unacceptable loss of control, and therefore Prospero does not permit it. But in doing so he also robs himself of the chance for what he really wants from his brother. More generally, this also allows us to make some sense of the atmosphere of weariness and

disappointment that shadows all of the displays of power on the island; the nagging sense of futility and the wish for oblivion and sleep which is repeatedly expressed by the characters.

Nonetheless, there are problems in thinking of Prospero's urge to dominate as the unadulterated core of his character, and likewise with seeing his relationship to power solely through the colonial frame. The issue is not so much that these interpretations are wrong but that they are partial, and therefore struggle to explain important aspects of the character. My own view is that this partiality can be addressed by giving more attention to the revenge theme in *The Tempest*, although this also entails a slight re-evaluation of the significance of the colonial setting (and in turn indicates larger issues beyond each of these compartments). For the moment, I will focus only on the aspects of *The Tempest* where Strier's reading loses some of its purchase. As noted, a key tenet of this analysis is that the island is – if not perfectly, then fundamentally – a place which offers profound gratification to Prospero. If indeed his most prized activity is the assertion of power over others, then the Duke has, after a fashion, found his home in exile. Strier puts it very plainly: "Life on the island… is not Prospero's nightmare but his wish-fulfilment dream."[39]

But this raises the obvious question – flagged in the first section of this chapter – of what the Duke's reasons for leaving the island at the end could be. In the abstract, *The Tempest* supplies a number of possible answers to this. There is his wish to reclaim his dukedom, for example; or to ensure the dynastic match of Miranda and Ferdinand; or perhaps even a desire to ready himself for death (5.1.310-311). For an account such as Strier's, however, the onus is to explain how some or all of these motivations relate to the fantasy of power which finds itself fulfilled so spectacularly on the island. Insofar as renouncing his magic and departing from the

[39] Strier, "'I am Power'," 17.

island represents a break with the structure of wish-fulfilment, then clearly Prospero is in the end motivated by something that takes precedence over his urge to dominate (although we can inquire, of course, whether this counter-motivation was present from the beginning or if it arose over the course of the play). If, on the other hand – and in spite of appearances – the Duke's choices at the end *are* consistent with his domineering impulses, this needs to be elucidated for us, although obviously there is a certain outward implausibility to the idea. It would also weaken the connection between the fantasy of omnipotence and the island locale.

The latter isn't necessarily a fatal objection, since as we know the function of the island in Strier's reading is merely to attach the fantasy of power to a certain type of political arrangement. Presumably, Prospero could be just as much of an aspiring tyrant outside of a colonial setting, but colonialism is what allows him to realise his fantasies in a special sense (thus "transforming" him into a sorcerer). This, however, is only to return to the same problem from a new angle. Why would Prospero give up colonial politics for those on the mainland, if it is only the former that offers him this unique gratification? Nobody else in the play has the power to force him to give it up, if he doesn't want to. In Césaire's *Une Tempête*, one of the major changes to the plot (noted by Strier) is that Prospero ultimately refuses to leave the island, and this modification to the original has a deep rationale behind it. The eventual terminus of the coloniser mindset – as both Césaire and Strier (building on Mannoni) understand it – would seem to be a type of psychological dependence of the coloniser upon the structure he presides over. In virtue of the colony meeting the coloniser's emotional needs so uniquely, he become addicted to his position of rule, unable to live happily anywhere else.[40] *Une Tempête* carries this insight to its

[40] This is precisely one of the insults that Césaire's Caliban hurls at Prospero: "Your vocation is to hassle me. / And that's why you'll stay, / just like those guys who founded the colonies / and who now can't live anywhere else. / You're just an old addict, that's what you are!" (*A Tempest*, 62.)

logical conclusion. But – of course – this is not how Shakespeare's plays ends. Prospero abandons his (magical) power voluntarily. He gives no indication of staying. Either something has changed inside him, then, or the simple fantasy of dominance did not exhaust his motivations to begin with.

One way of parsing the issue would be this: for Shakespeare's Prospero, is power on the island a means to an end or is it an end in itself? On Strier's reading, the answer is both, in a sense. Power is an end in itself because the Duke has a pathological need to dominate; he doesn't have to *accomplish* anything in order to take pleasure from this scenario (recall the total absence of cultivation on the island). At the same time, as Strier makes clear, there is also a definite endeavour that the magic is employed in the service of: namely, the moral transformation of his enemies. So, this is to say that Prospero has two different types of project on the island. One is more like an Aristotelian *energeia* (ongoing, complete-in-every-moment) and the other is more like a *kinêsis* (finite, moves from incompletion to completion). Given that Strier argues that the thematic emphasis in the play is not on what Prospero has brought about, in terms of concrete achievements, but rather on the relationships he has established, I take it that part of the critique of colonialism being offered in his reading is that the colonial enterprise is an *energeia* which deceptively presents itself as a *kinêsis*. Prospero may be sincerely outraged at his inability to "improve" Caliban, but the essential purpose of the mindset the sorcerer embodies is the maintenance of a particular structure of power, not the transformation (by education or other means) of his subjects from one state of being into another, save insofar as this is necessary for the underlying aim of control. In that respect, it is a static enterprise. Colonisers may not understand things this way – they may wholeheartedly believe in their "civilising" mission, for

example – but the essential thrust of the style of critique which can be found in *The Tempest* and its relevant interpreters is that this belief would be a type of false consciousness.

The question, then, is whether this picture explains Prospero's motivations in the play exhaustively, i.e. whether his every *kinêsis* on the island in the end proves to be subordinate to an *energeia*. And here the answer would seem to clearly be no. The Duke's efforts to wrest a change of heart from Antonio bear a very close affinity to his efforts to "improve" Caliban – not least in their lack of success – but on no level is he trying to transform his brother *for the sake of* maintaining a colonial power structure (perhaps he is trying to restore an old power structure, but that is different). The fundamental layer of this part of the sorcerer's project is dynamic, in principle, rather than static; it is about making something change rather than keeping something in place. This also suggests that the magic in the play is about more than just the colonial relations we find there. Prospero is applying outside of that specific political context.

Suppose we hold on to the idea that Prospero has a driving need for power and recognition, but think of the island as having more of a two-sided relationship to this need than the notion of simple wish-fulfilment suggests. How might such a thought be unpacked? As it happens, the colonial aspect of *The Tempest* provides us with a clue. Although in one respect it must be true that the coloniser's situation is the ideal site from which to act out a fantasy of dominance, from the perspective of the would-be despot it is also possible to see how it might appear to be infected by a type of restrictiveness. One gains "permission" for this particular mode of dominance only at the price of being excluded from the true centre of social and political power: the metropole. For that reason, any fantasy of omnipotence which is let loose by the coloniser must be conscious (on some level) of its own limitations. Perhaps this apprehension of confinement would bother some personality types more than others, but at least in Prospero's

example we can see how it dovetails with a very clear sense in which his status on the island represents (for him) a humiliating relegation and dismissal. The Duke's entire life there is a reminder of his inability to foresee or defend himself and his daughter against Antonio's betrayal. True, he now wields the sort of wondrous power that any normal ruler can only dream of, but – if this power is tied to his presence on the island – his strength has come about only because of his utter incompetence and helplessness in a moment of life-defining importance. On the material level, the Duke is a deposed lord presiding over a tiny kingdom, with a single servant to do any menial labour ("I am all the subjects that you have," sneers Caliban; 1.2.341) and what's more a servant who despises him and takes every opportunity to denounce his regime. Even his own name, with its vivid connotations of success and prestige, might sound like a kind of joke in the circumstances.

Seen from this angle, the magic in *The Tempest* is an index of the Duke's powerlessness not only in an instrumental respect – i.e. attesting to his inability to bring about the type of moral changes he desires – but also in a deeper, more atmospheric one. There is a fundamental ambivalence which shadows his displays of might on the island. This strange admixture of absolute dominance within a frame that somehow undermines that power on its own terms adds another layer of meaning to the colonial setting, and it is also what connects the colonial aspects of the play with the theme of revenge – vengefulness being a condition which (at least in some cases) also exemplifies an oddly self-undermining dynamic. Indeed, it is striking, when one notices it, the degree to which the basic apparatus of *The Tempest*'s plot conveys the feeling of a revenge fantasy. That is not to say that Prospero is in fact hallucinating the events of the story, only that its action corresponds uncannily to how someone in his position (betrayed, humiliated, driven from his home) *might* fantasise about their revenge if they had no other recourse. There is,

first, the never-wholly-explained acquisition of immense and godlike powers, then the mysterious intervention of fate (or luck or Providence) which places every one of his enemies at his mercy.[41] But most of all, there is the shadowy sensation that even for the figure at the apex of control in the scenario, there is still something demeaning, dissatisfying, and somehow insubstantial about the whole business. A revenge fantasy is invariably a reminder of one's weakness – or, at least, of one's damaged condition – after all.

In his book on Shakespearean comedy and romance, Frye observed that "[the] greater the emphasis on reconciliation in comedy, the more the defeated forces of the comedy tend to become states of mind rather than individuals."[42] This is a useful remark inasmuch as it helps to motivate the thought that part of the target of Prospero's *kinêsis* on the island – the thing he is trying to "defeat" – is not Antonio or the other Europeans, but something within himself. *Grievance* is the name I would give to this condition, where this stands for a form of injured vengefulness (although there is also a great deal more it comprises). But I will save the proper analysis of this state for the next chapter. What we are now in a better position to see, in any case, is the way in which *The Tempest* invites this sort of reading, and how it can work as a compliment to the colonial psychology Strier identifies in the play. If the magic (and the island) in some way represents the fulfilment of a wish, we have to understand that fulfilment as something it makes sense for Prospero to want to abandon, too. To put it more strongly, I think the truest reading of *The Tempest* is one that finds a way to articulate the sense in which the fulfilment of this wish dislocates and traps the Duke. (This also perhaps makes more sense of the

[41] The sheer fortuitousness of Alonso and company sailing past just the right island at just the right moment is something Prospero makes explicit note of. "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…" (1.2.178-82). We are not given any significant evidence that Prospero is lying, and his explanation seems to fit with the idea that his sorcery has a restricted area of influence.
[42] Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 91.

oddity of Prospero as a coloniser who performs no cultivation of the land: there is some essential manner in which the island, for him, *cannot* be made into a home.) Fundamentally, it is not that the sorcerer doesn't want to leave the island, but that he is unable to do so, for long as whatever creates the need for his power endures. The dream and the nightmare are perhaps not so easily distinguished.

Does this change the political meaning Strier finds in *The Tempest*? I am not so sure it does, save insofar as it underlines the fact that the ending of the story is likely to at least complicate any reading of the play that sees it as boosting the colonial venture (because whatever the logic of empire is, surely it does not involve giving up one's territory).[43] Nonetheless, *The Tempest* remains an illustration of a type of pathological fantasy colonial power has a special capacity to speak to, and of how part of the lot of the colonised beyond their direct coercion is that they are forced to inhabit the fantasy of their oppressors, after a fashion. One of the darker ironies of *The Tempest* is that although Prospero's conscious efforts to control the inner lives of those around him repeatedly meet with failure, there is a more insidious sense in which his mind does indeed structure the experience of everyone who finds themselves on his island. This is what we shall begin to explore in the next section.

3

Even if the colonial interpretation does not explain Prospero's motivations comprehensively, Strier's underlying contention that the source of the magic in *The Tempest* is a kind of alchemy between the island and the Duke must be correct. "The intellectual fantasy embodied in *The*

[43] In Strier's view, "Shakespeare can be seen as giving something close to a negative answer" to the question of whether the colonial project in Virginia was worth the exertion ("'I am Power'," 29). As he notes, the one clear political success Prospero manages during the play is distinct from magical-colonial politics: the dynastic match of Miranda to Ferdinand. In the end, *The Tempest* seems to valorise the practice of "normal" over "magical" rulership.

Tempest is of narcissistic withdrawal producing – quite literally – magical power."[44] True enough, but even within the story we are shown that the fantasy of withdrawal is not sufficient in itself. Prospero's earlier moment of narcissistic cocooning – to his "secret studies" in Milan – produced no corresponding yield of power that we are aware of. That seems to have happened only when he arrived on the island.

It is important, though, not to confuse the Duke's "full" acquisition of magic with the mere fact of Ariel coming into his service. However useful the spirit is to the sorcerer, it must be the case that the latter's power substantially proceeded their arrangement, since – as noted – their contract was only made possible by the fact that he was able to free Ariel from the pine, an achievement which already elevated his magic beyond Sycorax's. It is equally true that no other character in the play (with the possible exception of Sycorax, although she is not a direct presence) experiences the island as a catalyst for their wishes in the same explicit fashion as Prospero.[45] This implies that, rather than being some generalised site of wish-fulfilment, the island bears a special relationship to something Prospero brought with him from Milan – his books perhaps, but in a deeper sense a desire or a set of desires. Again, Strier's interpretation draws these points together very effectively: the island-qua-colony is necessary for Prospero's fantasy of dominance because colonialism is what allows that fantasy to become "real." But if the colonial reading is only partial, then it falls to any further interpretation to give an expanded account of this link between the character's inner life and the setting. (With respect to my view

[44] Strier, "'I am Power'," 25.
[45] Sycorax's wishes are shown to be directly frustrated in a way that Prospero's are not: Ariel refuses one of her commands (1.2.270-274). Kermode argues that this is a result of Sycorax being "a geoist… whose power is limited by the fact that she could command, as a rule, only devils and the lowest orders of spirits," rather than a theurgist like Prospero ("Introduction," xl). For Kermode's discussion of Ariel in relation to the magic users, see: Appendix B in the Arden edition (142-145).

specifically, the question would be: what makes the island a particularly appropriate setting for a story about grievance?)

So, the question of the origin of the magic in *The Tempest* breaks into two. On the one hand, there is the island, which in some mysterious fashion works to concretise a certain type of wish. On the other, there is Prospero – who brings such a wish with him. By now, it seems safe to say that the sorcerer's underlying desire has to do with power. What else is there to know about it? A great deal more texture is available to us if we turn our attention to the backstory delivered in the second scene.

But before coming to that, let me make a brief comment on how what we have discussed so far in this chapter bears on the topic of the previous one. Although it is quite far from his focus, another interesting feature of Strier's essay is how it implicitly touches on the idea of a kind of reality-altering (or even world-creating) power of mind. Thinking of the sorcerer's magic as a concretised extension of his psychology has the obvious, if peculiar, consequence of implying a type of porousness between inner life and outer world in the play. Via the enigmatic influence of the island and the power it confers, Prospero's wish manufactures the reality that all of the other characters in the story occupy. This is the equivalent, within the plot, of the "emergence" of a coherent dramatic world bound together by the sorcerer's magic that the audience experiences as they enter the main compartment of the action. And if we keep in mind the underlying, doubtful nature of that official world, we will also find that it reflects something important about the thinker at its core.

But to return to the topic of the backstory: one of the many odd lacunae in *The Tempest* is that the island itself rarely features as an explicit object of thought for Prospero. Despite having lived there for twelve years, the former Duke never utters a direct opinion about its qualities or

significance, except on two brief occasions – once in a cryptic remark to Miranda that it was by both injury and blessing that they were brought there (1.2.61-63) and later in the bald assertion that he was placed on the island "To be the lord on't" (5.1.163). The history of his rule is likewise left mostly to the imagination. One thing we *are* told is that its character has not been homogenous. The reign is split into two distinct periods: a relatively benign phase in which Prospero, Miranda and Caliban had formed a kind of amalgamated family (1.2.332-337), and then a second, antagonistic phase after Caliban had been thrown out of Prospero's lodgings for attempting to rape Miranda (1.2.344-350).[46] This schism opens up the possibility that, for the Duke, existence on the island had once been more or less satisfying until the break with Caliban occurred. Is this a plausible reading? *The Tempest* offers us no hard proof either in favour or against it. But there is one key sequence that implies an answer in the negative. Immediately after reassuring his daughter that the spectacle of the wreck has not equated to any real damage or loss of life, Prospero tells her to sit down because she "must now know further":

MIRANDA: You have often
Begun to tell me what I am, but stopped,
And left me to a bootless inquisition,
Concluding, "Stay, not yet."
PROSPERO: The hour's now come;
The very minute bids thee ope thine ear. (1.2.33-37)

[46] I agree with Strier that there is no compelling reason to think that the report of the earlier, more harmonious phase of Prospero's reign – reported by Caliban in his first, angry confrontation with the sorcerer – is false. Prospero doesn't deny this part of his slave's story, and from what we see of him in the play Caliban is not someone who lies. ("I am Power", 23.)

Setting aside the expository purpose this passage serves – namely, to give a justification for the entire backstory being unfurled in a single sitting – it is of course strange that Prospero, who has been educating his daughter diligently since she was a toddler (1.2.172-175), has never in twelve years told her how they arrived on the island or who they were previously.[47] Evidently, Miranda knows what a duke is and knows what Milan is, but she is amazed to discover that the Duke of Milan is her father (1.2.54-55). What she lacks is not information per se but an identity, and the depth of that lack is suggested by her choice of words: she says she's been waiting to learn *what* she is – not merely who.[48]

At the surface, then, what we learn from this exchange is that life on the island for both Miranda and Prospero has been defined by *waiting* – she for crucial knowledge, he for what he considers the proper time to disclose it. The girl is conscious that their existence has a meaning that her father has (until now) refused to share with her, but no more than that. As we shall discover, she retains a faint but tenable memory of a time from before this location –, ergo she knows that something must have brought them there (1.2.38-52). But the *why* of the island, the answer to the question *why are we here?* remains hidden from her. What we also ascertain, however, is that the Duke has attached a temporal index to this secret. It is not that Miranda cannot or must not know the truth, but that (as he has told her on several previous occasions) she can only know it when what he considers the correct moment has come. From her perspective,

[47] "It has taken [Prospero] twelve years to tell the child one or two things which any decent parent of his intelligence would have passed on long ago." (George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, London: M. Joseph, 1960, 115); quoted by Strier in "'I am Power'," 21.

[48] The implication, I think, is that even the general categories through which one assembles an identity (race, class, sex, nationality, religion, and so forth) have at best a hazy application in Miranda's self-understanding. One would assume that categorical identity of this sort is in large part learnt through comparison and contrast – and how much of this has been available to Miranda on the island? As she conveys to Ferdinand later on, she knows herself to be female but has only a distant and imperfect acquaintance with anything else that the category *female* includes, and likewise only a very limited first-hand knowledge of the category *male* to contrast it with (3.1.48-53).

then, the mystery of the island has both a forward- and a backward-facing aspect. It is shot through with anticipation.

It is impossible to know exactly what Prospero had in mind when he denied Miranda's entreaties in the past. But what we *do* know is that as the play begins his conditions have finally been met, which means that the moment the Duke has been waiting for was not (as it might have been) determined by his daughter being old enough to understand what he would tell her, but rather with a much more specific occasion. The "very minute" that compels the story is the arrival of the royal party to the island. This is a strange detail in a number of ways, but in the first place what it shows us is that in at least one respect, life in this place was uniform for the pair until now. Before this moment (a moment that he either knew or wished would come) Prospero has never felt able or willing to tell Miranda the truth about what happened to them. Hence, strikingly, it is made to appear as if the Duke and his daughter have been living their entire lives here in expectation – albeit quite unwittingly, in her case – of Antonio, Alonso and the rest. Their identity and this event are somehow bound together.

Why does the sorcerer hold back? Psychologically, the most robust answer seems to be that he cannot tolerate his history being known until he is on the very brink of redeeming it. Although he swaddles himself in wounded self-righteousness, the tale Prospero goes on to share with Miranda is in large part a confession of impotence and disastrous failure (moreover, it is being told to perhaps the only person in the world who still believes wholeheartedly in his authority). He is ashamed, in other words, and his reticence is the first hint we are given of the depth of the narcissistic injury he has suffered.

The Tempest, in this way, gives a concrete dimension to the idea of a psychic inheritance. If it is true that Prospero's reason for withholding their history is that he is ashamed of himself,

then we can see that there is also a sense in which he has forced Miranda to live inside his wound. He may not realise that he is doing this (as parents may often fail to realise that they are inflicting something on a child in the process of trying to protect them), and the girl does not recognise the wound for what it is. Nonetheless, it pervades her entire life. The island is all of Miranda's world, or near enough. But in virtue of her father's silence, she relates to her home as something that bears an occluded meaning – the mystery she inhabits is no more than his shame, transformed. This is the first instance in the play of the more insidious truth about how Prospero imposes himself. His inner life "spills out," in ways that are both intentional and not, and forms a kind of structure that subsumes those who are caught in it. The magic is the most basic and literal manifestation of this tendency, but it is not the only one (even without getting to the specifics, it is not hard to intuit how Caliban, in particular, is brought under its sway).

What distinguishes this imposition from the mere display of coercive force is that the structure variously reproduces itself inside the minds of the afflicted. Take Miranda, for example. It is a phenomenological truth about vengefulness that the subject who is consumed by it is simultaneously dominated by the memory (or pseudo-memory) of a past event and yet bent inexorably towards the future – towards the imagined moment at which this loss will supposedly be discharged or redeemed. Without exactly meaning to, Prospero recreates this outline in the soul of his daughter. By framing the mystery of their arrival as he does, he attaches the *why* of the island (and so the *who* and *what* of Miranda) to an unstated future event. The girl's sense of herself is thus inundated with the idea of some fateful subtraction in the past connected to a moment of projected fulfilment ahead. It is like a silhouette of her father's rage.

The psychic imposition upon Miranda is evidence, too, of how profoundly the memory of the catastrophe continues to fester inside the Duke. The past is "alive" on the island in the form

of this structure – and equally it is alive in what we see of his disquiet. It is not difficult, when Prospero finally gives Miranda their history, to apprehend the anger and discomfort seeping through his words. On five separate occasions, he punctuates his tale with remonstrations to the effect that his daughter is not listening to him properly.[49] The complaint barely makes sense on the face of it (she is finally being told the story of her life!) but its presence serves to underline the fact that there is a transference of emotion at work. "Prospero's expostulations take the form of demands for attention and reassurance," notes Orgel. "Miranda makes it clear that her attention is in no danger of wandering, but her father's violence is retrospective, the playing out of an old rage, and Miranda is not really its object."[50] At some point – Prospero does not explain what caused it – he passed over the running of his dukedom to his brother, in order to pursue his studies exclusively. This retirement was the catalyst for Antonio's treachery:

> The government I cast upon my brother,
> And to my state grew stranger, being transported
> And rapt in secret studies.
> …
> I thus neglected worldly ends, all dedicated
> To closeness and the bettering of my mind
> With that which, but by being so retired,
> O'er-prized all popular rate, in my false brother
> Awakened an evil nature, and my trust,

[49] "I pray thee mark me" (1.2.67); "Does thou attend me?" (1.2.78); "thou attend'st not!" (1.2.87); "I pray thee mark me" (1.2.88); Dost thou hear?" (1.2.106). Here, too, there is a technical purpose – to break up Prospero's lengthy monologue. But the question is why Shakespeare chose this method and not another.
[50] (Orgel, "Introduction," 16.)

Like a good parent, did beget of him
A falsehood in its contrary as great
As my trust was, which had, indeed, no limit,
A confidence sans bound. He being thus lorded,
Not only with what my revenue yielded,
But what my power might else exact, like one
Who, having into truth by telling of it,
Made such a sinner of his memory
To credit his own lie, he did believe
He was indeed the duke… (1.2.75-103)

A great deal is contained in this passage, but over and above the content of what Prospero says it bears emphasising, once again, the role this story plays in the informing structure he has created on the island. This is the sorcerer's attempt to explain – to himself as much as Miranda – the puzzle of their situation. *What brought us here?* Hence it marks another way in which the isolated setting grants a type of concreteness to a psychological scenario. What I mean by this is that, tacitly, Prospero is answering the question *why are we here?* in two separate ways. To employ another piece of Aristotelian nomenclature, he is assigning both an *efficient* and a *final* cause to their life on the island – the former being overt and the latter being implicit.[51] The first and more obvious type of cause is all that the Duke appears to be providing as he recounts the sequence of changes that culminated with their arrival. But the delay and the timing of his

[51] Although *efficient cause* is the common terminology, a more accurate definition is "the primary source of change or rest." *Final cause* is best thought of as the telos of change; the that-for-the-sake-of-which change occurs. See: Aristotle, *Physics* II.1. For a useful gloss, see: Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 27-42.

revelation smuggles in the second type of cause alongside it. By implication, it is made to appear as though existence in this place has a purpose and not merely a history. Moreover – as in an eschatology of sorts – the suggestion is that the past can, or should, only be understood in the light of this promised end. It is therefore concealed right up until the moment where the purported *telos* begins to materialise.

Even before the arrival of the royal party, however, this purpose is not just in Prospero's head – and not just in Miranda's, either. John Berryman observes that life in the sorcerer's domain is almost the perfect inverse of the utopian commonwealth Gonzalo imagines when royal party first comes ashore. ("No occupation, all men idle, all, / And women too, but innocent and pure; / No sovereignty… All things in common nature should produce / Without sweat or endeavour", 2.1.152-157.) In reality, everybody works.[52] Prospero is devoted to his learning – to judge from a remark made by Miranda at 3.1.19-21, he studies for at least three hours a day (it is even possible that the sorcerer spends time at his books during the brief course of the action itself). As well as this, the Duke administers his regime and labours over Miranda's education (1.2.171-174). At one point he tutored Caliban as well. Miranda practices her lessons and, before he assaulted her, also apparently helped with Caliban's learning (1.2.352-357).[53] Ariel is in indentured servitude. Caliban performs the physical tasks that allow Prospero and Miranda to subsist, which in turn allows their own labours to continue. ("We cannot miss him," remarks the

[52] Berryman, *Berryman's Shakespeare*, ed. Haffenden (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 157-160. Strier likewise emphasises the role of hard labour on the island and the bondage Prospero both suffers and imposes ("Civilization and its Discontents: Montaigne in *The Tempest*", forthcoming).

[53] There is a longstanding controversy about whether Miranda's lines here ("Abhorrèd slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak…"; 1.2.350-353) ought to be assigned to Prospero instead, given their indelicacy. But this emendation seems to assume something about the girl's character that the text does not force upon us – and she does, after all, have a proximate reason to be angry at Caliban (who, just prior to these insults, expressed his regret that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to rape her; 1.2.348-350). Cf. Orgel's note on p.120 of the Oxford edition of the play and Kermode's note on p.32 of the Arden edition.

Duke. "He does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us," 1.2.311-313.)[54] The first visitor to the island with whom Prospero comes into direct contact, Ferdinand, is immediately set to work hauling logs (3.1.1-15).

If we ask what, if anything, all of this labouring activity is *for* beyond mere survival – and presumably it must have been carrying on in this way for several years by the time of the action – the answer comes back that it's for the sake of the Duke's project of retribution. Every one of these enterprises serves the end of Prospero proving his superiority over Alonso and Antonio, making his enemies suffer, marrying Miranda to the Prince, regaining his dukedom, and returning to Milan. From a certain angle, the island resembles a machine engineered for his obsessive purposes. Indeed, there is a non-trivial sense in which the sorcerer becomes part of the structure of reality on the island. He acts as a principle of unity: binding the others together through his project, creating a whole out of parts.[55] None of the other participants in the story – the newcomers just as much as those who were already in situ before the events of the play – are able understand their own circumstances without reference to his thinking. If they have no knowledge of his intentions (as the royal party do not, at first) it only means that they are in error about their own condition.

But if on one level it is easy to appreciate how all of other characters inhabit an order that corresponds to Prospero's wishes, on another we wonder about how intelligible this order really is. In broad terms, it is true that the island is for-the-sake-of his retribution against his enemies. But what does that entail, exactly? When Miranda asks him the reason for raising the tempest, he

[54] Strier observes that this "need" of Caliban stems from the fact that it seems to be inconceivable to Prospero that he (or his daughter) would do any of the physical labour that life on the island requires. This is part of a larger comment in the play about the social hierarchies of labour ("'I am Power'," 21-23 and 29-30).

[55] To continue the Aristotelian theme, Prospero thereby is the *formal cause* of life on the island: the principle which organizes the parts of an entity into a whole, and which makes the whole intelligible as itself. (What separates a collection of brick and mortar from a house, for example? The answer is that latter embodies a certain type of order that allows the material to function as a house.) See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII.17; Lear, *Aristotle*, 15-27.

sets her to sleep before answering (1.2.184-186). Via Ariel, he tells the Italians that they are "most unfit to live" (3.3.58) and he expects "nothing but heart's sorrow, / And a clear life ensuing. (3.3.81-82) or else he will punish them with "Ling'ring perdition, worse than any death / Can be at once" (3.3.77-78). But does this mean that he expects to punish or forgive these enemies? He abandons his power before he ever gets a confession of remorse. Margreta de Grazia suggests that before the Duke declares his intention to turn away revenge at the start of Act 5, his ultimate aims might be undetermined (5.1.7-30).[56] This is debatable. But, as with the shipwreck, there is at least the hint that the overarching structure is neither as fixed nor as legible as it might seem. Perhaps not even Prospero knows his heart.

Nor is it just the projected end of his project that seems vague. The sorcerer's own understanding of the history that has placed this need at the centre of his life also appears uncertain. Although it will turn out to be a comparatively superficial layer of the phenomenon, the disordering injury of self he has suffered is exaggerated by the fact that it involved his deposition from his "natural" place atop a political hierarchy. The result is the aforementioned schism in identity between what he "is" to himself – the true Duke of Milan – and the realities of his impoverished situation. In the sorcerer's thoughts, this contradiction appears to both produce and thwart a need to rationalise the present moment – where this impulse is understood as an effort to return order to some part of the self in which it is felt to have been painfully removed. *How could this happen to me?* "Your tale, sir, would cure deafness," says Miranda, after the last of her father's accusations that she isn't heeding his words properly. It is telling that part of what

[56] "Once Prospero's anger is noted, the question of what he intends to do to his enemies before he decides to forgive them becomes more acute. … Though he refers constantly to his 'project,' 'end,' 'business,' and 'purpose,' he never identifies it; Miranda's pressing question, 'your reason / For raising this sea-storm?' (1.2.176-177), is left unanswered. We know that he has no intention of hurting them, during the storm scene at least… On the other hand, could he be keeping them alive to subject them to a fate worse than death? … Before [Act 5] there is nothing to distinguish his treatment of his enemies from revenge." (De Grazia, "*The Tempest*: Gratuitous Movement or Action Without Kibes and Pinches," *Shakespeare Studies*, 14, 1981: 256-257.)

seems to be maddening to Prospero is the idea that his pain is going unrecognised; that even when he is telling it to someone who swears they are listening, his experience is of being ignored.

The difficulty of this effort to communicate is clear in the tangle of competing explanations the sorcerer offers to his daughter. Alongside the denunciations of Antonio's perfidy and dark arts we find a raft of details that imply unacknowledged guilt on the Duke's part. Although the only fault Prospero admits to is that of being too much of a beneficent "parent," he also suggests that his thoughtless trust is what aroused his brother's wickedness (hardly a sign of successful parenting, one would have to think).[57] An even more obvious failing was his willingness to abdicate his duties as governor in the first place, for the sake of purely private satisfactions.[58] Nor are these "secret studies" depicted in an uncomplicatedly positive light, even in Prospero's own account ("rapt" carries the hint of demonic forces, for example – the same word is used to describe the influence of the witches' prophecies on Macbeth).[59] Lastly, hanging over all of this, is Prospero's awareness – surely – that his carelessness might easily have cost both he and Miranda their lives. The ship they were bundled onto is described by the sorcerer as "A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged, / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast – the very rats / Instinctively have quit it"; a picture which, if it is honest, makes the expulsion from Milan sound like an effective death sentence (1.2.146-148). No wonder he finds the story difficult to tell.

[57] The same dynamic is repeated in Prospero's relationship with Caliban, who also betrayer the sorcerer's trust when he made his attempt on Miranda. Strier notes that Prospero makes the same mistake in each case, being unable to imagine that a person he places in a situation of obvious temptation would go against his wishes. "[We] know that, in Prospero's mind, his trust is an absolute that places an absolute obligation on its object." ("'I am Power'," 24)
[58] "[The] abandonment of royal responsibility is the source of much greater evils in the state and in the human condition. The theme is a familiar one in innumerable texts in the period, from *The Book of the Governor* to *Basilicon Doron,* from *Gorboduc* to *King Lear*." (Orgel, "Introduction, 15.)
[59] *Macbeth,* 1.3.57.

In short, even as he is trying to install the "correct" version of events into his daughter's mind – that is, the one most flattering to himself – Prospero cannot help but flounder on the question of his own responsibility. Once again, we can identify a psychological and a structural dimension which are conjoined here. With respect to the former, the pertinent detail is the obscurity that Prospero both manufactures and seems to experience in relation to the question of what has caused his present hardship. He claims within the space of two lines that he "awakened" Antonio's evil nature and yet "begot" his brother's duplicity: two subtly different degrees of cause (the second implies creation, the first does not). In one sense, Antonio is the unambiguous reason for what Prospero has suffered, and yet the nature of their connection is evidently not something the Duke is able to fix clearly in his mind, an uncertainty which then has the effect of giving the entire sequence of events leading up to this moment a stubborn air of impenetrability. Although this is the first time the story has been articulated – at least to Miranda – it is no great leap to imagine that it is only the latest iteration of a dialogue that Prospero has been performing within himself for years, a rehearsal and a compulsive reordering which nonetheless always delivers him into the same bewildering cage.

From the perspective of the audience, the sorcerer's inability to tell his own story with assurance means that for us, too, there is a kind of fog surrounding the origins of what we behold. To some extent, we can adopt a critical distance and identify the self-preserving evasions and omissions in Prospero's account – and thus acquire a more complete view of what took place in Milan. But only to some extent. Nobody in the play adds to the Duke's explanation of the events prior to his exile. We are never told his exact motivations for abandoning public life in favour of study; nor is the purported "love" the "people" in his city felt for him explained, although this is apparently what prevented him and his daughter from being murdered (1.2.140-

143). And of course, although the sorcerer thanks "providence divine" for their salvation on the island (1.2.159), their journey to this place is immensely mysterious – why here and not somewhere else? (A point which is compounded by the dreamlike indeterminacy of the island: ostensibly located in the Mediterranean, but also clearly associated with the Atlantic and America, as well as spaces beyond ordinary reality completely.) The form of life Prospero creates resembles the official reality of the play, inasmuch as the closer one comes to it the more it seems to resist explanation.

But let us return to the question of the origin of Prospero's magic. If we continue with the idea that the clearest thing the sorcery tells us about his temperament is that he is driven by an imbalanced need for power, this also becomes the most serviceable tool with which to try and penetrate some of the mystery surrounding the events in Milan. Moreover, in a way that harkens back to the two different types of project that the Duke pursues on the island – the *kinêsis* and the *energeia* – we can perceive two different sorts of explanation which might apply to what we know about his behaviour in Italy. Prospero's investment in his "secret studies" is all but confirmation that his desire for magic was already in effect before his downfall. But if we accept this, are we to understand his theurgic endeavour as an outgrowth of some all-but-permanent aspect of his character, e.g. the same lust for domination Strier highlights, or does it reflect a more temporary or specific type of desire? Needless to say, since this was prior to Antonio's betrayal, the idea of revenge cannot do the same explanatory work that it performs on the island.

More succinctly: why did Prospero abandon himself to study? As Jeffery Stern notes, the oddity of the Duke's decision is its exclusivity.[60] At the very outset of the story he tells to Miranda, the sorcerer describes the prosperous state of Milan at the moment when he handed

[60] Jeffrey Stern, *The Cause of Thunder: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Shakespeare's King Lear, Pericles, and The Tempest* (University of Chicago, 1981), 124. This is an unpublished doctoral thesis.

power to Antonio. "Through all the signories it was the first, / And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed / In dignity, and for the liberal arts / Without a parallel" (1.2.71-74).[61] The notable thing in this description is that Prospero includes scholarly pursuits in an account of his own greatness *prior* to his abdication from politics.[62] In other words, it seems as if there was a time when scholarly learning formed only single, and proportionate, part of his identity. In the sorcerer's own telling, at his political height he approximated the ideal of the renaissance prince. (Perhaps the fame Prospero had won for himself in the fields of both learning and politics is what inspired the love from the common people spared his life – it is a possibility, in any case.) However, it was this balance the Duke forfeited in order to devote himself to books – why? The text offers no direct explanation. "Why at this time his desire for study, for the pleasure of texts, overwhelms his other interests and changes Prospero from a governor into a reclusive scholar is completely obscure", writes Stern.[63]

Before getting to the theory Stern puts forward to explain this puzzle, I want to consider the *type* of answer that the movement between the first two scenes of *The Tempest* suggests, since this general pattern is more relevant to my own reading of the play. The most pertinent stretch of dialogue in this respect is the gnomic exchange between Prospero and Miranda that immediately follows the discussion of the shipwreck but precedes the lengthy account of the events in Milan. As he prepares to reveal the secret of their identity, the Duke wonders aloud to his daughter: "Canst thou remember / A time before we came unto this cell? / I do not think thou

[61] Cf. Orgel's note on *signories*: "both lordships and domains, specifically applied to the Italian city-states" (*The Tempest*, 105).
[62] Cf. Orgel's note on *liberal arts*: "technically those 'considered "worthy of a free man"; opposed to *servile* and *mechanical*… [arts] suitable to persons of superior social station' (*OED* s. liberal). Specifically, grammar, logic, and rhetoric (the *trivium*), and arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (the *quadrivium*)." (Ibid., 105.)
[63] Stern, *The Cause of Thunder*, 125.

canst, for then thou wast not / Out three years old" (1.2.38-41). Yet she surprises him:

MIRANDA: Certainly, sir, I can.

PROSPERO: By what? By any other house or person?
Of anything the image tell me that
Hath kept with thy remembrance.

MIRANDA: 'Tis far off,
And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once that tended me?

PROSPERO: Thou hadst, and more, Miranda; but how is it
That this lives in thy mind? What seest thou else
In the dark backward and abysm of time?
If thou rememb'rest aught ere thou cam'st here,
How thou cam'st here thou mayst.

MIRANDA: But that I do not. (1.2.41-52)

Berger points out the oddity of Prospero using the grandiloquent phrase "the dark backward and abysm of time" to describe a span of only twelve to fourteen years in the story's chronology, and he is surely right to suggest that part of the intended effect is to help create an impression of vast reaches of history (and geography) subtending the events on the island.[64] But what it also conveys is a background sense of void and obscurity underlying the scenario immediately before

[64] Berger, "Miraculous Harp", 162-163.

us: prior to this moment lay an abyss of time.[65] This is another moment to recall that Miranda, at the beginning of the second scene, functions as a surrogate for the audience. *What was there before the island?* asks her father, and (yet again) we should be struck by how the girl's response echoes our own experience. The only thing Miranda recalls prior to the island is an isolated, dreamlike episode; one that does not seem to cohere with her present life. This image exerts a pressure towards integration that Miranda cannot satisfy by her own resources because there is an irreducible void in her experience between then and now. She therefore has to rely (as we do) on external information in order to have an idea of how the two parts fit together. The "solving" of this gap transforms her conception of the world she is a part of.

Once we are aware of the ambiguity of the connection between *The Tempest*'s two locations, we can also see how an equivalent misdirection is repeated in Prospero's answer to Miranda. He "explains" the orphaned image in her mind: it is a memory of Italy, where they used to live an honoured life tended by servants. It hence becomes possible for Miranda to integrate this memory with her present experience. And yet the *content* of the scene is left slightly underexplained, even then. Who were these four or five women – more to the point, where was Miranda's mother?

In Stern's account, the event which droves the Duke to wall himself off inside his library was the death of his wife in childbirth, and this is the catastrophe both concealed and expressed in the image of the unknown women. We know that Miranda was "not / Old three years old" when Antonio's betrayal occurred, and we also know that Miranda was alive when Prospero transferred his power to his brother (he tells her that when he did this, Antonio was the person

[65] "Below the cycle of nature or the ordinary physical world, is the abyss of disorder which Shakespeare often summons up by the word 'nothing,' and symbolizes, most frequently, by the tempest." (Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 137.)

"whom next thyself / Of all the world I loved"; 1.2.68-69). Allowing for the time it would have taken Antonio to become "perfected" in the art of influence and to put his usurping schemes into place, it therefore seems plausible to imagine that Prospero retreated to his books not long after Miranda's birth. Why think this was in response to his wife's death? Notoriously, the Duke only speaks about her once in the entire play, just after the vignette of the four or five women Miranda recalls:

> MIRANDA: Sir, are you not my father?
>
> PROSPERO: Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and
> She said thou wast my daughter; and thy father
> Was Duke of Milan, and his only heir
> And princess no worse issued. (1.2.55-59)

I will not go into too much detail on Stern's reading, but suffice it to say that he interprets Prospero's near blankness on the subject of Miranda's mother – alongside the strangely intense hatred he directs toward the memory of Sycorax – as "evidence of displaced mourning and unconscious rage" within the sorcerer.[66] The Duke's excessive pursuit of knowledge following his daughter's birth becomes legible, from this point of view, as a dysfunctional response to bereavement with the attendant feelings of betrayal and anger.[67] His retreat into study is an

[66] Stern, *The Cause of Thunder*, 136. Stern fills out his interpretation with a comparison to Freud's monograph on Leonardo Da Vinci, where Freud speculates that Da Vinci was overcome by a blank inability to mourn following the death of his mother (Leonardo makes only a single reference to this loss in his diaries: a sparse note about the funeral expenses). In Freud's telling, Da Vinci displaced his mourning onto an obsessive pursuit of science; transforming his "overwhelming desire to maintain contact with his lost mother" into an all-consuming investigation of nature (Ibid., 130). Stern also points towards *The Winter's Tale* as a precursor in the theme of female generativity prefiguring a compulsive rage in the male protagonist (133-134).

[67] The sorcerer's misogyny might be read as part of his failure to mourn: he refuses grief by denying the value of what was lost.

attempt to assert control over the powers that introduced catastrophe into his life. "Prospero's researches", writes Stern, "are ultimately intended to master the sources of his rage and anxiety: the problems of childbirth and death."[68]

Is this reading convincing? Whether or not it is literally true of the story – an undecidable question – what matters for my purposes is the way in which it coheres with the pattern we have been exploring. Again, what is the founding event of official reality in *The Tempest*? It is the banishment of catastrophe by magic. Prospero is thereby positioned from the start as a figure who exists in response to disorder. As we know, this response appears to be one of triumph. But it is nothing so certain. What else might it be, then? We have seen over the course of this chapter how there is a profound difference within *The Tempest* between what Prospero wants from his power and what he is able to perform with it. My suggestion is that we abstract this pattern up to the ontological frame of the play. What the Duke represents is not the world's order (and the attendant qualities of coherence and legibility) but the *wish* for such an order. And the informing power of this wish speaks to its ongoing frustration. Beneath the manifest structure of the world Prospero has assembled, disorder is what he inhabits.

This is a somewhat cryptic formulation and it will be the work of the next chapter to explore it. But Stern's speculative account of the Duke's history can at least give us a preliminary sense of what it might involve. On the one hand, a sufficiently traumatic bereavement is the exemplar of a suffocating problem of intelligibility – why has this happened? (It is not a question about antecedent cause, of course.) On the other, such a trauma is also an instance of a loss which goes beyond, or has the potential to go beyond, any particular alteration in the world. In its wake, the whole of the world might seem different. The parameters of

[68] Ibid., 138.

Prospero's magic – its all-enveloping quality, its basis in knowledge – become more lucid in light of such considerations. Finally, the idea of bereavement makes deeper sense of the role of fantasy in his power, since perhaps the most devoutly wished of all human fantasies is the power to bring a dead loved one back to life.[69] There is a reason that necromancy is at the summit of the sorcerer's boasts: it represents the purest wish to undo change. This does not solve the mystery of where and when the sorcerer might have tried to put this particular longing into effect, or how successful his efforts were (evidently his wife has not returned). But I take it that the more substantial aspect of the claim is to point once again towards the type of impasses that Prospero's power runs up against. The past cannot be recreated perfectly if one has to change into a necromancer in order to do it. Reanimating the dead is not the same thing as wiping out the possibility of their loss.

But I should reiterate that the essential thing is not whether Stern's interpretation is authentically true or not, but rather how it helps us to see the type of problem Prospero embodies. The underlying object of his desire is not to defeat Antonio or to bring a lost loved one back to life (or however one might imagine the original catastrophe) but to recapture a sense of rightful order and belonging in the world: to escape the feeling that the world is profoundly other than it should be. Prospero's doubt about his own capacities to do this, I think, is part of what explains the Duke's tendency to hold up figures of generativity as his moral antithesis: Sycorax, who came to the island with child, but also Antonio.[70] Once we are able to see the

[69] "The conception of the *same* form of life passing through death to rebirth of course goes outside the order of nature altogether. Yet this conception is so central in Shakespearean romance, as Thaisa revives from a 'block' and Hermione from a statue, that perhaps what really emerges in the recognition scenes of these romances is the primitive feeling, which is incorporated in Christianity, that it is *death* that is somehow unnatural, even though it always happens." (Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 122) A notable feature of *The Tempest* in this regard is that, unlike the patriarchs in *Pericles* or *The Winter's Tale*, Prospero does not have a dead wife restored to him. It is much less a play of wish-fulfilment.

[70] The very fact of pregnancy and birth seems to be woven into Prospero's hatred of Sycorax. He describes the witch as a "blue-eyed" (i.e. pregnant) "hag… hither brought with child," and calls Caliban "the freckled whelp, hag-born –

project of revenge as being (in a perverse way) bound up with a restorative wish, we will be able to fully apprehend this substrate of the play.

not honoured with / A human shape" who she "did litter here" (1.2.269-284). Not only does the sorcerer displace the witch as the ruler of the island, he variously lays symbolic claim to the generative power she represents. His power is behind the display of lifegiving abundance in the betrothal masque, for example. It is he who frees Ariel from the body of the island ("made gape / The pine and let thee out"; 1.2.292-293). Most strikingly, the journey Prospero and Miranda made from Italy to the island is also attached to a metaphor of birth. "Under my burden groaned, which raised in me / An undergoing stomach to bear up / Against what should ensue" (1.2.156-158). Adelman comments that this "fantasized pregnancy… imagistically remakes [Miranda] wholly her father's daughter." (*Suffocating Mothers*, 237) The patriarchal order on the island in which good women are next to non-existent and bad women are concubines to the devil (1.2.319-320) thus seems to peel back to expose a fantasy of perfect independence from the feminine. It should be born in mind, however, that all of Prospero's claims to generative power are simulated – at root, it is not a successful appropriation. The partial exception to this is Miranda herself, who he uses to "birth" a new political dynasty in Italy. It is significant, of course, that Prospero's only real act of creation in the play is not magical.

Chapter Three: Thy False Uncle

In the two previous chapters, I have discussed *The Tempest* on (roughly) two different levels. On the one hand, there is the background or framing level, the key component of which is the transition between the first and the second scene.[1] On the other, there is the foreground realm of the story; the tale of an exiled Duke of Milan, stranded on an unnamed island with his daughter and servants, waiting for retribution on his enemies. My overarching claim is that these two levels merge in important ways. The issues of theatricality and world-formation that come to light in the transition between the play's locations are reflective of the psychology at issue in the plot, and vice versa. More specifically, what the metaphysical and metatheatrical aspects of *The Tempest* have in common is a type of uncertainty about how one establishes a contrast between truth and appearance. (How are we to think about the strangely doubtful ontological hierarchy within the world of the play, for example? Or, in what manner should we think about the "reality" of the theatrical event?) Interpretatively speaking, then, the task is to draw a connection between this form of uncertainty and the psychology that informs the plot. This is what I think the idea of a particular sort of post-catastrophic state – which I have marked out with the idea of A* – allows us to do.[2] Such a state is one in which the fixity of the world becomes, for the subject, doubtful in an intrusive way.

The focus of the present chapter will be a more detailed examination of the revenge theme in *The Tempest*. In broad terms, what I want to show is how this component of the play is of a piece with the overview just given. More narrowly, the aim is to better explicate the relationship between Prospero and his enemies. The basic thought is that vengefulness (of the

[1] Cf. Chapter 1.
[2] Cf. the Introduction.

sort I am interested in, and of the sort I think is at issue in *The Tempest* and *Hamlet*) is in a deep sense a mode of relating to the world in general rather than relating to an object or set of objects within the world (for example, an individual). The idea that revenge has something innately performative or theatrical about it is not new.[3] Part of what I want to argue in what follows is that one of the subtler aspects of this connection is that each of these phenomena is characterised by a certain type of removal from life, wherein an individual is "unplugged" from the ordinary immersive business of living and set in relationship to something that is not exactly real in a positive sense (a fiction, an image of the past) but which exerts a controlling influence over them. For the revenger, this removal from ordinary life is also what places them in a strangely discordant and unhappy relationship to the world in general. All-consuming vengefulness is one way – although not the only way – of being overcome with a sense of the world as something fundamentally degraded or intolerable. In previous chapters, I have made much of the idea that Prospero's power in *The Tempest* gives his desires in relation to the whole play a unique status, along with the idea that the type of longing for coherence and stability that he represents on this level is crucially frustrated. A further aim of this chapter is to show how these whole-related features of the character are not incidental to his status as a revenger (or a would-be-revenger) but rather a continuation of it.

The bulk of the chapter – beginning with Section 2 – will be taken up with an analysis of the inner logic of the wish for revenge, with the aim of illustrating how it leads us (from the inside, as it were) towards the conclusions just outlined. Although within the limits of this

[3] John Kerrigan gives a useful overview of the relation between the nature of revenge and dramatic structures at the beginning of his book *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-29. W. H. Auden remarks that a revenger always bears a type of connection to a real or imagined audience: "one who seriously desires personal revenge desires to reveal himself." ("The Joker in the Pack" in *The Dyer's Hand*, New York: Vintage International, 1989, 249.)

project I will not able to explore the matter deeply, one of the ideas I want to signal in the process of making this argument is that the type of relation vengefulness creates between the individual and the whole means that there is a sense in which it is a mistake to think of vengefulness as a "merely" psychological matter. It is also a philosophical one, inasmuch as it forces the individual into a reckoning with something beyond the immediate determinacies of practical life. This is a reason for the centrality of revenge in both *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*, plays which are very obviously concerned with far more than the pursuit of or forbearance from revenge narrowly understood, but rather push us towards metaphysical questions of the highest order.[4] Finally, understanding the revenge theme in *The Tempest* involves seeing it as an outgrowth of an even more fundamental wish in the play for reunion and new life. The story invites us to see vengefulness as, in some way, a restorative instinct – albeit a treacherous one.

1

Although in a certain sense everyone involved with the royal party, with the partial exception of Gonzalo, could be classified as a foe to the sorcerer, the two chief antagonists in *The Tempest* are clearly Alonso and Antonio.[5] These are the men most responsible for Prospero's downfall (other

[4] Cf. Fredson Bowers, on the subject of Elizabethan revenge drama: "The tragedy of revenge began as a moral and philosophical drama on the great theme of personal revenge for blood and God's punishment of crime. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is the supreme achievement of the form since he made the issue turn on the character of the revenger and thus gave ample scope for the philosophical consideration of life, death, and human endeavor inherent in the central situation from the days of Aeschylus." Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940, 278.) My aim here is to supplement this general thought with a reflection on the inner nature of the revenge drive. This is what Charles and Elain Hallett are pointing toward – although they do not work through the phenomenon of vengefulness in the manner that I do – when they write, also on the subject of Elizabethan tragedy, "[we] miss the whole point if we regard revenge as just another passion. No other passion could have been elevated to a search for justice. That search is symbolic of the individual's quest for order." (Charles A. Hallett and Elain S. Hallett, *The Revenger's Madness: A Study of Revenge Tragedy Motifs*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980, 119.)

[5] Even the partial inclusion of Gonzalo may sound odd, given Prospero's unabashed affection for the counselor at the end of the play (5.1.68-71/120-122). But as Harry Berger points out, "Gonzalo, for all his goodness, was in effect Antonio's accomplice; as Alonso's counselor he mitigated the harshness of Prospero's exile, but the fact remains that he was master of the design [of preparing Prospero and Miranda's exile at sea], responsible for its

than the former Duke himself). As with Edmund and Edgar in *King Lear*, the quasi-homonymic quality of the names has the faintly unsettling effect of encouraging some confusion between the characters, as though we are being asked to bear in mind that these two figures (though they have very different roles and temperaments) cannot be separated in some crucial sense.[6]

What does Prospero want from these men? We already have a partial answer to this: he wants "heart-sorrow" for their misdeeds (3.3.81). But what does it mean to want *that* – and why, in the end, does he forgive the men without achieving full satisfaction? Alongside these conventionally psychological questions there is the same general issue broached in the last chapter, which is how to understand the relationship between the desires of *The Tempest*'s central character and the peculiar attributes of that character. (In other words, what does it mean that he is a sorcerer stranded on an island, wanting these things?) Moreover, how deeply does the play's affinity with revenge tragedy go? Critics have before now observed how the action of *The Tempest* replicates a number of the archetypical trappings of Elizabethan revenge drama. There is the central division between a revenger and a usurper; the presence of rival brother-figures; a hero who is both a champion of the traditional order and yet (paradoxically) condemned to isolation from his society; and various re-enactments of the past with the active and passive roles reversed.[7] Nothing we see in the plot – counterfactually – would have happened absent one

execution." ("Miraculous Harp, 150.) Strier offers a much more positive account of Gonzalo, which sees the counselor as subtly disobeying his orders from Antonio in Milan ("'I am Power'," 13).

[6] Of *King Lear*, Stephen Booth observes: "The practice of 'rhyming' a pair of sharply contrasted characters by having them share some identifying characteristic is not unusual in literature and is common in Shakespeare; the juggernaut loquacity of Hotspur and Falstaff and Edmund and Lear's prayers to nature are examples. The names Edmund and Edgar are disquieting variants on the same technique (I doubt I am alone in the habit of forgetting which name goes with which brother and in feeling foolish even to have approached a confusion between such opposites)." This could also be said of Alonso and Antonio, I think. (Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983, 46.)

[7] I owe most of these points to Michael Neill's discussion of Shakespeare and Renaissance revenge tragedy: "Remembrance and Revenge: *Hamlet, Macbeth* and *The Tempest*," in *Jonson and Shakespeare* (ed. Ian Donaldson, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983, 35-56). For other treatments of the relationship between *The Tempest* and revenge drama, see: Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy*, 261-266; and Sarah Beckwith *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 147-172.

brother's betrayal and the other's desire for retribution. Vengefulness is a connotation of the Italianate background to the story, too; inasmuch as Italy represented the quintessential locale for bloody revenge plots in the imagination of Renaissance England (and Antonio certainly fits the template of the scheming Machiavellian villain).[8] The play also bears some obvious structural affinities to *Hamlet*. It is set in motion by betrayal and loss inside a ruling family, the antagonist is a duplicitous younger brother, and the key passage of exposition is a lengthy speech, delivered on a seacoast, by a father to his only child, lamenting the loss of his state.[9] Evidently, some thought of revenge in its more destructive and tragic aspects is woven into the fabric of the play.

At the same time, *The Tempest* just as conspicuously sets itself *against* tragedy, not only in terms of the reconciliatory and matrimonial conclusion (the comic ending grafted onto the tragic framework) but also in the symbolic "dismissal" of tragedy at the beginning of the second scene (discussed in Chapter 1) and in the absence of death from the action. The play could be described as a comedy of revenge and this would not be a terrible misrepresentation. But one could also just as well say that it is neither entirely vengeful nor entirely comic. It is a truism of Shakespeare criticism that the romances in some way represent "curative" or optimistic treatments of issues that are worked out to far more morbid conclusions in the tragedies. More specifically, as Sarah Beckwith observes, "[it] is conventional to see in *The Tempest* a revenge plot that overcomes revenge."[10] In very general terms, I think this view is right. Part of what the departure from the island denotes is a release from vengefulness (both for Prospero and for those

[8] For the popular meanings attached to Italy and Machiavelli, see: Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, 47-57 and 266.
[9] The point about the similarity between the expository scenes in *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* belongs to Jeffrey Stern (*The Cause of Thunder*, 122-123). Stern also observes that in each case the humiliating content of the story being told is partially concealed by a display of might from the speaker: the storm in Prospero's case, the battle-garb in Old Hamlet's. Likewise, he notes the suggestion in Prospero's account of his downfall that something akin to cuckoldry occurred ("fair Milan" was brought to "most ignoble stooping" by Antonio's treachery [1.2.126/116]).
[10] Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 150. In her book, Beckwith offers a Cavellian theory of the romances as "post-tragic" plays (1-12 and *passim*).

who fell into various forms of bondage as a result of his rage).[11] But the more interesting question, to my mind, is what we are encouraged to think a heart or mind is released *from* when it is released from vengefulness. Answering this, in my view, requires coming an understanding of how vengefulness can comprise a type of dislocation from the world (just as the island is a type of dislocation). This is the theme I will begin to explore in the second section.

Seeing *The Tempest* from this angle also helps to illustrate something about the generic alloy of the play. In saying that *The Tempest* is not entirely comic, I do not mean simply that it is more melancholic and more directly concerned with tragic possibilities than a more conventional comedy would be (although this is true) but also that its outwardly comic resolution has something awry about it. It mimics comedy rather than embodies it. By way of illustration: in a book on revenge themes in the Shakespearean comedies, Linda Anderson makes the claim that revenge plots and devices are prevalent in these plays, but also that in these plays such plots tend to fall into a fairly distinct pattern. As a rule, "revenge" is collective rather than individual, and relatively temperate rather than passionate:

> Revenge, as practiced by these characters, is not an uncontrollable passion to return evil for evil, but a rational, just, and usually amusing, response to evil or folly. …the comic revenge is frequently a group effort by which various members of society indicate their

[11] On the release of Prospero as a precondition for the release of all of the other souls on the island, see: Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 149. De Grazia's reading is also constructed around the idea of Prospero as a figure of arrested motion while he is on the island. "Prospero's act of forgiveness in Act V, scene i frees men including himself to move, releasing them from inhibiting involvement in the past, specifically in the usurpations and banishments of twelve years ago." ("*The Tempest*: Gratuitous Movement or Action Without Kibes and Pinches," 251.)

> disapproval of a character's antisocial (but generally not illegal) behavior, and unite in an effort to punish and change it.[12]

The exemplary victims of Shakespearean comic revenge, on Anderson's account, would be Shylock and Malvolio: quasi-alien figures who are brought low for the sake of the wellbeing (or purported wellbeing) of a larger group to which they are connected. But *The Tempest* fits this template only very partially.[13] It is true that Prospero does not straightforwardly return evil for evil, and that – thanks to his scheme – a type of sociability prevails at the end. Still, the exiled Duke remains a fundamentally non-social figure in key respects: a wounded and wrathful man who seizes his retribution unilaterally, and whose interactions with other characters (as we've seen) are almost entirely shaped through radical asymmetries of power. I will not assess Anderson's formula in any detail here, but even in outline it helps to bring out something significant about *The Tempest*'s qualified relation to comedy: the play is not really a story about a collective. Rather than depicting a society engaging in a successful act of self-regulation, *The Tempest* dramatizes the quintessentially revenge-tragic scenario of an individual's quest to correct what is experienced by them as some deep (and intensely wounding) error in the surrounding world. The "correction" in the play, however, ultimately comes out in more of a comic rather than a tragic shape.

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[12] Anderson, *A Kind of Wild Justice: Revenge in Shakespeare's Comedies (*Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987), 20-21.

[13] I should note that Anderson draws a distinction between the romances and the comedies. "Shakespeare in the romances concentrates on serious revenges, rather than the generally comic revenges of the earlier plays. … Generally, revenge in the romances is individual, not social; is swiftly determined and immediately acted upon; is not accomplished, but merely intended; and is ultimately a cause for regret, rather than laughter." (Ibid. 21-22) In itself, however, this strikes me as not being a very apt description of *The Tempest* either (it seems closer to a summary of *The Winter's Tale*). Although the revenge in *The Tempest* is both individual and "serious," it is not immediately performed, is in some sense accomplished, and does not seem to be a cause for regret for the protagonist.

Because the majority of the forthcoming discussion will move into more abstract territory from the next section onwards, I would like to insert a few remarks about the particulars of the revenge story in *The Tempest* first. One of the interesting features of the play in this regard is that the two main targets of Prospero's project (Sebastian is notionally a third, although he bears no significant relationship to the sorcerer) function as near-opposites in the story: a good foe and a bad foe, more or less. Although Prospero begins by describing Alonso as "an enemy / To me inveterate" (1.2.121-122), in practice the King of Naples is barely represented as a villain or even a real opponent. Instead, for most of the story Alonso functions as an embodiment of wraithlike unhappiness and regret – overwhelmed with sadness at the presumed loss of his son; his grief magnified by the recent forfeiture of his daughter, Claribel, in marriage to the King of Tunis. (This is the journey the Italians were returning from at the beginning of the play. Alonso's loss is made all the more bitter because Claribel was married off against her will [2.1.94-129]). The king's guilt for his previous actions is swiftly awakened when he is confronted with them (3.3.94-106) and by the conclusion he is also the only European who seems to be at all morally altered by Prospero's efforts.[14] In the last scene, as Alonso digests the news that he and the man he once almost destroyed have now been made family through their children, he declares: "But O, how oddly it will sound that I / Must ask my child forgiveness!" Prospero responds with perfect magnanimity: "There, sir, stop. / Let us not burden our remembrances with / A heaviness that's gone." (5.1.197-200). Indeed, even before the news of Ferdinand's safety and his engagement to Miranda is revealed, we see a kinship between the two patriarchs beginning. They

[14] "Alonso… is Prospero's one clear success, and it seems to be grief over the (apparent) loss of his son that enables the process to work in him." (Strier, "'I am Power,'" 27.) It is perhaps also worth noting that in the final scene Prospero twice defers Alonso's request that he explain what's been going on (5.1.119-122/242-250), which leaves at least a sliver of uncertainty about how the king will react once he discovers he was tricked into believing his son was dead.

"speak the same language" as they exchange their stories:

ALONSO: You the like loss?

PROSPERO: As great to me, as late… I
Have lost my daughter.

ALONSO: A daughter? O heavens, that they were living both in Naples,
The king and queen there! …
When did you lose your daughter?

PROSPERO: In this last tempest. (5.1.144-153)

In contrast, Antonio is said to have "Expelled remorse and nature" (5.1.76) by his crimes against his brother – but, unlike Alonso, he also lives up to this description in the play. The usurper laughs off the idea that his heart is in any way burdened by the memory of his deeds in Milan (2.1.273-278) and almost as soon as he is ashore his treachery extends to his superior, Alonso, with equally little compunction. The signs of desperation that Gonzalo interprets as evidence of a "great guilt" gnawing inside the usurping Duke in the wake of the mysterious banquet (3.3.104-106) seem, in the end, to be no more than a set of physiological reactions induced by Prospero's magic.[15] Nothing of significance has changed. Where Alonso is full of contrition in the final scene, Antonio is silent save for an ominous remark about the price Caliban might fetch at market (5.1.265-266). His life is spared, but there is no rapprochement or union with his brother. Prospero forgives him without any warmth: "For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother /

[15] "Prospero can produce the physical and even the physico-psychological effects of guilt – he can produce hysteria and hallucinations and obscure the group's rational powers… but he cannot affect their 'spirits' in the non-physiological sense. He cannot change their moral characters, their hearts in the non-physiological sense." (Strier, "'I am Power'," 26-27.)

Would even infect my mouth. I do forgive / Thy rankest fault – all of them…" (5.1.130-132). There is not a hint of the fellow-feeling offered to Alonso.

The distinction between the two opponents is also emphasised in Prospero's manner of speaking. Aside from remarking that the king treated him and Miranda "Most cruelly" (5.1.71), the sorcerer never singles Alonso out for invective. Antonio, on the other hand – beyond the insults already quoted – is "perfidious" (1.2.68); likened to parasitic ivy (1.2.86); "false" (1.2.92); "evil" (1.2.93); "Unnatural" (5.1.79); and worse than a devil (3.3.36).[16] "Mark his condition, and th'event; then tell me / If this might be a brother," seethes Prospero to Miranda, as he unfurls their story (1.2.118-119). The imbalance of emotion as well as power between the two brothers is very stark. For his part, Antonio barely says anything about Prospero over the course of the action, and one could readily believe that, prior to this day, he might have more or less banished his brother from his mind. On the other hand, the sorcerer boils with fury and swears that Antonio was once the person who he loved most in the entire world apart from his daughter (1.2.68-69). Functionally speaking, Antonio also makes for a peculiarly understated arch-villain. We can appreciate Prospero's fury at being betrayed, but because his brother remains everywhere fenced off by the sorcerer's magic, Antonio's wickedness also has a slightly abstract quality from our perspective. Antonio does not do – is fundamentally incapable of doing – any real harm on the island, and it is difficult to imagine a spectator having an especially powerful response to his defeat. He is not complicated enough to sympathise with. There are no moments of soliloquy that might allow a more nuanced picture of his inner life. Though he is funny in an

[16] Prospero's exact words as he observes the royal party's wonder at the magical banquet are "for some of you there present / Are worse than devils." It is possible that he means this judgment to extend not just to Antonio and Sebastian (who we have recently seen attempt a murder plot) but also to Alonso, too, although it would be an anomaly if this were the case. Then again, this is before Alonso first professes his guilt, which perhaps makes a cruciak difference in Prospero's estimation.

excoriating way and memorably articulate in his manipulations of Sebastian, he nonetheless acts as a curiously blank presence in the play. What are we meant to think of him?

In an essay on *Othello*, W. H. Auden lists Antonio as belonging to the class of "criminals" rather than "villains" in Shakespeare, and the dichotomy is an interesting way of approaching the character.[17] The criminal, according to Auden, is a person who succumbs to some temptation to break the law, and while the temptation may certainly be one they ought to have resisted – and while the ensuing crime may be reprehensible – simply in terms of brute self-interest their choice is not hard to understand. Macbeth and Claudius are examples of this type. "The villain, on the other hand," writes Auden:

> is shown from the beginning as being a malcontent, a person with a general grudge against life and society. … What distinguishes their actions from those of a criminal is that, even when they have something tangible to gain, this is a secondary satisfaction; their primary satisfaction is the infliction of suffering on others, or the exercise of power over others against their will.[18]

In other words, there seems to be something pathological about a villain, something which doesn't simply translate into the language of self-interest, that is not the case for the criminal. But is Antonio really more like a Claudius than a Iago, on these terms? My impression is that Auden classifies him as a criminal in part because of the lack of magnitude in the character. Yet on second glance Antonio doesn't seem to quite fit into either category. It is true that it doesn't seem right to say that he has a pathological grudge against life or society (if anything, he seems

[17] W. H. Auden, "The Joker in the Pack," 247.
[18] Ibid., 247-248.

to be a fairly self-satisfied character, for as long as he is evading comeuppance). On the basis of what we know about him, his motivations are rather more prosaic: glory and self-enrichment. Although his behaviour against Prospero in Italy may have been awful, the profit is perfectly obvious to us. So far, so criminal, then.

On the other hand, there is a purity to Antonio's wickedness – a profound coldness to the character – that prevents him from being quite as humanly legible as the criminal, in Auden's sense. "Succumbing to temptation" is not remotely how he understands his treachery in Milan, for example. Rather, the usurpation was an opportunity that he expertly seized from a brother who had become pathetically unfit to rule. ("I remember / You did supplant your brother Prospero," remarks Sebastian. "True," responds Antonio, "And look how well my garments sit upon me, / Much feater than before" [2.1.268-271].) Even what might seem like his most humanising quality in the play, his criminal friendship with Sebastian, becomes doubtful the more one reflects on it. The salient fact about Sebastian, after all, is that Antonio can control him: having Alonso killed and replaced with his brother is therefore quite in line with the Duke's interests, since it would provide him with a more pliable king in Naples. Moreover, given what we know of the perfect ease with which Antonio deceived and then betrayed Prospero and Alonso, do we have any reason to suppose that this would be the end of his ambitions – or that a similar fate might not be in store for his one-time accomplice, if the moment came?

What we seem to know about Antonio is that he cares only about his own narrow self-interests, cannot be trusted, and cannot be improved. The character we perceive at the end of the story is to all appearances just as unyieldingly base and, in his way, depthless as he was at the beginning – a smooth dark surface. Part of the point of this, I think, is to illustrate that there is something fundamentally misguided about any of the other characters (though chiefly Prospero)

trying to forge a relationship with Antonio that goes beyond instrumentality. There is nothing there to bond *with*, in a significant sense. The usurper is like a sealed-off moral space, unable to impose his will but also seemingly immune to any meaningful alteration in heart or mind. On some level, the sorcerer knows this even before the events of the afternoon – again, he says his brother "Expelled remorse and nature" in Italy – and yet he persists with the fantasy of being able to reconfigure Antonio into a new man. The very obviousness with which the usurping Duke is shown to be someone from whom genuine regret or penitence cannot possibly be drawn is another sign that the ultimate conflict driving the sorcerer is not between himself and his brother, but between himself and an image of Antonio he carries in his mind, or between himself and his own wishes (and with whatever it is that gives these wishes such an overriding priority for him). The relative nullity of Antonio as a dramatic presence is part of this. If the brother were not only inhuman in his lack of conscience but compelling in the way Iago or Richard III are, Antonio would risk becoming an object of fascination in his own right – interfering with the more basic function he has in the story, which is to act as a screen onto which Prospero's needs are projected.

Another way of looking at all of this is to say that, from a purely *realpolitik* angle, it is somewhat mysterious why one *wouldn't* kill Antonio in the circumstances, since even allowing for the admirable qualities of mercy it would seem to be by far the most pragmatic option for a ruler who wished to secure his own safety back in Milan. What is it that creates the need for remorse instead? That is, more fundamentally, what is it that interferes with Prospero's understanding of what his brother is – and thus leaves him unreconciled to reality? Relevant to this puzzle is the fact that the course of the Prospero's thinking with respect to his enemies during the play is not entirely self-evident. The first opportunity he is given to spell out his

designs for the Italians (Miranda's question: "And now I pray you, sir, / For still 'tis beating in my mind, your reason / For raising this sea-storm" [1.2.175-177]) is conspicuously passed up. Thereafter, what seems to be the first clear statement of intent is not given by Prospero directly, but rather Ariel – disguised as a harpy and acting as his mouthpiece – in the speech following the disappearance of the banquet. To Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian, the spirit declares:

> But remember –
> For that's my business to you – that you three
> From Milan did supplant good Prospero,
> Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it,
> Him and his innocent child; for which foul deed,
> The powers delaying, not forgetting, have
> Incensed the seas and shores, yea all the creatures
> Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
> They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
> Ling'ring perdition, worse than any death
> Can be at once, shall step by step attend
> You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from,
> Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
> Upon your heads, is nothing but heart's sorrow,
> And a clear life ensuing. (3.3.68-82)

Here the stakes of the afternoon seem to be spelt out in rather stark terms: heartfelt contrition *or else* a slow torment unto death. Is the threat genuine? The thought of it can be slightly jarring. Prospero is a not a gentle figure, certainly, but torturing his enemies to death is another order of brutality altogether.[19] Would he really do such a thing? The sorcerer makes a point of noting how faithfully Ariel followed his commands in the speech ("Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated / In what thou hadst to say" [3.3.85-86]), so we know the words are perfectly deliberate. In other places, too, *The Tempest* allows us to speculate that a more vindictive and brutal outcome might have been possible. After the feast scene, Prospero does not return to his business with the royal party until the very end of Act 4, when he remarks: "At this hour / Lies at my mercy all mine enemies. / Shortly shall all my labours end" (4.1.263-265). Then, at the beginning of Act 5, he takes up the issue again in earnest. "How fares the King and's followers?" he asks Ariel. His servant responds that the Italians are "all prisoners" and "cannot budge till your release." Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian have been driven out of their wits, and the rest of the royal party are "mourning over them, / Brimful of sorrow and dismay" (5.1.7-14). The spirit then provokes his master's pity:

[19] In the play, the physical violence Prospero inflicts is confined to the lower-class characters. He habitually imposes agonizing physical punishments on Caliban for his insubordination (cf. 1.2.368-370, 2.2.4-14) and his wrath latterly extends to the two clowns (4.1.250-60). What is striking about this pattern isn't simply the fact of Prospero's violence but the open malice he displays. Almost as soon as Caliban starts to quarrel with his master in the second scene, Prospero begins to list the torments his slave can expect: "For this be sure tonight thou shall have cramps, / Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up. Urchins / Shall, for that vast of night that they may work, / All exercise on thee. Thou shall be pinched / As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging / Than bees that made 'em." (1.2.325-330) Caliban subsequently complains about being punished "For every trifle" (2.2.8). Ariel is threatened with punishment for insubordination, and although we do not see evidence that Prospero has ever carried out such threats on the spirit, Ariel refers to his tasks as "pains" at 1.2.242, which implies that his service is also not comfortable.

ARIEL: Your charm so strongly works 'em
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.
PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit?
ARIEL: Mine would, sir, were I human.
PROSPERO: And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?
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. Go, release them, Ariel.
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
And they shall be themselves. (5.1.17-32)

In outline, this might seem like a reiteration of the binary presented in Act 3: if there is remorse from the captured men, then there will be no more suffering. (If they are "penitent" there will be no "frown," although what the latter entails is not specified.) But in truth the situation is quite distinct from the earlier scene. Whereas previously the issue was framed as being exclusively a

matter of what took place – or failed to take place – within the hearts of the "three men of sin" (3.3.53), here Prospero represents a change or decision inside himself as being relevant to the outcome. ("[With] my nobler reason 'gainst my fury / Do I take part.") Moreover, although something of the prior ultimatum is repeated, it seems as if – by the end of this passage – the truly meaningful choice has already been made. Without waiting to find out what his enemies' response will be, Prospero elects to give up his power. Before Antonio has even been returned to his senses – and so before he has had a chance to withhold his contrition – the sorcerer declares his forgiveness of his brother (5.1.75-79). Evidently, the "business" Ariel referred to in Act 3 is being brought to a close, with or without his enemies' participation.

On the other hand, if the exchange at the beginning of Act 5 represents an authentic moment of decision for Prospero – and I think it does – then it also casts a new (and somewhat unsettling) light on his remark at the end of Act 4: "Shortly shall all my labours end…" This statement comes on the heels of an episode of violent rage directed against Caliban and his accomplices, a fury which seemed to have been triggered not only by the recollection of the clowns' "foul conspiracy" (4.1.139), but by the ever-renewed memory of Caliban's intransigence to Prospero's efforts to "better" him. ("A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains, / Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost" [4.1.188-190]). So, we know that by the end of Act 4 Prospero is not buoyed with faith in the possibility of moral change – in which case, in that moment, how else could he imagine the business with the Italian aristocrats ending, except badly? Even after his affections become tender, the way Prospero articulates his new resolve carries a buried suggestion that the events of the afternoon might have worked out quite differently. There is a hypothetical version of the story – not so far off the actual one – in which the sorcerer does not forgive his enemies, but kills them, or leaves them to suffer on the

island in perpetuity ("Ling'ring perdition"). In the process of moving away from this possibility, *The Tempest* also makes it clear what would have motivated it: the sorcerer remains "struck to th' quick" by his injuries and filled with rage. As it turns out, these feelings do not end in the murder or prolonged torment of his enemies. But they might have.

The Tempest is in many respects not a happy play. From the very beginning – with the tremendous image of catastrophe – we are given omens of loss and destruction that, although never realised, are also never simply evacuated from the play. The motif of a suppressed but enduring idea of tragedy persists throughout the story. Prospero's distant intimation of a more vengeful, bloodier conclusion to the tale is one example of this, as are the very real expressions of grief over the imagined deaths and separations in the plot. After the shipwreck, Ferdinand is reported sitting alone on the shore, "His arms in this sad knot" (1.2.224), and Prospero later describes him to Miranda as "something stained / With grief – that's beauty's canker" (1.2.415-416). Contemplating the loss of his children, Alonso remarks: "I wish mine eyes / Would, with themselves, shut up my thoughts," (2.1.189-190); and later – in what are surely the saddest lines in the play – adds "patience / Says it is past her cure" (5.1.140-141). The illusory losses in the play creates sorrow that is all too real. The murder plots fail, but the ambition and fury that motivated them are not mere pretences.[20] In such moments, the world is not kindly represented. The most obvious evocations in the play of a catastrophic dissolution of limits – beyond the shipwreck itself – are the recurrent images of madness. Prospero seems to relish the news that the men in the storm were driven to the brink of insanity (1.2.207-210). Caliban describes himself as being tormented "into madness" by his master's punishments (2.2.14). Ariel, whilst

[20] Consider the lust for violence that overtakes Caliban as he conspires his revenge against Prospero with the two clowns: "thou mayst knock a nail in his head… thou mayst brain him, / Having first seized his books; or with a log / Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake, / Or cut his weasand with a knife" (3.2.60/86-9).

disguised as the harpy, tells the royal party that he has made them mad (3.3.58). Finally, in a strikingly macabre image, as Prospero contemplates his "spell-stopped" enemies before he releases them from his charms, the sorcerer remarks (gloatingly?) "thy brains, / Now useless, boil within thy skull" (5.1.59-61). Minds are lost and regained in *The Tempest*, but only thanks to the precarious whims of the sorcerer. Relief is not assured.

Like *Hamlet*, although less forcefully stated, there is a palpable strain of exhaustion within *The Tempest* at the self-tormenting capacities of the mind. "It is remarkable," observes John Berryman, "in a work rich with the happiness of the exercise of supreme art – how often, and with what longing, *sleep* is invoked."[21] But this should not be so surprising, if we also recognise how prominently the wish to escape thinking is also expressed within the play. When Alonso grows drowsy, Sebastian tells him: "Please you, sir, / Do not omit the heavy offer of it. / It seldom visits sorrow; when it doth, / It is a comforter" (2.1.191-194). Prospero describes sleep that he imposes on Miranda as "a good dulness" (1.2.185). Implicitly, when Caliban cries "to dream again" (3.2.141), it is not just the happiness of his reveries he is evoking, but also the escape from the continuous fear and pain of his master's despotism, and the rage it inspires in return (2.2.1-14). In *The Tempest*, the freedom of sleep is represented as the freedom from the perpetual straining of an unhappy mind. Another one of the recurrent images is that of a "beating" mind. Most famously, it is used by Prospero at 4.1.163; but Miranda employs the same phrase at 1.2.177, and at the conclusion the sorcerer tells the equally astonished Alonso not to "infest [his] mind with beating on / The strangeness of this business" (5.1.246-7). Part of what is expressed is the sheer physicality of incomprehension, of being unable to draw the phenomena of experience together into an intelligible unity – and the phrase also carries the connotation of a

[21] Berryman, *Berryman's Shakespeare*, 169.

mind hurting itself. With respect to all of these boiling and imprisoned thinkers, the island is not entirely separated from an idea of hell. When Prospero first comes ashore, he finds Ariel – the chief emblem of thought in the play – trapped and howling: "a torment / To lay upon the damned" (1.2.289-290).

Vengefulness in *The Tempest* is another part of this pattern. It is an instance of the broader wish – manifested in almost every major character at one time or another – for the mind to fall quiet. ("If you can command these elements to silence…" [1.2.21]) This is hence also a sort of freedom at issue in the play.

2

"Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick…" I will use the term *grievance* to refer to the type of vengefulness Prospero alludes to in the exchange with Ariel in Act 5: a passionate wish for revenge born out of an enduring sense of injustice and personal injury.[22] (Berryman once described *Hamlet* as a play about "the torture of outrage" and this is also a good encapsulation of what I have in mind.)[23] The first purpose of the term is to separate vengeful thought from vengeful action. It denotes a mindset which bears an innate *imaginative* connection to the act of revenge, inasmuch as wherever it is felt, the pull of revenge will be felt also, but this is not the same thing as compelling any specific piece of behaviour. Prospero, for example, is a figure who does not follow his vengefulness as far as he could have, while another sort of person might suffer from grievance just as much or more and yet never embark on any foe-directed

[22] There are perhaps types of vengefulness which are relatively impersonal in nature. In the case of a running vendetta between two sizeable groups of people, for example, it could be that the motivations of an individual revenger are guided more by notions of obligation or loyalty instead of a sense of personal distress or injury. This is not the type of vengefulness I am interested in here.

[23] Berryman, *Berryman's Shakespeare*, 101. Although this description is fitting, I should perhaps make it clear that Berryman himself does not use the term grievance to refer to this state of mind, and the concept I set out in this chapter does not rely on his work.

behaviour whatsoever (perhaps instead turning their anger upon themselves, or growing embittered, or sublimating it in some other fashion).[24] But the distinction between thought and deed also allows us to conceive of the purpose of vengeful action in two slightly different ways. On the one hand, there is revenge as an exercise in bringing about a certain state of affairs in the world – say, the deaths of one's enemies. On the other hand, there is revenge as an action performed for the sake of bringing an end to the revenger's feeling of grievance. These purposes may very often coincide, but they are not identical. Clearly, for example, what counts as effective action in terms of achieving determinate results in the world is not necessarily the same thing as effective action in terms of a change in the inner state of the revenger.

Grievance is a state of profound psychological tension. At the risk of blurring the focus of the discussion slightly, there is a passage in *Macbeth* which offers a good basis for thinking about the driving logic of the condition, although it is not in itself an example of vengefulness. It comes in Act 5, when Macbeth berates his doctor for an antidote to misery:

MACBETH: How does your patient, doctor?

DOCTOR: Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies
That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH: Cure her of that:
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,

[24] One thinks of Nietzsche's account of the birth of so-called slave morality: "The revolt of the slaves in morals begins in the very principle of *resentment* becoming creative and giving birth to values – a resentment experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge." (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*; trans. Horace B. Samuel, New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 2003, 19.)

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

DOCTOR: Therein the patient
Must minister to himself. (5.3.39-48)

Macbeth's (and Lady Macbeth's) suffering is born of guilt and despair rather than outrage and vindictiveness, and so it is not an example of grievance in the sense of the term used here. Nonetheless, the passage is a vivid illustration of three qualities that the condition of grievance, as I understand it, also shares. First, there is the image of a mind at war with itself. Macbeth's anguish attests to a power of psychological self-harm that can be mobilised by a sufficiently painful injury or frustration of a certain type. For the subject who suffers in this fashion, one part of the psyche is experienced as a hostile and dominating force, beyond their conscious control, and at odds with another segment of their mind.[25] Second, because this turmoil is not responsive to the subject's will in any direct sense – Macbeth cannot silence his own thoughts – it produces a pressure in the direction of the external world. Unable to rest within himself, the individual quite naturally looks outward for a solution. Third, however, there is, at the very least, no guarantee that the world will be able to offer any succour for his pain. Macbeth demands assistance and the doctor replies that insofar as there is any help available, it somehow lies

[25] Cf. Freud's remark in *Mourning and Melancholia* on the possibility of such a conflict within experience: "We see… one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, takes it as its object." (*S.E. Vol. XIV (1914-1916)*, 247.)

within the sufferer himself. However one might interpret this slightly cryptic remark – is he telling the king to address himself to God? – the point is made that the type of peace Macbeth longs for cannot simply be given or seized from the world.

The notion of the avenging figure as a type of prisoner to their own wound – poisoned by the memory of the injustice they feel they have suffered – is familiar enough. Sophocles's Electra or Melville's Ahab would be among the canonical literary examples. What the trope points towards is an idea of an alienated or "split" condition of thought (à la Macbeth), but one that arises specifically in relation to vengefulness. Within Shakespeare, this idea is taken up in a quasi-literal fashion in the first act of *Hamlet*. In his encounter with the Ghost, the prince vows a complete abandonment of himself to the call of revenge:

> Yea, from the table of my memory
> I'll wipe away all trivial fond records
> All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
> That youth and observation have copied there,
> And thy commandment all alone shall live
> Within the book and volume of my brain,
> Unmixed with baser matter. (1.5.98-104)

This image of a mind being emptied of its contents, so that the dictates of an alien power can govern there, is at the same time an image of the schismatic potential of grievance. By giving the spirit of revenge a type of external figure and voice, *Hamlet* dramatizes the way in which vengefulness can begin to pry open a fissure inside the individual, who experiences himself as

both the *agent* of the retributive project and as a passive *subject* in relation to its demands. To the extent that the will of the avenger fails to keep pace with the mandate of revenge (as happens so famously in *Hamlet*) the pressure of grievance will come to seem more and more intolerable.

In such cases, the revenger's desire to bring about some determinate result in the world will sooner or later become blurred with, or overtaken by, his wish to regain some lost state of wholeness and equilibrium within himself. In *The Winter's Tale*, for instance, Leontes frames his mad longing for revenge against Hermione explicitly in terms of a need to pacify his own thoughts ("say that she were gone, / Given to the fire, a moiety of my rest / Might come to me again"; 2.3.7-9). In the same vein, Othello swears to Iago that "my bloody thoughts, with violent pace, / Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love, / Till that a capable and wide revenge / Swallow them up" (3.3.457-460). The transport these men embody is not substantially different in kind –in this regard – from grievance as it might appear in other, less delusional forms.[26] For the revenger thus afflicted, thought becomes a phenomenon which needs to be quelled or obliviated or expulsed – *solved* in some respect. If this is felt to be beyond him (for whatever reason) and if the burden of grievance is sufficiently heavy, then it makes sense that a type of loathing or despair at the enduring activity of the mind will be the outcome.

[26] The objects of both Othello's and Leontes's rage are women –wives – falsely understood to have betrayed them. There is a natural question, then, arising from these examples about whether and to what extent grievance is a phenomenon of the masculine imagination in particular (and to what extent the sexuality of its targets informs its nature). The question clearly has some purchase in *The Tempest*, given that the mere notion of Sycorax runs a close third to Antonio and Caliban in Prospero's antipathy. Adelman's readings of *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale* in *Suffocating Mothers* see these two plays not only as treatments of specifically male rage against women, but also of the difference "between male and female sexual dynamics and hence between male and female sexual imagination: the male end-stopped, figured by stasis and death; the female unbounded, figured as part of a larger process of generation." (*Suffocating Mothers*, 73) Adelman only gives three pages to *The Tempest* in *Suffocating Mothers*, which is a shame, because it seems to me that Prospero can very fruitfully be read as a figure who does not so much appropriate female generativity (as Adelman argues, briefly) as try desperately to imitate it, despairing over his own capacities to create. Conversely, what he gives up in the end is in some sense a type of fixity.

On the other hand, what distinguishes the experience of grievance from Macbeth's type of ravenous guilt is that the former is fundamentally shaped by the idea of an antagonist. Within the aggrieved person's thinking, there is a wrongdoer (or a set of wrongdoers) represented as the cause, in some essential respect, of the aggrieved person's present misery and also as the projected target of retaliation. To reiterate: this orientation-in-mind may never translate into action. Indeed, the subject may emphatically disavow revenge as a matter of principle. Nonetheless, once grievance is installed – and for as long as it lasts – it takes on a life of its own within the imagination. Part of what it is to suffer from this mindset, in other words, is to experience revenge as the projected solution to one's pain.

But *why* is it a corrective, or thought to be? This is a large question. A preliminary issue is whether, or to what extent, it is possible to speak about grievance psychology in general. Even among the handful of examples from Shakespeare that I've quoted, there are obvious and important differences in kind. Unlike Hamlet or Prospero, the vengefulness of Leontes and Othello is in response to an illusory wrong, which makes it difficult if not impossible to think of either of them as a mere victim of events. On the other hand, Hamlet's situation is distinct from the other examples partly because he inherits his duty of revenge. Because it is a murder that the prince seeks to redress, moreover, there is also a clear sense in which his mission demands (or might be thought to demand) the death of his enemy, as well as comprising an irreversible loss which isn't mirrored in *The Tempest*. Prospero is able to return to his position in Milan. Hamlet cannot bring his father back from the dead. For the same reason, the prince can be regarded as an agent who acts on behalf of a third party, unable to act for itself. Whereas Prospero – although arguably he seeks retribution for Miranda's sake as well as his own – is not the avatar of a distinct and incapacitated other in the same way.

These differences are important, clearly. But in themselves they don't preclude a common logic of revenge at work in the various scenarios. In the first place, the fundamental pattern of injury-grievance-response can be observed in each situation. Even in Leontes's example (where the injury is a product of fantasy) this format holds. And this is just what one would expect. Revenge is an innately reactive project: the injury compels the response. Between the first motion and the countermotion of this phenomenon is where grievance lies. The same pattern allows us to say that revenge must always involve some conception of appositeness, too. The question of what makes for an *adequate* answer to the injury is contained within the task from the outset, even in an inchoate form. Revenge is not always and everywhere justice – how could it be? – but nonetheless it seems right to say that the revenger cannot help but apply the category of justice to their pursuit. The same quality means that vengeance lends itself naturally to images of lost and restored equilibrium.[27] Since the injury creates a type of imbalance of suffering between two or more parties, it appears logical to imagine a successful revenge as in some way a return to a state of evenness.

As such, a half-intuitive metaphor for the revenge process is debt. The original crime represents a loss that turns the perpetrator into a kind of debtor to the victim – or the victim's kin – who then seeks to extract something of equivalent value from the culprit. This way of thinking is commonly reflected in the parlance of payback, getting even, settling scores, and so forth. Yet as a formula it also creates obvious puzzles. Most fundamentally, the economic metaphor for revenge is imperfect because the person who loses a sum of money and then regains it is at the

[27] A remark by Simone Weil bears on this: "The desire for vengeance is a desire for essential equilibrium. … The search for equilibrium is bad because it is imaginary. Revenge. Even if in fact we kill or torture our enemy it is, in a sense, imaginary." (*Simone Weil: An Anthology*, ed. Siân Miles, London 1986, 217-218.) William Ian Miller argues forcefully for the centrality of the wish for balance as it pertains to revenge psychology in his book on talionic justice. "The misery of mind is having no prospect of getting back to even." (*Eye for an Eye*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 61-62.) Miller's book is also extremely informative with respect to the sheer historical scope and depth of the economic metaphor I am about to discuss.

end (all other things being equal) no worse off than they were at the beginning. Clearly, however, this cannot be maintained in cases of qualitative rather than merely quantitative loss, where there is no such thing as strict equivalence to trade in.[28] For Orestes, does the death of Clytemnestra make up for the death of Agamemnon? Perhaps in some respect, yes. But it is not because the loss of Agamemnon has been annulled. In which case, what exactly is the balance "restored" in such circumstances (assuming it still makes sense to speak in that manner) and what exactly is the mechanism of its restoration?[29] Here, the notion of grievance at least offers us one fairly intuitive answer. What is recovered – or what the revenger imagines *ought* to be recovered – is the comparatively cloudless state of mind that preceded the demand for revenge. A kind of psychic balance is the object regained.

But still, what is the mechanism of that recovery? This is a trickier question. If revenge can abolish a state of inner disquiet, then this would seem to be because its success removes the cause of disquiet. Yet here the economic oddities of revenge immediately reassert themselves. Insofar as the cause of my malady is Claudius, the man who murdered my father, then this cause can be readily destroyed. But insofar as the reason for my rage and suffering is the sheer fact of my father having been murdered, there is nothing that can be done. Grievance conflates these

[28] A perfect example of this incommensurability is given in *The Merchant of Venice*, where what begins as an economic debt between Shylock and Antonio is transformed into a debt of suffering that can no longer be satisfied, or even computed, in strictly economic terms. (Salarino: "Why I am sure if he forfeit thou wilt not take his flesh. What's that good for?" Shylock: "To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge." 3.1.47-50.) The point is reinforced by the usurer's subsequent refusal – when he is offered – of twice and three times as much as his original bond in payment. (Portia: "Shylock, there's thrice thy money offered thee." Shylock: "An oath, an oath! I have an oath in heaven! / Shall I lay perjury on my soul? / No, not for Venice!" 4.1.225-228.)

[29] In the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals,* Nietzsche argues that the very idea of a just return as it applies to revenge – or to punishment more broadly – has its origins in the fact that the most primal form of payment in human affairs is the joy of exerting power over another human being, where this typically means the joy of inflicting suffering. Hence, what the revenger gets in "exchange" for their loss is an experience and affirmation of their own power. At least in its broadest outlines, I think this explanation is right. Whether or not one finds Nietzsche's genealogical account of the point convincing, or agrees with the premium it sets on cruelty and will-to-power, the restoration involved in the act of revenge is most fruitfully thought about in terms of the revenger's own sense of substance and agency. More on this below. (*The Genealogy of Morals*, Essay 2, particularly Sections 4-6.)

two aspects of the event, combining the identification of a target that can be assaulted with a state of utmost passivity and helplessness. Strictly speaking, this second aspect is the more general feature of revenge stories. It is that adamantine fact of powerlessness that Nietzsche refers to when (via Zarathustra) he states: "this alone is *revenge* itself: the will's unwillingness toward time and time's 'it was.'"[30] Admittedly, this saying of Zarathustra's is in some ways a rather mysterious one – what could it mean to set oneself *against* time, after all? – and we shall return to it in due course. But for the moment all we need to bear in mind is the idea that the revenger qua revenger is brought into an antagonistic relationship to the past in some sense. In that respect, Hamlet's claim that his burden is to amend a time fallen "out of joint" expresses a predicament that belongs to the very essence of the revenge project (1.5.191). An injury cemented in the past is one that cannot be undone: time is irreparable, if this is the type of rupture at issue. Accordingly, the question of grievance brings us directly to the question of a subject's power over their own mind. Or rather, it brings us back to it in a more nuanced fashion.

I will explain. In the first place – as I have noted – what is so fearful about grievance beyond the basic victimhood it presumes (the death of loved ones, etc.) is the prospect of experiencing a painful loss of control over one's own mental activity; of being turned not just into a victim of the world but also a victim of thought, so to speak. In that sense, part of what makes the condition potentially traumatic is the extent to which it reveals the subject's powerlessness over their own faculties.[31] The economic problem of revenge brings up the same issue of inwardly directed power (or its absence) from a different angle. If the enduring cause of grievance is not to be located in any external object or enemy, but rather consists in a past event

[30] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (trans. Adrian del Caro, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 111.
[31] This is the stuff of the great Shakespearean tragedies, of course, or at least what A. C. Bradley identified as the four great tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, London: Macmillan, 1905.)

that cannot be altered, then by the same token the possibility of freeing oneself from grievance can only depend on some form of internal change. The instigating event must be remade in the mind of the subject – or else forgotten – so that it no longer functions as a source of pain in the same way. This is not to say whether or how such a transformation is possible (which, as much as anything, will depend on the particularities of a given situation). But if there *is* any possibility of the subject liberating themselves under their own power, their capacity to bring this change about is what it turns on.

It is another familiar idea that – once begun – the pursuit of revenge is capable of giving rise to a perpetual and metastasising cycle of violence between the warring parties, generating a kind of endless back-and-forth movement (this is the very possibility that the principle of "an eye for an eye" is meant to forestall, for instance).[32] I remarked just now that in a grievance play the natural motion of revenge is interrupted, but this may be a misleading formulation if it implies that – were the motion *not* interrupted – revenge would by itself come to a natural halt or completion. In fact, what the aforementioned fear of metastasising violence and the imperfections of the economic metaphor each suggest is that perhaps no such innate endpoint exists. Because revenge applies a transactional logic in a field where there is no genuine equivalence, there is an obvious sense in which the process of revenge lacks an internal limiting principle. What counts as "enough" vengeance, after all? One imagines that the answer will depend either on the arbitrary perspective of the revenger or, perhaps more commonly, will be imposed from the outside by some form of law. But revenge logic qua revenge logic does not fix its own conclusion. Indeed, this very absence is what makes the imposition of the law necessary. In itself, revenge merely supplies the principle of a threshold (there must be *some* reaction,

[32] Of course, the talionic principle also means that one should take *no less* than an eye for an eye. See: Miller's discussion of the Biblical talion (*Eye for an Eye*, 20-30).

inactivity is not vengeance) but no outer limit, and this is one reason it has a disposition toward maximally destructive action.

One can argue about the extent to which *The Tempest* fulfils the pattern of a revenge tale. Up until the final act, Prospero's treatment of the royal party amounts to a form of (theoretically edifying) torture, and so it is not as though the story lacks vengeful practice altogether. Nonetheless, in the late exchange with Ariel, Prospero makes it clear that he understands himself as turning away from revenge. By contrast, in a moment closer to the beginning of the play, the Duke recounts an episode of "unmitigable" vindictive rage (1.2.276). He is not talking about himself, but rather Sycorax, the witch who preceded his rule over the island. Her fury was inspired by an act of disobedience from Ariel, and the punishment she meted out to the spirit (imprisonment within a pine tree) might have lasted forever were it were not for Prospero's arrival, since the witch "[could] not again undo" her magic, and eventually died (1.2.291). Unappeasable anger, here, results in the creation of something that has no self-determined end – no inner principle of cessation, as it were. Ariel's punishment is the more literal expression of this outcome. But Sycorax's fury is itself unlimited in the sense that its effects both outstrip her ability to control them and outlast her biological frame. Its power exceeds her finitude.

"The foul witch Sycorax," remarks Prospero, "who with age and envy / Was grown into a hoop…" (1.2.258-9).[33] It isn't made clear if Sycorax underwent this change only after she imprisoned Ariel, but there are reasons to think that she did – and in any case this is the condition she died in. Not only time but *thought* is said to have bent the witch into a circle, ergo a symbol of a closed infinity as well as a figure of death-in-life (insofar as existing within an unbroken

[33] It would appear that the sense of "envy" Shakespeare employs here is: "Malignant or hostile feeling; ill-will, malice, enmity" (an obsolete usage, per the Oxford English Dictionary – quoted from the [1.a.] entry for "envy" on oed.com).

loop is to be excluded from living in some sense, something akin to the thought that repetition is in the nature of hell). All of which makes Sycorax an emblem inside *The Tempest* for the self-consuming forces that grievance can unleash.

How might vengefulness be brought to an end? There are all sorts of answers that one could imagine to this question. Perhaps at some point the injury is no longer felt as an injury in the same way because the victim has forgiven the culprit, or successfully massacred the enemy and their entire family, or become a profoundly different person, or restored honour and peace of mind in some other meaningful fashion (accepted compensation, for instance). Yet since the injurious event is a sealed fact of the past there is in every case the ineliminable possibility that *nothing* will count as its defeat, hence nothing will remove the cause for grievance; and so even if the revenge project comes to a halt through time or accident or simply running out of foes to destroy, it will never be completed. This gives us a much more fundamental explanation for the potentially limitless character of the revenge drive – it has no worldly object, essentially (and this is the flipside of the necessarily inward nature of any real escape from grievance). It also gives us the outlines of a formula for spiritual captivity.

What is it the avenger falls victim to? Intuitively, one wants to say that memory is the oppressive power at work. But if we stop to consider the issue more fully, we might doubt how reliable the relationship between the revenger's recollections and the events of the past needs to be. (Think again of Leontes.) It would perhaps be more accurate to say that the avenger is dominated by an image of loss or injury. We should add, however, that whether this image is the representation of something real or imaginary – or some amalgamation of the two – it necessarily *has the form of a past truth*. That is, it is of the nature of being vengeful to experience oneself as in some way a captive of the past, whether this history is "genuine" or not.

This allows us to say a little more about the relationship between grievance and the will. If grievance necessarily comprises a representation of the past, then it makes sense that it would also pose a profound conundrum for the will – since part of what it is to be in conscious relationship to an event that we know, or are convinced we know, took place is to understand that event as something that cannot be altered. ("Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto's gates… strong as heaven itself," *Troilus and Cressida*, 5.2.156-158.) Thus, as I touched on above, to suffer grievance is in part to suffer from a representation of immutability. We could say this is what gives the condition its special arduousness, in that it seems to demand that we *do something* about that which admits no change. But notice – this is crucial – that the problem here does not simply consist of a relation between ourselves and some unfortunate external event, X, which has occurred and now cannot be undone. The rationale for saying that the revenger suffers from an *image* or *representation* of loss rather than loss per se is that this "event" is part of their psychological being. It is not external. We can hence also be more precise about the kind of powerlessness grievance bequeaths. On some level (although one may be more or less self-conscious of it) the aggrieved party has been touched by an intimation of the deep uselessness of their will. Hamlet is such a figure. Inside the avenger is an image that is both a source of terrible pain and, in its form as a historical truth, a mockery of their capacities as an active, willing subject. There is in this respect a partial analogy between grievance and certain conceptions of sin: a wrongness that is most intimately ours and yet which we hold no power to repair.

We also find a rationale, here, for Prospero's status as an embodiment of the unfettered will who is at the same time profoundly limited and trapped. Even the most fearsome revenger is left at the mercy of his own thoughts. Recall that when the sorcerer frames his brother as a rival magician in the second scene, it is not just Antonio's ability to control the inner lives of others

that is raised – it is also his purported capacity to shape his own thoughts as he sees fit.[34] By contrast, Prospero's thoughts, up until (at least) the final part of the story, will not unclench. He is the one who has spent twelve years in a fury on the island, while his brother has seemingly never been troubled by a second thought. It was Prospero who, in the wake of whatever world-altering catastrophe struck his life in Milan, retreated into study for the "bettering" of his mind (1.2.90), and yet only invited more catastrophe thereby. The penultimate piece of magic he performs in *The Tempest* is to break the spell cast on the hypnotized men in Act 5: "A solemn air, and the best comforter / To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains" (5.1.58-59). Primarily, the sorcery is instrument of Prospero's revenge in the story – but as he gives it up, along with his revenge, we catch a glimpse of what might have been the true hope invested in it even from the moment of his retirement in Milan. It was meant to be an instrument of healing.

3

Let me briefly say something about the implicit parallel in *The Tempest* between grievance and theatre. In a formal sense, the play can be seen to tie these two things together. The emergence of what I've called the theatrical frame in the transition from the first to the second scene is also the revelation of a world that is, in one respect, quite literally defined by grievance. Inside the story, existence on the island – both before and after the arrival of Alonso's ship – is organised around Prospero's wound and his wish for retribution. Our "entrance" into the theatrical is simultaneously an introduction to this environment in which grievance saturates the fabric of life. Conversely, the end of the play – with its promised departure from the island and the renunciation of Prospero's powers – corresponds to what seems to be at least a partial, though

[34] "[Like] one / Who, having into truth by telling it, / Made such a sinner of his memory / To credit his own lie" (1.2.99-102). Cf. Chapter 2, Section 1.

significant, escape from this condition. Within *The Tempest*, both theatre and grievance are in this manner associated with a movement away from the ordinary world, and the return to that world is associated with their conclusion. Being "inside" theatre is like being "inside" grievance, somehow, and leaving one is like leaving the other.

Clearly, this symmetry is not the same thing as a relationship of identity. Nonetheless, the structure of *The Tempest* invites the question of why these two spheres – which seem so categorically different, on the face of it – might be thought to mirror one another. Recall that our original movement into theatre was marked by the discovery of a kind of absolute human power behind the events of the opening scene. We move from a picture of a world in which there is (or seems to be) no controlling principle or intelligence, to one in which there is a sovereign will in effect. So this is the first basis within the play for a comparison between the two phenomena. In each case, the motion away from the ordinary world encompasses a departure from a realm in which there is (or seems to be) no overall controlling human power, and an entrance into a sphere in which there is such a power. Implicitly, this distinction is what marks off both grievance and theatre as meaningfully *other* to the ordinary mode of life.

Some other correlations can be sketched out. For a start, we can see that the fact of being a revenger involves submitting oneself to the demand for a particular kind of activity. Behaviour is predetermined or compelled to some extent; a role is enacted. (Grievance by itself provides a shadow version of this condition, in that even if one never translates thought into deed, the aggrieved party still experiences themselves as painfully *subject* to the demand of revenge: thought slips out of their control.) With respect to theatre in general – or at least the type of theatre we are concerned with here – there is an obvious parallel on the side of performance.[35]

[35] For the relevant type of theatre, see: the discussion in Section 4 of Chapter 1.

The actor in a play adopts a character-mask and "enters" the world of the story, which entails a submission to a pre-set structure. It may be true that the theatre performer is free to opt out of this determined condition, while the person afflicted with grievance is not, but in either case while the condition lasts the subject's life is given over to a quasi-alien logic. Of course, in concrete terms this surrender will always be a matter of degree. The actor's role is (typically) an interpretation too, a way of being themselves in a special sense. Likewise, the revenger's individuality may come through in any number of ways in the course of their pursuit – or indeed in their passive suffering. But the point is that such expressions of individuality are necessarily situated within an overarching logic that defines what the subject is doing.

There is a further point that can be added to this: in both cases, the person who exists in this displaced condition does so in relationship to a type of image, and it is this image that dictates the subject's life. For the revenger, this is the inner representation of whatever injurious loss it is that drives them. For the actor, it is the character they play (and by extension the dramatic world this character belongs to). But for each, the interruption of life is simultaneously a coming into relation with some such image. With respect to *The Tempest* in particular, the installation of the theatrical frame at the outset adds yet another layer to the analogy. What it implies is that, within the contract of theatre, it is not only the actor who departs from their life and plays host to an image – the audience does so, too. Again, these positions are obviously not identical to one another. But our "arrival" in the role of the audience within *The Tempest* is another event that corresponds to the symbolic departure of the ordinary world. And clearly, as this happens, we are also brought into a relationship with an image or a set of images: namely, the play itself, the dramatic-object that forms at the same time as the audience-subject.

Consequently, there is a way in which audience, actors and the aggrieved, all in their different ways, partake in a mutual condition.

This condition might be called *unlife*, in the same way that the term *undead* is used to mean not-dead rather than living. It represents a state of existential displacement or suspension in relation to an image, a removal from the ordinary mode of life that is not a relocation into a new space. With respect to the theatrical audience's experience of this condition, the pertinent question is something like – what happens to us, exactly, when we submit ourselves to a play? The thing to bear in mind is that being an audience is not brought about merely by having a seat in a theatre, facing a show. One is an audience to something only to the extent that one engages in the characteristic activity of audiencehood in relation to it, i.e. *plays the part of an audience.* And there is reason to think that this activity does indeed comprise a type of supplanting of one's identity. True, it does not involve action in the same way as vengeance or being in a performance do, but nonetheless being part of "an audience" leads to a displacement of one's own life and projects.

On this sort of view, it would be possible for a stage performance to be taking place before a full house and yet for no audience to be present, if it were the case that no one in the theatre was really engaging in the distinct activity of audiencehood (perhaps because everyone had their mind completely on other things, for example). But if a subject *were* engaging in that activity, what happens? I want to suggest that audiencehood – at least, with respect to the type of theatrical audience at issue here – is a state of being that is defined by receptivity to its object. One lets the drama in. This is not to say very much about what occurs (or might occur) as a result of this reception, but it is enough to give sense to the idea that the subject's life is suspended or

makes way in the process. Audiencehood represents a type of joining, or conjoining, in which the ordinary world is excluded through the active devotion of attention to the object on show.

On the basis of the above, we can surmise that alongside the idea of *departure* as a shared quality of grievance and theatre, *The Tempest* evokes the notion of a *summoning image* (where the latter is in some way the mechanism of the former). Needless to say, this – the summoning image – remains a fairly nebulous concept, and there are good reasons to be uncertain about the exact depth of the analogy. Are we to believe that the sort of psychological image that motivates a revenger is really comparable to the kind of manufactured images we find in theatre? How does the inward nature of the former match up to the externalised qualities of the latter, for example? Exploring these questions properly would demand a longer version of the project than I am able to provide here. It seems to me, therefore, that the best policy is to be relatively minimalistic in the account of theatre. The only claims I would endorse without reservation, here, are that there are good reasons for thinking that *The Tempest* posits a relationship between theatre and grievance (and as such it's reasonable to inquire about how the two might be connected) and that, more specifically, the idea of an image that in some way pulls the subject away from the ordinary world of life bears further examination. Given that I've said so much more about grievance than theatre, it makes most sense to approach the relationship from that direction. In other words, our aim should be to arrive at as a clear an understanding as possible about what the image entails within grievance, and this can provide a base for extrapolations about how it merges with the practice of theatre. Let us now turn back to the issue of vengefulness fully.

4

On the surface, as we know, the wish for revenge seems to concern a loss that has taken place in the external world (e.g. a dead father, martial defeat, romantic betrayal, social downfall, or whatever). But upon examination it turns out that – although such losses may be perfectly real – in the most important sense the problem of grievance consists in a change that has taken place within the subject rather than in their environment. Whereas before they did not carry around an image of loss inside themselves, now they do. On this account, understanding the phenomenon of grievance reduces to the question of what it means for this sort of image to reside within a person's mind. What does the image *do* to them, in other words?

In the first place, it has to be emphasised – or re-emphasised – that there is no necessary link between a state of affairs in the external world and the presence of the image within the subject; and nor can the power of the image be adequately explained simply in terms of its representational content (i.e. what the image is an image *of*, specifically, in the mind of the revenger).[36] With respect to the first point, we can assume that the means by which the image comes to take power in an individual's psyche is open to variation. Grievance might befall someone because of a genuine crime committed by a genuine enemy, or it might arise irrationally in response to a misfortune for which no one is really responsible, or it might be the sheer product of a person's fantasies. In a similar way, its resolution or continuance does not ultimately depend on any particular state of affairs obtaining in the external world. Revenge may

[36] In any particular case, of course – be it in real life or a story – the mindset of the aggrieved could be coloured by any number of individual factors that might make them more or less vulnerable to the state I am trying to describe here. It may also be that in any concrete example it would be misleading to speak of a single "image" as though the subject's unhappiness were necessarily concentrated on a lone, unchanging picture of an event that befell them rather than a more clustered or fluid set of representations.

bring about the end of grievance and a thwarted revenge may very well ensure its persistence. But the mechanism is not automatic.

With respect to the particular content of the image, on the other hand, there is of course an obvious sense in which the image commands power simply in virtue of what it depicts. Its content is a source of pain for the victim because it is a remembrance of some valued state of affairs in the world which is now gone – and, equally, the enduring power of the image is connected to the fact that the subject still mourns for this state of affairs. This is all true enough. But here, too, it must be added that there is no necessary entailment between an inner representation of some lost state of affairs and a subject's feelings about that loss. The same person can experience the same event (allowing for a reasonably capacious definition of what we mean by "the same") through their memory as a source of grievance at one time and not at another. Ergo, it must be the case that there is also something independent of the image's specific content that makes it into a source of pain and subjugation for the aggrieved person.

This is the rationale for saying that it is the *form* of the image that matters rather than what it depicts. Beyond the idea of there being a component of the image that cannot be straightforwardly identified with its content, an additional reason for using the term *form* is to convey the idea that the image has a specific nature, a life of its own. In other words, it functions in a manner that produces a distinctive structured effect within the mind of the aggrieved and, in doing so, imposes a certain shape upon that person's relationship to the external world. For clarity's sake, I will use the term *grievous image* to refer to any inner representation of loss that takes this form.

Some of the qualities of such an image were already set out in the second section of this chapter, but it does no harm to quickly recapitulate the essentials. First and foremost, the

grievous image presents itself as a past truth and what it represents is experienced by the subject as a violation of justice. The latter need not be an especially articulate sensation (although it might be) and nor does it have to reflect reality (although again, it might). It merely has to be the case that the aggrieved thinks of the event depicted as something that *ought not to have happened*, as an occurrence that was somehow viscerally wrong or unfair. Furthermore, the perception of injustice entails the perception of a wrongdoer who is responsible for it. Obviously, this structure is particularly apparent in a revenge scenario, where the hero faces off against an enemy who has committed known crimes against them. But it is an interesting question whether the "wrongdoer" in such an equation needs to be a human agent at all, insofar as we can at least superficially make sense of the idea of a person who wishes to be revenged upon the world, or society, or God, or some comparable abstraction. (Think again of the category "villain" in Auden's usage. The same consideration also harkens back to the gnomic statement about time in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.) For the moment let us just assume that, alongside moral outrage and the retrospective form of the image, grievance orientates the subject towards the perception of an external, blameworthy cause of one form or another. This cause has the status of an adversary.

Although in one sense the grievous image sits at the core of the subject's identity – and so it can be hard to see how we might think of it as being distinct from their person – it also operates as a quasi-alien component of mental life, and this is what makes it intelligible to speak of a *relationship* between the image and the subject who bears it. This relationship is essentially an antagonistic one. The subject experiences the image as acting upon them painfully and in turn (whether or not they conceptualise it as such) every action the subject takes in relation to the image is performed for the sake of "defeating" it. Indeed, this is simply to reiterate one of the very first points made about grievance in this chapter, which is that the person who suffers in this

manner acts in order to bring an end to a state of inner turmoil – only we are now able to see that this purpose (if it is to be realised) entails the transformation, or somehow the expulsion, of the image that inhabits them.

But here is the truly pertinent feature: we observed previously how the grievous image functions as a kind of *active negation* of the subject's will. Because the subject experiences the image as both unacceptable (qua violation of justice) and yet unalterable (qua historical event), it also amounts to a reflexive demonstration of powerlessness within their psyche – an *active* demonstration in the sense that it appears at once as an enormously compelling motive and a completely unactionable target. This quality is present no matter what the content of the image might be. Part of what it is to suffer grievance, in other words, is to suffer from the inability (or the felt inability) to erase the original crime. Whether the aggrieved person is conscious of it or not, they are hence afflicted with a kind of proof of the nullity of her will in relation to some vitally important dimension of their life. It seems reasonable, in that case, to assume that the pain of the image – its formal or unparticularised pain, as it were – must also be related to this stigma.

In order to bring this into focus, however, we first need to be clear about something that I have largely left implicit so far. There is a way in which it can be misleading to speak of the grievous image as existing *inside* the subject, insofar as this description suggests that it has a no essential bearing on the subject's relationship to the world around them. But the image does have such a bearing. As well as being a representation within the mind, it comprises a mode of orientation towards the external world as a whole. (I will explain the significance of the words *as a whole* in this formula shortly.)[37] As ever, this mode of orientation does not exist inside a

[37] Likewise – in case it causes any confusion – by "world" in this context I simply mean the outside that stands against the subject's inside; that is, in the very broadest sense, the environment in which they live and act. Cf. the Introduction for a longer discussion of this point.

vacuum – its influence in any particular case will depend on the variables of character and circumstance. At the level of form, however, the point is that the grievous image has both an inward and an outward-facing dimension.

What does this mean in practice? Given that the image is the representation of a *loss* that dominates the subject's thinking, it generates an outlook according to which the world as a whole appears fundamentally deficient. Tacitly or otherwise, vengefulness entails some comparison to an earlier state of affairs against which the current state of affairs is judged inferior (indeed, the present situation is essentially defined for the revenger as a debased version of the past). One of the interesting subtleties of the image in this regard is that this disordered relationship between the aggrieved person's interiority and the condition of the world around them is experienced by her in the form of a projected task. Instead of depicting an *internal* relationship, the image depicts an *external* one in that it ties the subject's suffering to an event (whatever it may be) and an adversary (likewise) that exist independently of her mind. From the subject's point of view, the conclusion that follows naturally from this appearance is that the cure for her unhappiness lies in amending, somehow, the faulty state of the world. Of course, it is possible to be more or less credulous in this regard. Even a deeply aggrieved person might be conscious that "correcting" the external world (by slaying their enemy, for example; or restoring their lost social position) will not be enough to end their suffering if it is not accompanied by an inner transformation of some sufficiently meaningful sort. Nonetheless, whether or not this type of awareness is available to the subject, the natural prejudice of the image is always to push her gaze outwards, so to speak.

In a sufficiently extreme case, the peril of grievance is therefore not just that it opens up the possibility of being lost in an endless pursuit of phantoms but that this pursuit – and the pain

that underlies it – can come to interfere with a basic sense of attachment to the world. To the extent that the grievous image dominates the subject's thinking, it comes to resemble a kind of medium through which she perceives everything else. And how the world appears through this medium is as *something that should be otherwise*. At the heart of grievance is an immensely powerful perception that the world as-it-is is deeply and painfully wrong, something that cannot be tolerated; something that has for one reason or another fallen into a degraded state in which the subject is utterly unable to feel at peace. By rights it should be different, but it is not different, and – for as long as the tyranny of the image lasts – cannot be made so. In this manner, the aggrieved figure ultimately relates to the world as something that is profoundly unresponsive to her wishes.

Among other things, this view casts some light on Zarathustra's opaque definition of revenge (again: "this alone is *revenge* itself: the will's unwillingness toward time and time's 'it was'").[38] What is confusing about this statement, at first glance, is that it appears to frame time as somehow an *object* towards which the vengeful mind bears an – unwilling, adversarial – relationship. But how could that be? In fact, I think the obvious difficulty in imaging time in such a way is central to what Nietzsche is trying to express. The point is the same one that we came to at the end of the second section: *the essence of revenge is not the pursuit of an object*. As it turns out, Auden's conception of the villain who labours under an indiscriminate grudge against life or society comes closer to the heart of the more general phenomenon of vengefulness than it might have appeared at first sight. Whatever the notion of a person who wishes for

[38] I note in passing that, at this point, Zarathustra's maxim resonates in a new way with the account of grievance I have been setting out insofar as it links the revenge mindset not simply to a contentious relationship with history but to a *representation* of history (time's "it was"). Notice, too, how this representation is framed in depersonalised terms – as originating from "time" rather than the mind of the aggrieved subject, therefore locating the problem, ostensibly, as existing outside of the subject instead of within them. The grievous image performs the same sort of cognitive inversion.

revenge upon the world (or whatever equivalent) is meant to express, it is obviously not the description of a subject who is literally in pursuit of some enormous, actionable target. Rather, what it identifies is much more like a general attitude or orientation. The impression it conveys is of a mind in thrall to a strangely objectless though all-consuming purpose – which is to say that this is revenge as a way of being in the world, not as a determinate project that might or might not be completed. This is also how Zarathustra's statement about time ought to be taken, I think. According to such a view, revenge is in some sense *never* really a matter of accomplishment: it reflects a holistic mode of engagement with the world, one that might survive the completion of any determinate task therein, even a concretely "successful" retribution.

By its nature, this vengeful mode of being is weighted towards dysfunction. Per Zarathustra's example, time itself is not an object but (surely) something much more like a medium in which we exist. Thus, to be *against* time – or the world, or life – is to be in some sense set against what you are, or against the conditions of your own being. In more commonplace terms, the revenge that Zarathustra warns against refers to a situation in which an individual is dominated by a desperate and overwhelming – though somehow futile – wish for the world to be different. And the puzzle we have been tracking is how this desire can persist even to the point of the mind injuring itself – indeed, to the point at which thought becomes despised by the subject whose thought it is, another sense in which grievance amounts to life within a corrupted medium. Consider once again Prospero's wish to transform Antonio. *The Tempest* gives us enough information to conclude that this wish is essentially impossible – not only because the sorcerer's magic cannot reliably produce an alteration in another person's soul but because Antonio (unlike Alonso) is the paradigm of a soul that cannot be touched. Whatever else this deadlock amounts to, and I will have more to say about it in the next section, it

represents the locus of Prospero's psychological dislocation from the world. Antonio is the unbending part of reality that comes to stand most vividly for the intransigence of the whole. Prospero's need for his brother to be otherwise, which he cannot enforce and eventually abandons, is of a piece with all of those other details in *The Tempest* that put the lie to the assurance of his power. But it also brings out the more basic point that the sorcerer's life is one defined by a sense of incongruity with the whole he confronts.

5

Part of what the idea of A* is meant to convey is a condition of mind in which a subject becomes intensely and unhappily conscious of the world's capacity to betray them. Or to put it in slightly different terms, in the wake of some overwhelming experience of loss, the individual affected is made urgently – even feverishly – aware of the possibility of such loss. This is not simply a piece of information. Any minimally reflective person can, of course, acknowledge the truth of the idea that the order of one's life is never fixed absolutely: there is nothing to preclude sudden and ruinous changes from intruding. But this is different from a state of mind in which such knowledge (as it were) imposes itself; where it fundamentally alters one's orientation towards the world in a manner that may or may not be permanent, but which is clearly of a different order to the more abstract reality it possessed prior to the change. *Betrayal* speaks to the idea that the subject's life is reoriented such that the untrustworthiness of the world becomes, to them, the most salient fact about it (whether or not the problem is articulated by them in this way), and beyond this, it hints at a type of intrinsic normative hue to their experience, as though in the subject's estimation this change *ought not* to have been inflicted on them (though this feeling is perhaps better thought of as an expression of pain than a real judgment).

From the above, we can see the outline of the affinity between A* (as a type of generalised, post-catastrophic state) and the narrower idea of grievance. Each of these conditions involves an all-pervading sense of normative violation. The world in general – not just one or more of its parts – is not as it should be. At a high level of abstraction, my view is that Prospero's struggle in *The Tempest* represents a conflict of this sort, a struggle against the world apprehended as a betrayer. For reasons which may be obvious, Antonio functions as the personification of this conflict in the play: he is treachery in human form. This also helps to explain why, for Prospero, it is not enough to contain or eliminate his brother in his initial plans. Antonio needs to be changed rather than destroyed because (within the sorcerer's wish) the point is not to punish him for betrayal, but in a sense to defeat the very possibility of betrayal. If one can control minds – or make everyone perfectly virtuous – then one is immune from treachery. The fantasy of omnipotence in *The Tempest* is a fantasy of perfect insulation in this manner.

There are two more questions to address. First, what is the difference between the type of disordered relationship to the world denoted by A* and the type of disordered relationship to the world represented by grievance? Second, in what sense does vengefulness amount to an impulse towards life, as I've suggested?

A good way to approach the first of these is to look again at the beginning of *Hamlet*. At the start of the tragedy, the problem the prince confronts is not that he is under an obligation to take revenge (as yet, his uncle's crime remains undiscovered) but rather that the world around him has transformed detestably without his being able to do anything about it. The combination of his father's death and mother's remarriage is unbearable. And it is clear, if we take the opening soliloquy at face value, that these events have also poisoned Hamlet's view of the

world.[39] This much we know from our previous engagement with the passage.[40] What we are now able to appreciate, however, is that – with one vital exception – the prince's soliloquy also evinces all of the qualities of the grievous image. He is tormented by a representation of the past ("Must I remember?" [1.2.143]); beset with feelings of powerless ("But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue" [1.2.159]); flooded with moral indignation; and set in a hostile orientation towards the perceived cause of his pain. Moreover, the cause he identifies is not – or not simply – the particular changes that have come about. It is also the whole within which these changes have occurred, as though the world itself must be rotten if it could allow such things to occur. Evidently, the prince is suffering from an image of loss in much the same way as the aggrieved person suffers. He cannot accept the world-as-it-is but finds himself incapable of altering it. He is thus stranded in a kind of all-encompassing rancour.

But Hamlet is not yet an avenger. However similar it is in its form, the image that torments him at the beginning of *Hamlet* is not a grievous image in the sense of the term used here. What we are shown, instead, is a condition that is very *like* grievance but that (literally, in this case) precedes it. The difference between the two is that in the prior state there is not even the mirage of an object. There is hence no call to action. By contrast, although the world may appear utterly alien and contrary to the desires of the aggrieved person, such a person clearly never loses their grip on the idea of meaningful action altogether. Quite the opposite: the prospect of revenge remains *all too* meaningful.

As such, one thing we can say about the arrival of the revenge plot in *Hamlet* is this: it is what displaces the original state of misery. This points us towards an important distinction

[39] "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world! / Fie on't, ah, fie, 'tis an unweeded garden / That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely." (1.2.133-137)
[40] Cf. Introduction, Section 3.

between the avenger and the person who despairs of the world – who hates it, even – but who has no equivalent sense of mission. The difference is that the soul immersed in grievance still relates to the world as something that can be fixed. This is not to say – for all of the reasons discussed at length in this chapter – that a revenge accomplished *would* redeem the world in the revenger's experience. In the most literal sense, some things would remain irreparably shattered (again, killing Claudius does not bring back Old Hamlet). But the point here is not to provide a syllogism for action. It is to highlight a difference in orientation, i.e. in the manner that the subject relates to the world, whether or not he elects to follow any particular course of action. Before his encounter with the Ghost, it is as though Hamlet had been obscurely ejected from the positive order of the world around him, entirely cut off from the possibility of affecting it in any meaningful fashion. Grievance, on the other hand, at least preserves the appearance of the world's correctability – of there being a deed that could be accomplished *by the avenger's own hand* that would alleviate his sense of severance from his surroundings. The idea of revenge functions as a strange sort of promise of being able to rejoin the world.

One thing that *Hamlet* and *The Tempest* each have in common is that neither of them are primarily stories about revenge but rather stories about whether (and in what circumstances) this type of reintegration with the world is possible. The point was noted in the introduction, and it is an essential one, that the feeling of disunion is itself an affliction. The image of loss, the phenomenon I have made so much of over the course of this chapter, is the way it lives on inside the mind (it is the form in which de-integration appears, if you like). Hamlet is already burdened with this riven condition before he receives the Ghost's decree. This is part of what explains his great vulnerability to the spirit, a vulnerability he acknowledges openly later in the play:

The spirit that I have seen

May be a devil, and the devil hath power

T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps

Out of my weakness and my melancholy,

As he is very potent with such spirits,

Abuses me to damn me. (2.2.537-542)

Apart from the contingencies of Hamlet's own temperament and circumstances, we are aware in the wake of the above discussion that there is a more general reason to doubt that revenge can produce (or at least reliably produce) the kind of integrative result it promises. The obscurities in the Ghost's edict prefigure some of the problems. The spirit declares to Hamlet that it is "Doomed for a certain time to walk the night, / And for the day confined to fast in fires, / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1.5.10-13). But is the prince supposed to believe that revenge is a part of this purgation? Are we? No explicit link is drawn between the ideas by the messenger – but nor does the spirit prevent Hamlet from assuming the connection exists, and the very structure of their meeting seems to presume the idea that the world will be haunted until the wrongs are atoned for. [41] The Ghost's commands multiply. "But howsomever thou pursues this act, / Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive /

[41] As for the identity of the ghost, one powerful argument in favour of it being a deceiver is the sheer fact of it demanding revenge: "The point cannot, it seems to me, be too much emphasized that the ghosts which the Catholics recognized as coming from purgatory to ask help from the living in the expiation of their sins did not demand revenge, but only masses, alms, prayers, and fasting. In fact, the chief argument against those who thought ghosts to be mere manifestations of the devil was the argument that since the ghosts never demanded other than things recognized as good, it was impossible to think their visits inspired by the devil. And visits of spirits which would move men to other deeds are regularly ascribed to the wiles of the devil" (Lily B. Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," *Modern Philology*, 28,1931: 294).

Against thy mother aught. Leave her to heaven…" (1.5.84-86). Yet what is it to avoid "tainting" one's mind in this pursuit? Or to prevent one's soul from contriving? This is not just a matter of *doing* something, it seems.

When Hamlet claims to empty out the contents of his mind, so that the spirit's "commandment all alone shall live / Within the book and volume of my brain," it is from one angle an image of life being sacrificed to grievance. From another, it is the picture of a desperate attempt by the prince to evacuate his own thoughts – to relieve himself of the tumult caused by his losses by subsuming his inner life to duty. This manoeuvre fails, of course, and the play is in large part the story of its failure. But one can see how the dynamic arises: what Hamlet wants to be rid of is the is apprehension of being stranded in an utterly irreparable world, either by "fixing" it through revenge or by muting his own consciousness of it. But his uncertainty in the play (both about the cosmos in general and the Ghost in particular) never allows the intimation of helplessness to disappear. This is one reason for the great ambivalence in the play about the act of revenge.

If we understand Prospero's pursuit of sorcery in Milan as the response to some still earlier catastrophe in his life, we can see how *The Tempest* mimics the pattern of *Hamlet*. The need for revenge is superimposed on a more fundamental and difficult problem about whether the world can be rejoined (or we might say, since it is the same thing: whether world-altering sorrow can be corrected). I observed previously that *The Tempest* might be described, albeit in a qualified way, as a comedy of revenge, and this idea is perhaps worth returning to now in more detail, when we are considering the difference between the romance and *Hamlet*. It may not be such a serviceable label for the play after all. Taken literally, the notion implies a story that achieves – or at least aims at – the ends of comedy using the means of revenge. What are the

ends of comedy, in that case? In the last chapter, I touched on the mythic theory of genre presented by Northrop Frye, and this strikes me as being the right instrument for the question, at least with respect to *The Tempest*.

Per Frye's theory, the basis of myth is the natural cycle of growth and decay. If tragedy is premised on the movement towards death in nature, "[comedy] is based on the second half of the great cycle, moving from death to rebirth, decadence to renewal, winter to spring, darkness to a new dawn."[42] By convention, comedies end with marriages and the symbolic regeneration of society. In the dynamic terms that are meant to underpin this convention, comedy is "an impetus toward completing a certain type of movement," writes Frye, and this movement is "a drive toward identity."[43] So the comic, on this account, is characterised as something like a drive toward the unities that make new life possible – and the consummation of this drive might find its expression on various levels, such as the personal (the recovery of identity after a period exile or amnesia, say), the romantic (the conversion of two into one through marriage), or the social (the healing of interfactional or intergenerational conflict). Frye is adamant that comedy is a structure rather than a mood, hence his emphasis is on these dynamic patterns rather than the emotions they elicit. The "logical end" of comedy is festive in that it is a bringing together and a celebration of the unity, but one can have better or worse feelings about festivities, after all.[44] In any case, if we were to accept this theory of comedy, how would it bear on the question at hand? The answer appears to be this: a comedy of revenge would be a story that brought about or reconfirmed identity through the act of revenge. The achievement of revenge and of life-giving unity would in some way coincide.

[42] Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 121.
[43] Ibid., 118.
[44] Ibid., 46-50.

Can we imagine revenge doing this? We already reflected, near the beginning of this chapter, on a type of comic revenge in which a group – per Anderson's schema – "revenges" itself on some internal threat to its cohesion, and thereby reproduces or reinforces togetherness. But this is obviously not the sort of arduous and personal vengefulness that we have been concerned with. With respect to the latter, the question clearly depends on how exactly we conceptualise the kind of unity at issue. It is true, for example, that there are ways of thinking of a successful revenge as leading to a type of wholeness, generally via the metaphor of purgation. A household or a person's conscience could be said to be "made whole" in a certain sense after an enemy had been destroyed, if this means that some internal conflict had thereby been decisively settled. (Analogously, a warrior's honour might be stained and then restored by retaliatory action, a similar movement in that the aim is to eliminate a sort of corruption.) But the concept of wholeness being employed in such examples is slightly different from the one that Frye uses in his account of comedy. His notion of identity is a bringing together of two or more components that are separated. The metaphor of purgation, by contrast, involves the expulsion of an element from an entity that it had previously been joined to. It is a breaking apart rather than a bringing together. This observation chimes with the more general thought that one of the reasons the term *comedy of revenge* sounds unusual – on Frye's terms – is that it's hard to grasp intuitively how a revenge tale could come to symbolise a triumph of life over death. For Frye, the comic movement is fundamentally an expression of generative power, whereas it seems much more natural to think of the drive for revenge as a manifestation of destructive force.

Having said all that, the notion of grievance offers a fairly intuitive way of making a connection between the desire for revenge and the (re)emergence of life. Insofar as we think of revenge in terms of what happens – or what is meant to happen – to the target of the avenger's

wrath, then naturally it will look like a movement from life to death; the subtraction of something from the world. (The death may be literal or it might be symbolic: a humiliation or ostracization or exile, for example.) This movement becomes inverted, however, if we focus our attention on the revenger instead. I have pressed the point that grievance equates to a certain interruption of living, and insofar as the desire for revenge doubles as the wish to return from this condition, then the longing for revenge can be seen as encompassing an impulse towards life. In that sense, assuming the avenger is not fastened to the idea of self-destruction, what she desires would indeed be comic. She wishes to live again: to have the winter of grievance give way to the spring of new life. Thus conceived, the problem of revenge *is* a problem of generativity – of the avenger's capacity to bring new life into being via her own reintegration with the world. The question, as ever, would be to what extent the fulfilment of revenge helps her along this road.

Is *The Tempest* an anti-revenge play? Is *Hamlet*? Perhaps there are interesting ways of asking about such questions, but in the present context they seem somewhat beside the point. Neither story, by its own lights – not even *The Tempest*, though its protagonist opposes "virtue" to "vengeance" – compels us towards the idea that revenge in itself is necessarily an evil.[45] Rather, in each of these plays, the *wish* for revenge is important principally because of the damaged perception of the world it entails, and so the manner in which this wish forces the question of what it would be for the world to be undamaged. It may be that in a "real" or

[45] Contemporary audiences would have understood *private* revenge as forbidden by both God and the state. But, at least nominally, Prospero is not simply a private revenger: he is a ruler illegitimately deposed. The story hence leaves room for the thought that revenge against Antonio, had it been taken, might have fallen within the bounds of a divinely-entrusted authority to administer justice. In Campbell's summary: "the great tragic theme of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century teaching is [the] theme of God's revenge for sin. … And all Elizabethan tragedy must appear as fundamentally a tragedy of revenge if the extent of the idea of revenge be but grasped. The threefold aspect of revenge must, however, be always held in mind; and revenge must be reckoned as including God's revenge, public revenge committed to the rulers by God, and private revenge forbidden alike by God and by the state as his representative" (Campbell, "Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England," 290). See also: Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, 3-40 and *passim*.

unqualified comedy of revenge, this question can never really arise because the affinity between desire and world in some important way cannot be doubted in order for the comedy to function.[46] The template Anderson describes would be an example of this, comprising stories in which an essentially benevolent order is protected and reaffirmed by those who know best. Of course, for the story to work, it requires an assumption that the order is genuine. "Comedy, by its very physics, bullies us into actively exercising faith in limits," in Stephen Booth's words.[47]

In *Hamlet*, that faith in limits – in a worthy order – never seems to return after it has been destroyed for the prince by the events that precede the action. The question of whether it is possible to reach some genuine concord between the inner and outer world becomes all the more forbidding, since here the cause of the misalignment is not simply the foolishness and vagary of human passion (as it might be in a comedy) but rather an irresolvable doubt about whether there exists any amenable order to be reached, or even an intelligible one. (Booth again: "Tragedy operates from – and demonstrates – the proposition that there is a way things are and that fools assume it is knowable and known.")[48] Insofar as Hamlet arrives at a type of composure before the end, it is a resignation to the idea that there is an unbridgeable distance between what one can understand or affect and what will happen:

> we defy augury. There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come. The

[46] I'm put in mind of a remark by C. L. Barber about *Twelfth Night*: "the fooling with madness in the comedy is an enjoyment of the control which knows what is mad and what is not" (Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963, 261).
[47] Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy*, 77.
[48] Ibid., 78.

> readiness is all. Since no man of aught he leaves knows, what is't to leave betimes? Let be. (5.2.197-202)

As I have tried to show, behind every assertion of order and limit in *The Tempest* there is the shadow of something that exceeds it: from the organisation of the play itself (via the curious fissure after the first scene) to the strangely silent metaphysical background. There are no direct images of any higher powers beyond Prospero.[49] True, it seems almost impossible that there could not be some guiding intelligence – be it the sorcerer's or a divinity's – behind the events that preceded the story. Prospero thanks "providence divine" for the safe arrival of Miranda and himself on the island, without expanding on the remark (1.2.159). But thereafter, although he refers to his own "prescience" when accounting for the appearance of his enemies near his shores – and certainly a theurgist of sufficient power could be thought to have some ability to see the future – he does not claim that he brought about the arrival of the Italians through the use of his magic (1.2.180).[50] Rather, it was "accident most strange" and (the only god Prospero ever names in *The Tempest*) "bountiful Fortune" that were responsible – not exactly the same thing as providence (1.2.178). Nor does the sorcerer represent the looming confrontation with Antonio and Alonso as merely the working out of a preordained fate: if he "omits" correct action now, everything could yet go wrong (1.2.182-184). It is possible that he is only dissimulating in order to preserve Miranda's innocence of his schemes. But even in his more private moments we are not given any hint that he has arranged more than he admits to.

[49] Cf. Chapter 1, Section 2.
[50] On the link between Prospero's type of theurgy and clairvoyance, see: Walter Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1937), 188-189. See also: West, *The Invisible World*, 31-32.

Yet alongside these suggestions of contingency beneath the events of the play, there are also indications of an uncannily precise timing at work. The twelve-year span of Ariel's contract of service evidently brings us right up to the moment the action begins, for it is only now that Ariel begins to appeal to Prospero for his freedom (1.2.245-250). Was Prospero therefore aware, from the very beginning of his sojourn on the island, that twelve years would be more or less the exact amount of time that he would have need of his servant? Is the significance of *that* particular length of time bound up with his daughter's coming of age, so that she could be married off to Ferdinand? But if so, are we then to believe that Prospero knew from the beginning of life on the island that Alonso would, firstly, have a marriageable son at all; and, secondly, that this eligible son would be accompanying his father at just the right moment in time in just the right part of the Mediterranean, thus allowing the dynastic part of the sorcerer's plan to come off? Implicitly, the answer to all of these questions must be *yes*, or at least this is the conclusion we are funneled towards. But none of it is ever verified. *The Tempest* only brings us right up to the edge of proof of a final design; it never supplies it.

But this aporia is no more than we should expect in a story whose most famous passage is a meditation on the transience of all limit and distinction – foretelling the world's dissolution into undifferentiated nothingness (4.1.146-163). None of the efforts in *The Tempest* to decisively separate reality from appearance ultimately succeed. There is no faith in limits. So, in that sense *The Tempest* cannot be a comedy. This is intimated in the fact that the collective assembled at the end will begin to disperse the next day, and the regenerative component of it (the union of Ferdinand and Miranda) will thereafter reside in Naples, separate from the protagonist who has brought all of this about. For his own part, Prospero associates his return to Italy with death

rather than new life ("And thence retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave" [5.1.310-311]).

Nonetheless, Prospero *does* make up his mind to return to the world. What is it that changes? One of the buried consequences of his coming to terms with the impossibility of reforming his brother is that he lets go of a certain image of the world as it was. In *Hamlet*, the real spectre that dominates the prince is not so much the Ghost as the image of Elsinore before his father's death: this is the lost world that makes the degraded present what it is, the A within A*, a standard that can neither be recovered nor (seemingly) disposed of in Hamlet's mind. In *The Tempest*, there is something faintly puzzling about Prospero's assertion that he loved Antonio more than anyone in the world apart from Miranda – because what is there in Antonio to love, on the basis of what we have seen? Then again, it would be quite in character for the world-abandoning Duke to have an image of "his" brother that bore little or no resemblance to the reality of the man. Not wholly unlike the power of necromancy he claims to possess, the wish to change Antonio's heart may also simply be a wish on Prospero's part to have his brother back – this idea of his brother – and in so doing come closer to recreating the world before sorrow and catastrophe had robbed him of his sense of its order. At the same time, it is not as though Prospero has created nothing by the end of the play: there is the dynastic match of his daughter and Ferdinand, and through this there is also the acquisition of a new brother, Alonso. "Alack, what trouble / Was I then to you!" says Miranda, when she is told of their storm-wracked voyage to the island (1.2.151-152). Prospero corrects her, and his response may also be a presentiment of the play's end: he tells her she saved him. "O, a cherubin / Thou wast that did preserve me" (1.2.152-153).

Before Prospero's epilogue, *The Tempest* ends with the promise of good weather for the next day (5.1.314-317). The magic, the island, and the twelve-year wish are all to be abandoned in the same motion – leaving perhaps only Caliban behind when the party leaves the next day. In the epilogue, Prospero asks the audience for his freedom, the only time he openly appeals for help in the entire play. "Now 'tis true / I must here be confined by you, / Or sent to Naples. Let me not… dwell / In this bare island by your spell…" (5.1.321-26). This is another moment of conflation between the different levels of the play, of course. The Duke, still in character but now mysteriously aware of the audience, needs their assistance to reach Italy. Our world blurs with his. There is a mystery that *The Tempest* does not quite resolve before it finishes (perhaps because such things can never be entirely resolved) about what exactly happens to Prospero that allows him to free himself from his consuming images, and to find the world, if not restored, then at least a place that he is able to rejoin. In a more comprehensive version of this project, the fact that theatre is of the same medium as grievance – of images – and thus seems to speak to the possibility of engineering such changes would be a rich question to follow. For now, it is enough to note that *The Tempest*, even at death, implies that the issue is not quite settled, and that it also depends on more than just Prospero's heart. After all, what if no one in the audience responds to his appeal? It is not unthinkable. Buried in this final moment of contingency, too, is the thought that if we *are* to find ourselves back in the world after an exile of the soul, it also depends on the world moving toward us.

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