

THE TEMPEST

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INTRODUCTION

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.

(Anne Barton)¹

I've never felt so strongly in a play that the meaning does not belong to the actor's perception of what the play is . . . The audience's imagination is much, much less controlled by the actors, I think, in this play than in almost any other.

(Sir Ian McKellen)²

Anne Barton's observation on the critical fortunes of *The Tempest* is amply borne out in the history of its reception. It has at various times been read as a romance of reconciliation, a Christian allegory of forgiveness, a meditation on the powers of the imagination and the limits of art, a psychological drama of fatherhood, a play about Jacobean politics, and a dramatisation of colonialist or patriarchal ideology (to name but the commonest approaches). Sir Ian McKellen's comment, that of an experienced Shakespearean actor reflecting on the problems of acting the part of Prospero (illustration 1),³ interestingly suggests that this openness is not simply a consequence of readerly ingenuity, but is fundamental to the theatrical experience of the performed play itself. One aim of this introduction is precisely to represent and attempt to explain the range of readings and stagings that *The Tempest* has provoked in the course of its transmission from the seventeenth century to the present. But, as an early seventeenth-century play, *The Tempest* is rooted in the culture of its period. It draws upon, moulds and responds to other texts both classical and contemporary; it participates in and reflects on issues and debates current at the time; and it was designed for performance in particular theatres. The exploration of the play's originating contexts is the other principal thread of this introduction, and it is where we begin.

The experimental *Tempest*

The Tempest's first recorded performance was at court on 'Hallomas nyght', 1 November 1611.⁴ Whilst it is conceivable that this was its 'opening night', it would have been unusual if the play had not already been performed publicly by the King's Men.⁵ The earliest date for its composition has usually been set as 1610, on the grounds that the

¹ Barton, p. 22.

² Interview with the editor, February 1999.

³ In the production by Jude Kelly at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, 1999.

⁴ E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols., 1930, II, 342. The performance may have been in the Banqueting House.

⁵ Leeds Barroll, *Politics, Plague and Shakespeare's Theater*, 1991, p. 203, suggests spring or autumn 1611 for its first performance. The fact that the only recorded performances were at court, in 1611 and again in 1613, has led some to see it as having been designed specifically for court performance.



1 Sir Ian McKellen as Prospero in the production by Jude Kelly at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, 1999

reports reaching London in that year of the wreck of Sir Thomas Gates's ship in the Bermudas, and the providential survival of his company, were a specific inspiration for the action of the play (but see below, pp. 30–1), and it is generally accepted that the play was the last Shakespeare wrote as sole author, a fact which has encouraged generations of critics to see it as a summation and a distillation of his dramatic career.¹ But to treat *The Tempest* as the grand finale to a writing life obscures the fact that in many respects this is as experimental a play as Shakespeare ever wrote. Though it revisits ideas, themes and topics explored in earlier plays, and though it has obvious generic affinities with the 'romances' which immediately preceded it, in its dramatic shaping, and in its deployment of music and spectacle in particular, *The Tempest* breaks new Shakespearean ground.

DRAMATIC DESIGN

Whereas *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* accept in their narrative and dramatic form the traditional expansiveness of romance, ranging over the Mediterranean world and spanning many years, *The Tempest*, unlike any other Shakespeare play since the early *The Comedy of Errors*, observes the classical unities of time and place. The resulting concentration of action is intensified by symmetries at every level of the play's narrative. There are two sets of father and child and two pairs of brothers; the two conspiracies within the play replicate the original deposition of Prospero from the dukedom of Milan; Prospero's arrival on the island with his daughter parallels the earlier arrival of Sycorax and her son Caliban; Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian, the three men of sin (3.3.53), are echoed by the trinity of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban – to offer but a few obvious instances. The play seems like a hall of mirrors² in which reflection is added to reflection in a curiously claustrophobic dramatic world. This sense of confinement is furthered by Prospero's domination of the action. Shakespeare had used 'manager figures' in earlier plays, and in some ways Prospero is a reworking of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or of the Duke in *Measure for Measure*. In *The Tempest*, however, Prospero's control of the narrative is not only more complete than that of his dramatic predecessors, but, unlike theirs, is directed to a personal and particular end – the triumph over the 'enemies' whom fortune has placed at his mercy.

The play's concentrated dramatic form may reflect a self-conscious effort on Shakespeare's part to imitate the 'New Comedy' of Plautus and Terence.³ Robert Miola points out the way its structure echoes 'the principle of binary construction' that characterises classical comedy,⁴ and suggests that a specific influence is Plautus' *Rudens* ('The Rope'), which, he argues, 'may function as a seminal subtext, frequently

¹ See, for example, G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life*, 1947, ch. 5. The persistence of the tradition is also to be seen in Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess's *Sandman* graphic novel, *The Tempest* (DC Comics, 1996).

² Harold Brooks's phrase in 'The Tempest: what sort of play?', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 64 (1978), 27–54; p. 37. He gives a comprehensive account of the play's repetitions (pp. 34–41).

³ See, especially, Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy*, 1974, and Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy: The Influence of Plautus and Terence*, 1994.

⁴ Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Comedy*, p. 155.

mediated and reconstituted, which offered dramatists a generic set of romance possibilities'.¹ Italian drama may have been one route for such mediation between Shakespeare and the classics. K. M. Lea's suggestion of the influence of the improvised scenarios of the *Commedia dell'arte* has been extended by Louise Clubb, who points out that 'the magician with rod and book, the spirits, the urban refugees, wandering lost and hallucinated, the transformations . . . the boisterousness of self-infatuated clowns with their minds on drink and license' are all found in the Italian literary pastoral.² G. K. Hunter argues that the blending of tragedy and comedy which is so marked a feature of all the late plays owes something to fashionable Italian practice.³ The point here is not that *The Tempest* derives from a particular Italian original,⁴ but, as Clubb suggests, that an awareness of its classical and Italian models is 'especially important for doing justice to Shakespeare, whose work . . . demands recognition as avant-garde drama in which the latest theatrical fashions were appropriated in dazzlingly new combinations'.⁵

One motivation for Shakespeare to attempt a 'dazzlingly new' play was the acquisition by the King's Men of the indoor theatre at Blackfriars in 1608 (see illustration 2). Andrew Gurr suggests that *The Tempest* was the first Shakespeare play indubitably designed for performance at Blackfriars,⁶ and there were two important practical consequences, each of which may have stimulated Shakespeare to dramatic experiment. First, the King's Men were able to call on the services of the consort of musicians who had previously played there for the boy companies. The importance of this newly extended theatrical resource will be discussed shortly. Secondly, the custom in hall theatres like Blackfriars was for each act-break to be marked by a pause of a few minutes which provided time to trim the candles. That such act-breaks were expected in *The Tempest* is made obvious by the fact that Prospero exits at the end of Act 4, but returns at the beginning of Act 5, an immediate re-entry unique in Shakespeare's work.⁷ Shakespeare turns this practical necessity to dramatic account. At the most obvious level, the play is deliberately designed to emphasise the shape imposed by the four breaks between acts. Each act builds to a powerful dramatic moment: the first ends with the subjection of Ferdinand (virtually the only dramatic *action* in the long second scene); the second culminates in Caliban's song and celebration of

¹ Ibid., p. 156. An extended case for Plautus' play as a specific source is offered by Bruce Loudon, 'The *Tempest*, Plautus and the *Rudens*', *Comparative Drama*, 33 (1999), 199–223, but the more the detailed case is pressed the less compelling it becomes.

² K. M. Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy*, 2 vols., 1934, II, 443–53; Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, 1989, p. 20.

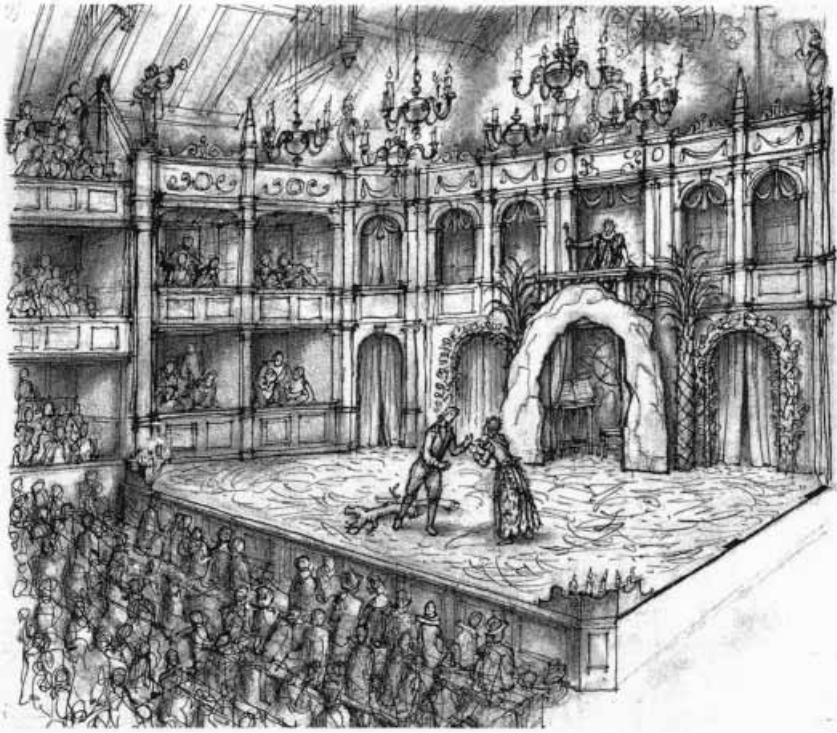
³ G. K. Hunter, 'Italian tragicomedy on the English stage', *Renaissance Drama*, NS 6 (1975), 123–48. See also Robert Henke, *Pastoral Transformations: Italian Tragicomedy and Shakespeare's Late Plays*, 1997.

⁴ Just as no compelling argument has been produced for a single romance as a source. Bullough put forward *The Mirror of Knighthood* (1578), while Gary Schmidgall has argued for *Primaaleon*, originally appearing in Spanish in 1512, in 'The *Tempest* and *Primaaleon*: a new source', *SQ*, 37 (1986), 421–40 – but neither is very close.

⁵ Clubb, *Italian Drama*, p. 157.

⁶ Gurr, 'Tempest', p. 92. I am indebted to this article in what follows.

⁷ In the modern theatre, where the play is customarily played with one interval, some cutting and rearrangement is frequently made at this point to enable the action to flow smoothly.



2 3.1 on the Blackfriars stage: drawing by C. Walter Hodges

freedom; the third with the frenzied reaction of the lords to Ariel's appearance as a harpy; and the fourth with Caliban and his co-conspirators driven out, pursued by dogs. Thus, at the close of each act, service and freedom are emphasised as central themes.

The action of the three main plot-strands is neatly interlaced. The developing relationship of Ferdinand and Miranda, the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian and the torment of the 'three men of sin', and its parodic counterpart in the plot of Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban, are tidily interleaved. For a theatrical company *The Tempest* easily lends itself to an economical rehearsal schedule, so little do the groups of characters intersect before Act 5. But while alternation of plots is characteristic of Shakespeare's dramatic structures – as in the movement between the court and Eastcheap in the *Henry IV* plays, or between the Lear and Gloucester plots in *King Lear* – in this play the narrative disconnection of its stories seems particularly extreme and mannered. In the absence of a narrative continuity, it is the presence of Prospero or Ariel, or both, which links the scenes (they both are absent only from 1.1 and 2.2), thus focusing attention firmly on the fact of their control rather than on the

individual development of each plot-strand. It is as if the conjunction of the romance genre's traditional interlacement of plots, the neo-classical prescription for a unified action, and the new theatre's demand for clearly marked, structural act-breaks, precipitated Shakespeare into this experimental design.¹

Nothing in the play, however, more clearly manifests its dramaturgical bravura than its first act. Storm or shipwreck had traditionally initiated the action in romance or epic, from Virgil's *Aeneid* to Sidney's *Arcadia*, and a prologue of retrospective narration is a common feature of classical drama;² but on both these conventional elements Shakespeare plays extraordinary variations.

Storms were not unusual in the drama of the period, and in *Macbeth*, *Lear* and *Pericles* Shakespeare had already used them to powerful theatrical effect. In mounting a tempest complete with a shipwreck before the spectators' eyes, however, Shakespeare was not merely going further than he himself had done before, but attempting an unprecedented theatrical coup.³ Confronted with such a scene an audience would have readily been disposed to understand it symbolically. Leslie Thomson suggests that 'Thunder and Lightning was the conventional stage language – or code – for the production of effects in or from the tiring house that would establish or confirm a specifically supernatural context in the minds of the audience'.⁴ More generally, the storm-tossed ship as a metaphor for the vicissitudes of human life, and the shipwreck as an 'image of surrender of self-control, or helplessness before fortune', were commonplaces in emblem books and elsewhere.⁵ But *The Tempest's* opening scene appears determined to resist such symbolic readings in its turbulent physical action, precise and technical naval commands, and the almost prosaically 'realistic' entrance of Mariners, wet.⁶ This mixture of the symbolic and naturalistic, and the challenge it offers to an audience to find a secure interpretative vantage-point, is to be characteristic of the play which follows.

The scene's dialogue, however, initiates important thematic threads by establishing a parallel between the disordered elements and the inversion of social hierarchy on board the ship. Refusing to countenance the authority of the king, and ridiculing the impotence of Gonzalo's courtly counsel in commanding the tempest, the Boatswain raises questions of power and control that will reverberate throughout the play.⁷ The arrogant resistance of both Antonio and Sebastian to the Boatswain's suggestion that

¹ See Barbara Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances*, 1976.

² The action of Plautus' *Rudens* is precipitated by an off-stage storm.

³ Gurr, 'Tempest'. He suggests also that it would have challenged the audience at Blackfriars 'accustomed to the quieter indoor conditions of the hall playhouses' (p. 95).

⁴ Leslie Thomson, 'The meaning of *Thunder and Lightning*: stage directions and audience expectations', *Early Theatre*, 2 (1999), 11–24.

⁵ Lawrence Otto Goedde, *Tempest and Shipwreck in Dutch and Flemish Art: Convention, Rhetoric and Interpretation*, 1989, p. 170. Though its focus is on pictorial art, this book is comprehensive in its survey of literary storm depictions.

⁶ Goedde notes that even in emblems with a clear moral purpose 'the depictions possess an internally consistent realism that may permit but does not appear to require a particular metaphorical interpretation' (p. 12).

⁷ See David Norbrook, '"What cares these roarers for the name of King?": language and Utopia in *The Tempest*', in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, eds., *The Politics of Tragicomedy*, 1992, pp. 21–54.

they should set to work is a proleptic contrast with Ferdinand's readiness to endure his 'mean task' in 3.1.¹ Gonzalo's desire for 'an acre of barren ground' is fulfilled (in a way he does not anticipate) by the 'desert' he first sees the island to be (2.1.34). The thematic significance of the opening scene was recognised by an anonymous lecturer who, before F. R. Benson's first performance of the play at Stratford in 1891, instructed his audience in its political resonance.² Unfortunately for him, the actual performance cut the entire scene, and substituted the music of Haydn's *Der Sturm*, played while Prospero stood before a painted backdrop 'waving his wand', with 'spirits seen in mid-air'.³

In cutting the words of the opening scene Benson was following the usual practice of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century performances,⁴ and the substitution of music is a device employed both earlier and in more recent productions.⁵ The storm could nonetheless be advertised as one of the highlights of a production, even if, as was frequently the case, it became the play's second scene. The poster for a performance at the Royal Amphitheatre, Leeds, in October 1865, for example, declared that the 'Great Storm at Sea' was 'Pronounced to be one of the best scenes and the nearest approach to reality ever witnessed in a Theatre' (illustration 3).⁶ This boast finds an echo in reviewers' response to the Stratford staging by Bridges-Adams some seventy years later, when the *Birmingham Mail* commented that 'Stratford has never seen anything more realistic than this disaster, with the ship lurching sickeningly to her final doom, the wind howling'⁷ (illustration 4). Giorgio Strehler's famous Italian production of the play began with a 'powerfully physical tempest' which lasted 'five full minutes', though it was 'contextualised by a conspicuous theatricality' as the billowing sea of silken cloth, first seeming an effort of quasi-realistic illusion, was, as the storm ended, broken up by Prospero, and revealed as having been produced by sixteen stage-hands.⁸ That a striking effect does not depend upon such elaborate staging, however, was demonstrated in the success of the 1951 Mermaid Theatre production, played on a stage designed by Michael Stringer and C. Walter Hodges as a generalised imitation

¹ But Strier, 'Politics', p. 22, observes that their contempt for labour is replicated in Prospero's unwillingness to 'fetch his own wood or make his own fire', and to be contrasted with the willingness of all on board the *Sea Venture* to assist in the storm (and see 1.1.37 n.).

² *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 17 April 1891.

³ Ibid., 24 April 1891. Haydn's music has no connection with Shakespeare's play.

⁴ Dymkowski, p. 11, notes that 'apart from partial retention of the dialogue in David Garrick's 1757 text and in William Burton's 1854 production, none of Shakespeare's opening scene was heard on stage until the beginning of the twentieth century'.

⁵ Thomas Linley's fine setting of a chorus, 'Arise, ye spirits of the storm', replaced the first scene in Sheridan's 1777 production, as did Sibelius's dramatic storm-music in a 1926 performance in Finland.

⁶ Kean in 1857 had a notably spectacular storm as a virtually detached prologue. See Mary M. Nilan, 'Shakespeare, illustrated: Charles Kean's 1857 production of *The Tempest*', *SQ*, 26 (1975), 196–204.

⁷ 17 April 1934.

⁸ Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare*, 1993, p. 305. The device was imitated in Noble's 1998 Stratford production, and anticipated, interestingly, in Jonson's 1605 *Masque of Blackness*, which featured 'an artificial sea' which 'was seen to shoot forth, as if it flowed to the land, raised with waves which seemed to move, and in some places the billow to break' (David Lindley, ed., *Court Masques*, 1995, p. 1). See also Pia Kleber, 'Theatrical continuities in Giorgio Strehler's *The Tempest*', in Dennis Kennedy, ed., *Foreign Shakespeare*, 1993.

1865
16

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On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday Evenings,
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The Play will be preceded by a GRAND SHAKESPERIAN OVERTURE.

The Best' Aria Music—Selection from the works of Handel, Dr. Arne, William, Bartholomew, and Mendelssohn—arranged expressly for this Revival by HERR WALLERSTEIN and Mr J. DEVEREUX. The BALLET & DANCES, arranged and invented by Mons. LAVIGNE.

The whole produced under the Superintendence of Mr. JOHNSON TOWERS.

3 Part of an advertising poster for a performance at Leeds Royal Amphitheatre in 1865.
Note the emphasis on the realism of the storm scene, and that it is the actress playing Ariel who gets 'star' billing



4 The realistic set designed for Bridges-Adams's production at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1934 (photographer Ernest Daniels)

of the Jacobean hall theatre. One reviewer commented on 'the surprising number of effects which can be got on the platform stage', and another described the scene enthusiastically: 'The play opened with a clap of thunder, rigging fell from the heavens, mariners tumbled up through a trap-door, courtiers reeled through side-entrances, everybody acted high seas and hurricanes, and not a word was lost.'¹ In many subsequent productions, although mimetic realism has given way to a more minimalist staging, directors have been so tempted by the possibility of amplified sound-effects that the words have been obliterated almost as completely as by Benson's cutting of them. Peter Hall in 1988 tried to avoid the scene's 'becoming what it always is, just a lot of desperate noise', by deploying sound as punctuation of, rather than ground-bass for, the action, so that it was 'a quiet scene about an external storm, followed by a noisy scene about an internal storm'.² It is certainly important to the play that we should both be persuaded of the tempest's ferocity, and yet aware, through the dialogue, of the collapse of social distinction under its overwhelming threat.

¹ Theatre Museum, London; the source of the reviews is not specified. William Poel in his late nineteenth-century attempt to imitate the 'original' Shakespearean staging had also eschewed stage illusion, but according to William Archer made 'a side gallery or balcony, cut in the very cornice of the lofty hall, to represent the ship at sea, and . . . Miranda watch the wreck from the stage . . .'. *Theatrical World of 1897*, 1898, p. 315.

² Roger Warren, *Staging Shakespeare's Late Plays*, 1990, pp. 160–1. Hall also argued that the scene was much less naturalistic than is generally supposed.

Benson also anticipated what has become almost a cliché of modern performance in having Prospero or Ariel, or both, present on stage throughout.¹ At one level this device seems to integrate the storm narratively into the play which follows and simultaneously to emphasise its meta-theatricality as an event, yet it profoundly changes the relationship, and therefore the effect, of the first two scenes. Peter Holland objected that it was 'a mistake to have Ariel visibly controlling the storm . . . for there are few effects in Shakespeare quite as thrilling as the realisation that the hyper-realism of the opening scene is really only a trick of the play's magician'.² The relationship between the play's first two scenes, however, is even more complex than Holland suggests. It is not simply that 'realism' turns out to be merely 'theatrical illusion' – watching the bare Blackfriars stage an audience knows full well that it must, in Gower's words: 'In your imagination hold / This stage the ship' (*Per.* 3, Prologue, 58–9). When Miranda opens the second scene with the words 'If by your art . . .' it is not stagecraft she means, but the arts of magic; and in both benign and malign forms it was believed that the magician (or witch) had the power to command 'real' tempests. Her 'If' registers that she reacts, not only to the horror of the storm, but also to the fearful possibility that it has been generated by her father, thus raising a question, which haunts the play, as to how magic power can and should be used.

In shifting to retrospective report, her rhetorical set-piece also prepares us for what is to be the dominant narrative mode of the second scene. It does not, however, anticipate the extraordinary virtuoso display by which Shakespeare so extends the exposition that it is only at line 375 that the present action of the play, suspended after the storm, recommences.³ It is worth considering carefully the way Shakespeare constructs this second scene, for in many different ways his elaborate descant on a classically conventional exposition sets up both the central thematic concerns and the characteristic dramatic patterns of the play.

The scene is built out of a historical recapitulation in three instalments which move successively closer to the present moment. Each of these sections is, as it were, framed and suspended within a narrative loop. The first runs for 175 lines before Prospero answers his daughter's implied question about the reason for raising the storm by telling her that his enemies are 'Brought to this shore' (180). The second begins as Prospero summons Ariel with the words 'I'm ready now. Approach, my Ariel. Come!' (187–8). But these instructions are postponed, and finally delivered (in a whisper we do not hear) only after Ariel's history has been recapitulated. In the third 'loop' Prospero summons Caliban to work, only to plunge again into some thirty lines of retrospection before demanding that he fetch fuel (rather than undertake the 'other business' he had said he required him for). Though action is repeatedly deferred, the scene is nonetheless organised to sustain dramatic momentum. Each bout of remi-

¹ As, for example, in Stratford productions in 1951, 1957 and 1993; Leeds, 1999; Shakespeare's Globe, 2000; and many more.

² Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares*, 1997, p. 172. The same view is expressed by Barton, p. 8, though E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, 1938, p. 82, thought 'Nugent Monck had the right instinct when he put Prospero and Miranda on the stage from the beginning.'

³ Its precedent in *The Comedy of Errors* (clearly modelled on Plautus) is a mere 150 lines.

niscence is shorter than the one before, thus accelerating up to the moment when past and present finally come together with Ferdinand's entrance, and the whole is articulated by the successive crescendos of Prospero's fury.¹ This ensures that although the scene functions formally as a *protasis*, introducing us to the principal characters of the play, it is focused upon Prospero's carefully differentiated feelings towards those characters.² In the first movement his anger is directed both at the brother who usurped him, and at himself for having made that usurpation possible; in the second it is aimed at Ariel's lack of gratitude and refusal of agreed terms of service; in the third at Caliban's violation of his daughter. The final exercise of Prospero's angry control comes with his treatment of Ferdinand. The crucial difference here is that Prospero allows us to be aware that this is a simulated anger. He pretends that it is derived from fear of Ferdinand's usurping him as lord of the island, but lets the audience know that its motivation is to test his suitability as a potential husband for his daughter.³ That this is a self-consciously staged fury neatly links the end of the act to its beginning in an angry tempest that is also a simulated elemental rage.

Carefully designed though it is, 1.2 poses an enormous technical challenge to the actor playing Prospero. In part this is simply a matter of his total domination of the scene, but it is rendered more difficult by the fact that throughout its length he is never engaged in conversation, speaking either to himself, or else aggressively to dominate Ariel and Caliban.⁴ The danger, therefore, is that he can appear a tedious or tiresomely tetchy bore. In older productions the narrative was almost always severely cut, and the tradition of playing Prospero as a dignified, other-worldly figure inhibited much variety in his representation.⁵ Dymkowski suggests that it was Gielgud's 1957 performance which decisively 'broke the nineteenth-century mould', and in her survey of subsequent productions she notes the emergence of a Prospero tormented by inner conflict – as in Derek Jacobi's 1982 performance, which emphasised 'his internal struggle between omnipotence and humanity'.⁶ But the astonishing demands Shakespeare makes on his principal actor issue a challenge to every production.

¹ For discussion of Prospero's anger in the light of Seneca's treatise *De Ira*, where it is condemned as 'temporary madness', see Ben Ross Schneider, Jr, '“Are we being historical yet?”: colonialist interpretations of Shakespeare's *Tempest*', *S.St.*, 23 (1995), 121–45; pp. 132–4.

² Dymkowski notes that a number of recent productions bring on stage in dumb-show the characters of whom we only hear by report, both to vary the visual nature of the scene and to make recognition easier for the audience.

³ Though, of course, one might see Ferdinand's marriage to Miranda as a different kind of 'usurpation' – of fatherly, rather than political, authority.

⁴ McKellen commented that 'what is difficult about Prospero . . . is that he's a loner, he doesn't communicate well . . . there are no proper scenes in which there's an interchange of the kind that you expect'. Though Prospero insists on Miranda's attention, this seems to be to ensure that she fully recognises what the story means to him. Philip Voss discusses the actor's problems with this scene in his essay on playing Prospero in Robert Smallwood, ed., *Players of Shakespeare*, 5, (forthcoming).

⁵ A tradition summed up by a reviewer in the *Observer*, 30 May 1940, as a 'mixture of Father Christmas, a Colonial Bishop, and the President of the Magician's Union'; more pithily by Ivor Brown as 'a bore with a beard' (Dymkowski, p. 18). Theodore Fontane, though recommending the introduction of the play onto the continental stage, yet considered Prospero 'not a role in which one can make much of an impression on the audience' (*Shakespeare in the London Theatre, 1855–58*, trans. Russell Jackson, 1999, p. 68).

⁶ Dymkowski, pp. 19–34.

The sequence of Prospero's angry outbursts unambiguously places at the centre of the play questions of authority and obedience. Its structure, in persistently thwarting the anticipated movement to the present time, also sets in place what is to become a continuing feature of the play's narrative. Throughout *The Tempest* both the characters on stage and the audience who watch them repeatedly experience frustration and disappointment as action is halted or deferred. The assassination threatened in 2.1 is postponed by the 'stagiest' of devices, Sebastian's 'O, but one word' (293). In 3.3, the offered banquet suddenly vanishes *with a quaint device*, and the celebratory betrothal masque of 4.1 ends prematurely in *a strange, hollow and confused noise*.¹ The frustration of expectation adumbrated in 1.2 pervades the play and provides its narrative 'deep structure'.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of this second scene is its insistence upon memory. This too initiates one of the play's thematic strands. Ariel's later injunction to the 'three men of sin' to '. . . remember – / For that's my business to you' (3.3.68–9) enforces its centrality. Conversely, the moment when Prospero's memory fails him, in his absent-mindedness about Caliban's conspiracy, causes the dissolution of the masque and precipitates his meditation on oblivion. Once the anger fuelled by recollection of his usurpation is converted to forgiveness, Prospero turns to Alonso at the play's end and instructs him: 'Let us not burden our remembrances with / A heaviness that's gone' (5.1.199–200). As Michael Neill points out, this turn from vengeance to forgiveness is also a revision of revenge tragedy into romance, and 'marks the conclusion not just of [Prospero's] moral pilgrimage, but of his creator's long meditation on man's relation with his past, on the significance of remembrance and revenge'.²

Memory for Miranda, peering backwards across the 'abysm of time', is a guarantor of fixity, its certainty set against the delusion of dreams (1.2.44–50); but for the audience its status is more ambivalent. They are offered no means of testing Prospero's stories (though, equally, no evidence to mistrust them), and the play seems at times to remember more than the characters themselves can know, teasing us to construct a prior narrative which would authenticate the knowledge they appear to have. So, for example, Prospero gives us a detailed description of Sycorax and her history, yet he himself can never have seen her. L. C. Knights famously rebuked those who went about to remedy a text's silences with supplementary narratives,³ but it is not only the desire of readers brought up on novelistic completeness, or the need of actors to create a possible past as motivation for the characters they play, which invite us to fill in the blanks. Our understanding of the play's action depends crucially upon the interpretation we have of the stories that precede and motivate it, yet those narratives are marked by lacunae and by information denied. That the text's silences should have invited later writers to repair and to build upon them is not surprising, and the substantial volume of rewritings and supplementations of the play is a testament to its provocative withholdings. But, as we shall see, the distinctly varied interpretations of

¹ See Brian Gibbons, 'The Tempest and interruptions', *Cahiers Elisabéthains*, 45 (1994), 47–58.

² Michael Neill, 'Remembrance and revenge: Hamlet, Macbeth and The Tempest', in Ian Donaldson, ed., *Jonson and Shakespeare*, 1983, p. 35.

³ L. C. Knights, 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?', 1933.

The Tempest have often derived from the different ways in which critics have fleshed out in their imaginations the play's pre-history.¹

SPECTACLE AND MASQUE

The theatrical experiment of the opening act is continued in the deployment of spectacle throughout the play. Ariel's appearance as a harpy in 3.3, the extended masque in 4.1, and the 'trumpery' and dogs at the end of that scene, are all staged by Prospero as emblematic scenes intended to instruct or manipulate characters, and thereby to bring his project to its conclusion. Entertainments featuring allegorical figures were commonplace in both courtly and popular pageantry, and most members of the audience would readily have comprehended their symbolic significance. Not all would have been familiar with the substantial handbooks that collected together the frequently contradictory allegorisations of classical figures, but whereas Ben Jonson published some of his court masques encrusted with scholarly footnotes, and castigated those spectators who lacked the learning fully to understand his allegories, Prospero's entertainment for Ferdinand and Miranda would have required comparatively little exegesis.

It is not, however, mythologically imprecise. Its deities are chosen to celebrate elemental concord. Iris, the 'watery' goddess of the rainbow, brings down Ceres, goddess of the earth, and introduces Juno, goddess of the air and patroness of marriage (see illustration 5), and the subsequent dance of fiery reapers and watery naiads enacts the fusion of male heat and female coldness in the ideal temperate marriage.² The exclusion of lustful Venus from the masque makes an equally straightforward symbolic point.

This celebratory set-piece is carefully framed. Before it begins Prospero warns Ferdinand that consummation of his love for Miranda must wait upon the 'holy rite' that will legitimate their union. The masque's vision is therefore provisional, its blessings conditional on their proper behaviour. This betrothal masque functions as the court masque was conventionally supposed to do – the 'spell' that Prospero creates is intended by its harmonious charm to educate his audience in the virtue it represents. It is as morally purposeful as Ariel's apparition as a harpy to bring the lords to repentance. But its discordant ending in *a strange, hollow and confused noise*, and the meditation its dissolution precipitates, signals its implication in wider contemporary debates about the nature of the court masque.

The masque had come to occupy a central place in the Christmas festivities of the Jacobean court, and in Ben Jonson it had found its most determined apologist.³ In the Preface to *Hymenaei* (1605), he confronted those critics who bemoaned the fact that

¹ On the ways in which all critical activity can be seen as an act of supplementation, see Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*, 1979, ch. 4.

² As Jonson explains in his masque, *Hymenaei*, 'Like are the fire, and water, set; / That, ev'n as moisture, mixt with heat, / Helps everie naturall birth, to life; / So, for their Race, joyne man and wife' (C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols., 1925–52, VII (1941), p. 215).

³ For useful introductions to the genre see Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque*, 1967; David Lindley, ed., *The Court Masque*, 1984; David Bevington and Peter Holbrook, eds., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, 1998.



5 An image of Juno as goddess of marriage from Cartari's compendium of the allegories attached to the pagan gods, *Le imagini de gli dei degli antichi*. This picture is from the 1608 edition

vast effort and expenditure was lavished on one single night's performance, by arguing that the transitoriness of the masque could be overcome by 'high and hearty inventions . . . which, though their voice be taught to sound to present occasions, their sense or doth or should always lay hold on more removed mysteries'.¹ By its learning and scholarship, he suggests, the masque genre has the capacity to transcend the particu-

¹ Lindley, *Court Masques*, p. 10. This masque was written for the marriage of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and some details of Shakespeare's masque may derive from it.

lar and aspire to a permanent wisdom. In this Preface, however, Jonson was also aiming critically at Samuel Daniel, who in his Introduction to the previous year's entertainment, *The Vision of Twelve Goddesses*, had explicitly eschewed learned allegory, claiming that he chose his deities 'according to some one property that fitted our occasion, without observing other their mystical interpretations'.¹ Daniel returned to the fray in the preface to *Tethys Festival* (1610), characterising masque-writers, including himself, as 'poor engineers for shadows' who 'frame images of no result'.² The most exquisite lyric in his entertainment concludes:

Feed apace then, greedy eyes,
On the wonder you behold.
Take it sudden as it flies,
Though you take it not to hold.³

Where Jonson seeks to transcend the evanescence of the masque's occasion, Daniel instructs his audience to embrace it. Prospero's masque is imagined in Daniel's rather than Jonson's terms, in the transparency of its allegory, the self-deprecatory tone in which he asks Ariel to prepare 'Some vanity of mine art' (4.1.41), and in the way he instructs Ferdinand, 'Be cheerful' (147), in contemplating the fact of its dissolution.⁴ More profoundly, the vision Prospero's masque offers of an idealised world predicated on the proper control of the passions touches on the play's central preoccupations, but does so only to expose the limits of Prospero's 'art' in the face of the reality of Caliban's remembered rebellion. The dismay shared by Ferdinand and the audience at its evaporation is the most extreme version of the disappointment which, I have suggested, is pervasive in the play.

It is possible to argue that the influence of the masque extends further into the fabric and design of the play than this. After 1609 the usual form of the court masque included an 'antimasque' depicting some kind of threat to courtly order, which was overturned by the entry of the main masquers, and the *shapes* who bring in the banquet in 3.3 might recall such figures (see illustration 6), so that the scene functions as an analogue to the antimasque, and, by extension, characterises the 'three men of sin' as figures of moral disorder. Some critics, however, argue that it is Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo who should be seen as antimasquers, so that their irruption reverses the normal masque sequence and becomes a 'generic cue' through which '*The Tempest* enacts its meaning, in large part silently, by depending on a sophisticated audience to recognize, and respond to, a significant rearrangement of masquing structure'.⁵ This may be to press the argument too far. In 1610–11 the form of the masque

¹ Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of Twelve Goddesses*, ed. Joan Rees, in T. J. B. Spencer and Stanley Wells, eds., *A Book of Masques*, 1967, p. 26.

² Lindley, *Court Masques*, p. 55.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 63, lines 355–8.

⁴ *The Tempest* certainly seems to have irritated Ben Jonson, as is indicated by the derogatory comments in both the Prologue to the revised *Every Man In His Humour* and the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*. It is not perhaps fanciful to conjecture that some of the animus derived from Shakespeare's very qualified view of the masque.

⁵ Ernest B. Gilman, "'All eyes": Prospero's inverted masque', *RenQ*, 33 (1980), 214–30; p. 218. Mendes's 1993 RSC production dramatised this possibility by having the straw-hatted reapers reveal themselves as the conspirators in disguise.



6 C. Walter Hodges's representation of the *shapes*, and of Ariel as a harpy, draws on Inigo Jones's designs for antimasque figures. He imagines the *quaint device* by which the banquet vanishes as a reversible table-top

had barely stabilised into the dialectic of masque and antimasque, so that one cannot be certain that Shakespeare or his Blackfriars audience would have responded to it in these terms. It is also important to recognise that Prospero's masque is not an *example* of the court masque, but a partial *representation* of it. Nonetheless the function of this 'harmonious vision' within the play cannot be fully comprehended without an aware-

ness of how it draws on, and therefore contributes to, contemporary debates about the ambitions and limitations of the genre.¹

It is precisely because the masque as a literary genre is so deeply embedded in the culture of the early seventeenth century that subsequent productions have had difficulty in finding a theatrical vocabulary capable of suggesting to an audience its full significance. Dryden and Davenant simply cut it from their redaction, substituting a different pageant at the play's end, whereas in the nineteenth century it was frequently amplified as a self-contained spectacle, with multiple changes of scenery and hosts of additional dancers.² In more recent productions material has been substituted for, or added to, the text;³ it has been radically pruned, or entirely cut.⁴ When staged, it has not infrequently been a theatrical flop.⁵ In that the masque is a deliberate introduction into the play of a distinct and different theatrical vocabulary, directors have attempted to find some analogous modern generic equivalent. So, for example, Mendes flew in a kind of pop-up theatre, and his goddesses imitated puppets (illustration 7), whereas a New York production by George C. Wolfe transformed the masque into 'a blissful celebration of the rites of marriage . . . presented as a jubilant Brazilian carnival'.⁶ Some of the most successful recent stagings have established its theatrical distinctiveness by giving it a through-composed quasi-operatic setting. Hall's 1988 National Theatre production had 'a masque of beauty and charm, much of which is provided by Harrison Birtwistle's music',⁷ while Stephen Oliver's brilliant pastiche score for the RSC in 1982 made the masque 'the showpiece of this magical production', and gave real celebratory weight to its idealised vision of fertile marriage.⁸

The theatrical problem of what to do with the masque echoes the unease which has provoked literary critics to argue that it must be a late addition, or simply non-

¹ Stephen Orgel argues that the play offers 'the most important Renaissance commentary' on the masque (*The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance*, 1975, pp. 45–9). John Gillies, 'Shakespeare's Virginian masque', *ELH*, 53 (1986), 673–707, reads Shakespeare's masque against Chapman's *Memorable Masque* of 1613, which is explicitly about Virginia, to explore the play's treatment of the idea of the Americas.

² Sixty dancers were used in the Leeds 1865 production, and Beerbohm Tree added a supplementary danced narrative.

³ The Old Vic performance of 1962 imported additional lyrics from Jonson and others, for example, whereas an American production substituted readings of some of the Sonnets (Dymkowski, p. 26. She describes other alternatives adopted by modern directors).

⁴ As it was in Strehler's production, which otherwise sought to emphasise the meta-theatrical qualities of the play as a whole.

⁵ See Dymkowski, pp. 288–91. Flops include Hytner's 1988 RSC production, where 'Prospero conjures up busy little figures bearing black plastic hampers, and allows a soft-focus harvest to be projected onto the back of the stage. The rich and strange is briefly overtaken by the rich and kitsch' (Kate Kellaway, *Observer*, 30 July 1988), and Hall's 1974 National Theatre production, which drew on the theatrical vocabulary of the Jacobean masque, but was dominated by a 'Juno whose [false] breasts are so enormous that whilst they are on the stage they absorb the attention to the exclusion of all else in fascinated horror' (Harold Hobson, *Sunday Times*, 10 March 1974).

⁶ Dymkowski, p. 289.

⁷ Charles Osborne, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 May 1988. It is curious, but revealing of the general temper of much stage history, that Warren's valuable, detailed discussion of this production in *Staging Shakespeare's Late Plays* yet makes no mention of the music.

⁸ *New Statesman*, 20 August 1982.



7 Siân Radinger (Iris), Virginia Grainger (Juno) and Johanna Benyon (Ceres) imitating puppets as they perform the masque for Mark Lewis Jones (Ferdinand) and Sarah Woodward (Miranda) in Sam Mendes's production at the RSC, 1993 (photographer Michael Le Poer Trench)

Shakespearean (see Textual Analysis, pp. 220–2). Yet the theatrical and critical anxiety about this scene paradoxically directs our attention to its central thematic significance, and underlines the experimental nature of the play as a whole. Though Shakespeare had deployed classical figures in plays such as *As You Like It* and *Cymbeline*, had poked fun at Elizabethan courtly masking in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and had used plays-within-the-play in a variety of ways throughout his career, the masque in *The Tempest* is more elaborate and more complex in its effect than any of them.

MUSIC AND SONG

The Tempest is also exceptional because music is more fundamental to its action and its symbolism than it is in any other Shakespeare play, and its treatment engages profoundly with his culture's understanding of its significance and power. At one end of the spectrum of that understanding was the traditional, neo-platonic view that human music imitated divine harmony and the music of the spheres. Insofar as it shadowed that celestial pattern it was imbued with the power to harmonise the disorderly passions of humankind, and, in the hands of its mythic practitioners, Orpheus, Amphion and the rest, could charm wild beasts, even rocks, stones and trees.¹ This is the view

¹ See Gretchen Ludke Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580–1650*, 1962; John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky: Ideas of Music in English Poetry, 1500–1700*, 1961; James Anderson Winn, *Unsuspected Eloquence: A History of the Relations between Poetry and Music*, 1981.

that Lorenzo articulates in his dialogue with Jessica in Act 5 of the *Merchant of Venice*, and that Antonio and Sebastian mockingly allude to in this play (2.1.82–3). But it is one which *The Tempest* determinedly sets out to question.

When Ferdinand enters he comments that:

This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air. (1.2.391–3)

This seems a straightforward enunciation of standard neo-platonic theory, but we know, as he does not, that the song has been designed by Prospero to ‘draw’ him towards Miranda, and detach him from his father, and therefore functions as a means of human rather than divine control. It is followed by ‘Full fathom five’, which, whatever its symbolic resonance in this play of transformations, tells a lie – Alonso is not dead, but it is important to Prospero’s purposes that Ferdinand should think him so. In analogous fashion, when Prospero calls for ‘heavenly music’ to cure the frenzy of the lords in Act 5 he invokes the same power that Cerimon summons to awaken the apparently dead Thaisa in *Pericles*, 3.2.88–91, or the quarto text of *Lear* requires to cure Lear’s madness (4.7.24). But he explicitly commands this music ‘To work *mine end* upon their senses’ (5.1.53; emphasis added), and we are uncomfortably reminded that he had himself characterised Antonio’s subornation of his subjects as setting ‘all hearts i’t’h’state / To what tune pleased his ear’ (1.2.84–5).¹ By stressing the essentially rhetorical nature of music and dramatising the way in which it is used to manipulate and control, Shakespeare questions the traditional view of its God-derived power.

Caliban’s most frequently quoted speech in praise of the island’s music (3.2.127–35) introduces a further set of complications. It has often been argued that his sensitivity to ‘sweet airs’ is a mark of Shakespeare’s intention to elevate him above the merely brutish. But Puttenham’s observation that ‘the American, the Perusine and the very Canniball, do sing and also say, their highest and holiest matters in certaine riming versicles and not in prose’² should give pause to too sentimental a reading – it is precisely the point of the Orpheus myth that even animals respond to musical sound. Stephano and Trinculo’s fear, like Antonio and Sebastian’s apparent deafness to the music which charms the other lords to sleep in 2.1, is a mark of their declination from human virtue in that they do not even have the brute’s instinctive response. It is sometimes asserted that this is the music ‘of the island’, and therefore that Caliban forlornly responds to something Prospero has taken from him. But Caliban’s young ears can have heard only the cries of the imprisoned Ariel, with their grotesque inversion of Orphic myth in making ‘wolves howl’ (1.2.288). It is Sycorax who confined the musical spirit, Prospero who released him. Nonetheless the poetry Caliban speaks is resonant, and his response is similar to the wonder Ferdinand exhibits towards the

¹ For discussion of the identification of royal and musical power in the court masque, see David Lindley, ‘The politics of music in the masque’, in David Bevington and Peter Holbrook, eds., *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, 1998, pp. 288–91.

² George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), p. 7.

masque. But just as the masque dissolves, so the riches of Caliban's dream are illusory, and confounded in the mantled pool to which this music actually leads him and his fellows.

At the other end of the spectrum from neo-platonic idealisation, music was considered as the source of riot and disorder. As Prynne later fulminated:

Such songs . . . deprave the manners of those that heare or sing them, exciting, enticing them to lust, to whoredome, adultery, prophanes, wantonnesse, scurrility, luxury, drunkennesse, excesse, alienating their mindes from God, from grace and heavenly things.¹

Characteristically, however, Shakespeare offers a much more ambivalent picture of the rebels' 'depraved' music. If Stephano's first songs render his maudlin drunkenness comic, Caliban's 'No more dams I'll make for fish' (2.2.156–63) is powerful and assertive, for by singing his celebration of freedom he commands empathy from the audience. As Mark Booth points out, 'most songs of protest do not appeal to an audience as jury but invite the already sympathetic into collective accusation'.² And that is also the effect of the 'catch' sung by Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban to the words 'Flout 'em, and scout 'em' (3.2.114–16). The musical nature of the 'catch' – a round in which the same tune is picked up in turn by each singer – is symbolically appropriate for a conspiratorial combination.³ The unaccompanied, proletarian song stands for that which opposes Prospero's harmonious purposes; but Ariel, playing the popular instruments of pipe and tabor (see illustration 8) co-opts its music, thereby controlling its rebellious energy and transforming it into a means of leading characters in a direction dictated by Prospero.

The distinction between the rebelliously popular and the harmoniously courtly is further blurred by the way in which Caliban's freedom song in 2.2 is echoed by Ariel's song of release in 5.1. They employ different musical vocabularies, but articulate the same feeling. 'Where the bee sucks' (5.1.88–94) accompanies the narrative climax of the play, the moment when Prospero's triumph is signalled by his resumption of his ducal robes, but the song seems pointedly inappropriate to the action. It is not simply the hedonistic triviality of Ariel's ambition which undercuts Prospero's robing, but the contrast the song sets up between the insouciant future Ariel imagines for himself and the heaviness of Prospero's resumption of his political duties.⁴ That there is indeed a tension between the song and the action it accompanies is suggested by the fact that in production they are not infrequently separated one from the other, as, for example, in Tree's 1904 production, the RSC 1982, where it was recomposed for the Newcastle and London performances and moved to the beginning of Act 5, and

¹ William Prynne, *Histriomastix* (1633), p. 267.

² Mark W. Booth, *The Experience of Songs*, 1981, p. 16.

³ Shakespeare uses the same musical form in *Twelfth Night* for the subversive below-stairs revelry of Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek and Feste.

⁴ For a fuller exposition of this argument see my 'Music, masque and meaning in *The Tempest*', in Lindley, *The Court Masque*, pp. 47–59. This view has been challenged by, among others, Robin Headlam Wells, 'Prospero, King James and the myth of the musician-king', in *Elizabethan Mythologies*, 1994, pp. 63–80; Howell Chickering, 'Hearing Ariel's songs', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (1994), 131–72; Jacquelyn Fox-Good, 'Other voices: the sweet, dangerous air(s) of Shakespeare's *Tempest*', *S.St.* (1996), 241–74.