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The Tempest

EDITED BY STEPHEN ORGEL

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THE OXFORD SHAKESPEARE

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PREFACE

It is a pleasure to acknowledge first my deep indebtedness to Frank Kermode's excellent Arden edition, which, despite a number of basic disagreements, I still find an indispensable text. My survey of the play's stage history took shape under the expert guidance of David Kastan, who generously placed his notes at my disposal. John Bender called my attention to the Henry Peacham emblem of the royal mage and to Stephen Batman's note on the identity of Carthage and Tunis. Students from my seminars at Johns Hopkins and the Folger Shakespeare Library have helped immeasurably to bring my sense of the play into focus: I should single out, for help on particular points, Laura Levine, Alexandra Halasz, Mark Rasmussen, Beverly Hart, and Mark Reckson. For references and valuable suggestions, I am indebted to Stephen Greenblatt, Sir Roy Strong, Nancy Wright, and R. A. Foakes. Some of the material in the Introduction has appeared in my essay 'Prospero's Wife', *Representations*, 8 (1984). The patience, intelligence, and helpfulness of the members of the Shakespeare department of Oxford University Press seem to me beyond praise, and I am especially grateful to John Jowett, who gave my text and commentary a detailed and acute reading, and many of whose suggestions I have adopted. Finally, Jonathan Goldberg read the whole manuscript, listened, discussed, argued, and always encouraged. This book is for him.

STEPHEN ORGEL

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INTRODUCTION

Beginnings and Issues

First Appearances. *The Tempest* stands first in the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare's works. Whether it was placed there by its editors or its publishers, and whatever their reasons,¹ the decision has profoundly affected the play's critical history. It has been taken to imply that the play is an epitome of Shakespeare's career, or of human experience; that it was Shakespeare's valediction to the stage and his last play (though never, more logically, that it was his first); that it was the truest expression of Shakespeare's own feelings, and that in the magician-poet Prospero he depicted himself.

Another historical fact, doubtless more fortuitous, has conditioned views of the play in this century. The two earliest surviving records of productions—the only ones in Shakespeare's lifetime—are of performances at court. 'Hallowmas nyght', according to the Revels Accounts for 1611, 'was presented at Whitehall before the kinges Maiestie a play Called the Tempest',² and a year and a half later the play appears in a list of fourteen performances at court during the festive season preceding the marriage of James I's daughter Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine.³ These records, combined with the fact that the play includes a masque, have seemed to many modern critics to link *The Tempest* specifically with the Jacobean court. In this reading, Prospero becomes not Shakespeare but King James, or a union of the two, and the betrothal masque obliquely celebrates the forthcoming royal wedding. The latter claim requires the further assumption that what the Folio preserves is a revised version of the play, undertaken to make the 1611 text appropriate to the events of 1613.

These inferences have so conditioned recent views of the play that it will be as well to deal with them at the outset. A record of performance at court implies neither a play written specifically for the court nor a first performance there. Dryden, completing Davenant's revision of *The Tempest* for the Restoration stage,

¹ See below, pp. 58–9.

² Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, ii. 342. For full references for works cited repeatedly in the commentary and introduction, see pp. 90–2.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

describes it as having been a Blackfriars play:¹ this may or may not be correct, but there is nothing in the evidence of the Revels Accounts to contradict it. The fact of a court performance need not even indicate that the play was new to the company's repertoire in that season, though we can say on the basis of other evidence that this was the case with *The Tempest*. That a play was presented at court on a particular occasion may indicate that it was chosen for its appropriateness, or that it was revised to suit the occasion; or it may indicate nothing of the sort: numerous examples exist of all three possibilities. *The Tempest* can be shown to have strong affinities with Hallowmas, the occasion of its first recorded court performance,² but if we wish to argue its special relevance to Princess Elizabeth's wedding we must deal with the thirteen other plays presented along with it: the list includes such seemingly ominous items as *Othello* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, among a miscellany defying easy categorization.

The only conclusion one can draw from this evidence is that plays were considered appropriate entertainments for weddings – or at least for this one. Even the presence of a masque is no evidence that a courtly venue was intended, and in this case it may, in fact, imply just the reverse: the mechanics of the masque and the apparitions in *The Tempest* are those of the public theatre – descents and ascents, properties appearing and disappearing through trapdoors – not of the Banqueting House, with its changeable scenery. Indeed, if one accepts C. Walter Hodges's argument in *The Globe Restored*, public theatres may well have had flying machinery;³ whereas Inigo Jones had no such devices at court until his stage included a fly gallery in the 1630s. If, therefore, we wish to think of Ariel as entering flying at 3.3.52.2, he may have done so at the Blackfriars or the Globe, but not at court.

Ceres' allusion in the masque to 'this short-grassed green' (4.1.83) has been taken as evidence that the surviving text of the play was specifically intended for production in the Banqueting House, which was carpeted with green cloth during the performance of masques. But the allusion is just as likely to refer to the

¹ Preface, *The Tempest or the Enchanted Island* (1670), in *Works of John Dryden* (1956–), vol. 10 (*Plays*), eds. Maximillian E. Novak and George Robert Guffey (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1970), p. 3.

² See John B. Bender, 'The day of *The Tempest*', *ELH*, XLVII, 2 (1980), 235–58.

³ 2nd edn. (1968), p. 21.

Blackfriars, where the stage was covered with fresh green rushes, and may also have been appropriate to a production at the Globe.¹ That the first court performance did take place in the Banqueting House, rather than in the Cockpit-in-Court (the palace theatre) seems clear enough; and, following Ernest Law's Shakespeare Association Pamphlet *Shakespeare's 'Tempest' as Originally Produced at Court* (1920), the fact has often been taken to imply, once again, that the play was written for the court and produced like a masque. Once again, the evidence will not support these inferences.

The Revels Accounts for 1611 tell us only that *The Tempest* was performed 'at Whitehall'. The information that it was staged in the Banqueting House, rather than in the Cockpit, derives from an entry in the Audit Office accounts for October 1611: 'To James Maxwell gentleman usher . . . for making ready . . . the Banqueting House there [at Whitehall] three severall tymes for playes . . .'² Since the King's Men were paid for performing *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and one other play at court in late October and early November, the conclusion is reasonable, though not inescapable, that these were the plays for which Maxwell was preparing the Banqueting House during October. But this information becomes less significant the farther one pursues it. Not only *The Tempest*, but all three plays were performed in the Banqueting House; and in December, Maxwell was paid for preparing the same hall for six more plays.³ Clearly the Banqueting House was not selected for its special appropriateness to *The Tempest*. The fact of a performance there tells us no more about this play, or the conditions of its production, than it tells us about any of the others. We have a precisely analogous case in *Othello*, the first recorded performance of which took place in the Banqueting House in 1604: this does not imply that *Othello* was thought to be particularly masque-like. Indeed, there was not even any necessary association between the Banqueting House and theatrical entertainments, to say nothing of masques. In the next March and April, Maxwell was making the hall ready 'twoo severall tymes for dauncing and another tyme for

¹ See W. J. Lawrence, 'The Evolution of the Tragic Carpet', in his *Those Nut-Cracking Elizabethans* (London, 1935), pp. 97-114, and Irwin Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse* (New York, 1964), p. 318.

² Audit Office, Declared Accounts, Bundle 389, Roll 49, fol. 10b (in the Public Record Office).

³ Fol. 11a.

bearbating'.¹ The Banqueting House became a place of high decorum in later years, but at this period it was simply one of a number of locations at court available for the presentation of entertainments of all kinds.

This is not to say that the fact of royal patronage and a court audience did not have important effects on the King's Men and on the Jacobean Shakespeare.² But they are effects that can be discerned in particular plays only in rare and special instances (a case can be made, for example, for the surviving version of *Macbeth*) and there is no reason to believe that *The Tempest* constitutes one of these instances. The figure of Prospero may well have had something to do with King James in Shakespeare's mind, but if we wish to account for it by invoking the company's royal patron, we will have to explain why the King's Men did not continue to commission and produce plays about magician-monarchs until the end of the reign in 1625.

The Genre. Generic considerations have also had significant effects on attitudes towards the play in this century. Modern criticism has removed *The Tempest* from its place as the first of the comedies, and has invented for it, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles* the category of romance.³ Modern conceptions of genre are not those of the Renaissance, and our categories tend towards different ends: ours are exclusive and definitive, theirs tended to be inclusive and analytic. To find a new category for a play was not, for the Renaissance critic, to abandon the old ones. J. C. Scaliger describes the *Oresteia* as both a tragedy and a comedy; analogously, the Quarto of *Troilus and Cressida* declares it witty 'as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus', while the Folio editors included the play among the tragedies. These claims do not contradict each other.

¹ Fol. 112a.

² See, for example, the interesting suggestions in David Bergeron's *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family* (Lawrence, 1985), especially chap. 4.

³ Coleridge referred to *The Tempest* as a romance in *Notes on 'The Tempest'*, but the term was first used to define a category of Shakespearean drama by Dowden: 'There is a romantic element about these plays. In all there is the same romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear—the daughters of Pericles and Leontes, the sons of Cymbeline and Alonso. In all there is a beautiful romantic background of sea or mountain. The dramas have a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to render the name 'comedies' inappropriate; we may smile tenderly, but we never laugh loudly, as we read them. Let us, then, name this group consisting of four plays, Romances.' (*Shakespeare* (New York, 1877), pp. 55–6.)

We have invented the category of romance because we believe that certain kinds of seriousness are inappropriate to comedy and because we are made uncomfortable by the late plays' commitment to non-realistic modes. We have, thereby, unquestionably, shed light on the relations between *The Tempest* and three other late plays, but we have also thereby obscured *The Tempest's* relation to the rest of Shakespearian comedy. And in our imposition of exclusiveness on Renaissance concepts of genre, we have obscured the plays' relation to Shakespearian tragedy as well.¹

The play is, in fact, as much concerned with tragic as with comic themes: the nature of authority and power; the conflicting claims of vengeance and forgiveness, of justice and mercy; the realities of reconciliation and the possibility of regeneration. It opens with a storm scene that recalls *King Lear* both in its natural violence and in the larger issues it raises about the relation of nature to human authority—issues that are succinctly expressed in the Boatswain's question, 'What cares these roarers for the name of king?' (I.I.16–17). In its concern with political legitimacy and the effects of usurpation, the play reconsiders issues that had occupied Shakespeare's mind from the earliest history plays to *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. The fact that it centres as well on a happy betrothal has tended to obscure for us its insistent concern with the dangerous potential of sexuality and the uncertain future that marriage represents—themes that recall the examples of Romeo and Juliet, Hero and Claudio, Angelo and Isabella, the worlds of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*. The rethinking of old issues is mirrored in the play's action: there is a profoundly retrospective quality to the drama, which is deeply involved in recounting and re-enacting past action, in evoking and educating the memory. If there is a path to reconciliation in the play, it is only through this.

Readings and Interpretations. The generic issues are related to questions of character, because in large measure the play contains and controls its tragic potential through the figure of Prospero—the Boatswain's question is, in the context of the second scene, ironic, as we see the storm under the control of the magician of the island. As the text presents him, Prospero is a complex, erratic, and even contradictory figure, though criticism has not invariably seen him

¹ For a fuller discussion see my 'Shakespeare and the Kinds of Drama', *Critical Inquiry*, VI, 1 (1979), 10–23.



1. William Hogarth, Scene from *The Tempest*, c. 1735-40.

as such. The eighteenth century's attitude was, for the most part, announced by Rowe, for whom the play seemed 'as perfect in its kind as almost anything we have' of Shakespeare's, and Prospero's magic had 'something in it very solemn and poetical'.¹ Charles Gildon, in 1710, saw Prospero as almost too serene and untroubled. He conceded that Prospero's account of his past to Miranda 'may seem a little too calm, and that it had been more Dramatic had it been told in a Passion; but if we consider . . . the Story as Prospero tells it, [it] is not without a *Pathos*'.² The rage and tension in these speeches are quite evident, but, to an age in search of perfection in Shakespeare, they had become invisible. Hogarth's extraordinary painting of c.1735-40 (Fig. 1) implies a similarly sentimental reading. Prospero, looking like a Rembrandt rabbi, watches benignly as a courtly Ferdinand in ermine and gold embroidery salutes a classically draped Miranda, a magic book at her feet and a garlanded lamb at her side. As Robin Simon points out, the iconography derives from conventional annunciation and nativity scenes. Ariel hovers above, a winged cherub with a lute,

¹ *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (London, 1709), i. xxiii.

² *Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare*, in the so-called volume 7 of Rowe's edition (1710), p. 262.



2. A notably courtly Ferdinand and Miranda, William Mattocks and Miss Brown at Covent Garden, 1776, from *The Universal Magazine*.

and Caliban, bearing logs, is apparently oblivious to the fact that he is crushing one of a pair of linked doves beneath his webbed foot. Despite his obvious animal qualities and an expression that seems to combine voyeurism and malevolence, he is obviously part of the family. The picture is unlikely to represent a stage production, since until the middle of the century the play was invariably performed in Davenant's and Shadwell's version, in which Prospero's household is a good deal larger. But Hogarth's realization is a clear index to the way his age saw the play.¹ (See Fig. 2.) Henry Fuseli, at the end of the century, found the model for his Prospero in portraits of Leonardo da Vinci (Figs. 3–5): the magic had become both art and science. Hazlitt, writing in 1817, saw Prospero as a 'stately magician', but added that 'the preternatural part has the air of reality, and almost haunts the imagination with a sense of

¹ Simon also observes that Caliban's appearance derives entirely from Shakespeare's text, not from the current stage tradition. See 'Hogarth's Shakespeare', *Apollo*, 109 (March 1979), p. 218. Ronald Paulson sees autobiographical implications in the choice of subject and the depiction of Ferdinand: *Book and Painting* (Knoxville, 1982), pp. 48–53.



3a (above). Henry Fuseli, *The Tempest* 1.2, engraved from the painting for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, 1789

3b (below). Detail of Prospero

