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# Bloody Thoughts: Violence and Wit in Shakespeare's The Tempest

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction to Violence and Wit as Foil Plot Devices

> 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,
>
> Their 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. (V.i.25-32)

Enough is enough, Prospero seems to say. He stands on the island that has become home to him and his daughter, Miranda, for the past decade, after his brother, Antonio, usurped his position as Duke of Milan. We watch the first four acts of the play as Prospero makes clear that he is no longer the homeless exile, but the mastermind, orchestrating chaos for the very noblemen who had sent him packing. Prospero speaks at the beginning of the play's final act, partly to himself, partly to Ariel, a spirit responsible for enacting most of the play's mischief with his power to shapeshift granting him omnipresence. Yes, Prospero admits, he remains "struck to th' quick" by the injustices of his brother (V.i.25). It was treacherous for Antonio to commit a political scandal against his brother, but was despicable for him to endanger Miranda, who, as a child, should have belonged to a protected class that even most criminals would not dare harm. And, sure, Prospero continues, he is filled with not only hurt, but "fury" (V.i.26). But, putting

both hurt and rage aside, he seems to reach a moral conclusion. “The rarer action is/In virtue than in vengeance” (V.i.27-8).

Rare indeed, I thought to myself. Upon first encountering *The Tempest*, my personal history with Shakespeare had been like a museum of situations that confuse human relationships in ways that end in death. A few weeks prior, I had read *Hamlet*, a work that had, frankly, annoyed me. As they began engaging in textual analysis, my classmates shared their trepidation about tearing into such a legendary text. I, on the other hand, was having a difficult time respecting our protagonist, who I viewed as willfully engaging in senseless violence. My empathy did not extend to this prince living with the comforts of a noble court, awkwardly portrayed by David Tennant in a 2009 film adaptation, breaking into a somehow stiff emotional outburst regarding his paternal uncle’s marriage to his mother. I watched as his existential crisis results in the accidental stabbing of Polonius, drowning death of the hysterical Ophelia, hired assassination of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the final scene’s littering of the stage with the bodies of Queen Gertrude, King Claudius, Laertes, and Hamlet.

While Hamlet ends with a stage full of bodies, *The Tempest* draws to a close without a drop of blood shed onstage. After my first exposure to *The Tempest*, I thought I had witnessed the use of wit as a substitute for violence, a plot device functioning the same way violence normally does in Shakespeare's tragedies. I thought that because this play reaches a resolution without the murder of any of its characters, the narrative undermined the necessity of violence. I wondered if Shakespeare was making a conscious pacifist statement.

An immediate issue arose when casting *The Tempest* as representative of Shakespeare’s comedic strategies. At the outset of their analysis, many critics of the play point out that the *The*

*Tempest* is not a comedy, not a tragedy, but a tragicomedy or romance. In the introduction to their piece on film adaptations of Shakespeare's romances, Samuel Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin argue that "Shakespeare's late-phase work," *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, belongs to its own distinctive category because these works "should conclude tragically but miraculously end happily" (Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin 1). The genre of tragicomedy dates back to Greek playwright Euripides' tragic plots with unexpected comic resolutions and Roman playwright Terence's comic plots that involved elements of danger (Foster 9). J.R.R. Tolkien coined the term "eucatastrophe" to describe an ending that is the opposite of a tragic ending, not because the story as a whole is void of struggles and mishaps, but because those events culminate in "the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn'" (176). Harold Bloom calls Edward Dowden mischievous for changing the label of Shakespeare's four less easily categorized plays from tragicomedy to romance, the label that has since stuck in most critical literature on the plays. Categorization as romance, though, is far from conclusive. Bloom's own impression is that Shakespeare "thought of most of them as tragicomedies and may have regarded *The Tempest* as relatively unmixed comedy" (Bloom 1). The First Folio places the play at the beginning of the comedies, perhaps setting an expectation that it will feature moderate examples of Shakespeare's comedic strategies.

If critics cannot agree on *The Tempest's* categorical home, can they at least agree on what the play is about? With a play whose body of criticism continues to grow after over four centuries of readership, what answer do you expect? Not to mention that of those four centuries, we are living within only several decades of the birth of Psychoanalytic, Feminist,

Poststructuralist, Postcolonial, Queer, and other critical lenses of literary theory. If not definitive, several standard readings of the play have received popular acceptance.

One common reading calls *The Tempest* Shakespeare's metatheatrical farewell to his career as a playwright. This play was very likely the last Shakespeare composed independently, a fact that "invite[s] us to view the play at least in part as a poetic comment on the playwright's lifelong relation to his art and to his audience" (Evans 29). According to this reading, Prospero's relationship with Ariel represents Shakespeare's relationship with his actors. Ariel uses his command of the environment to enact the schemes dreamed up by Prospero, all to the end of confusing and directing the other characters through the maze of a plot. Shakespeare's actors used their talent to bring to life Shakespeare's plots (or Shakespeare's specific take on well known plots, as was the case for all but *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*) and thus controlled the experience of the audience. The play's ending is the strongest foothold of the metatheatrical reading. Prospero renounces his magic, throws his spell book into the sea, and frees Ariel from bondage. In an epilogue, Prospero asks audience members to fill his sails "with the help of [their] good hands," an invitation for applause so that their "indulgence" may "set [him] free" (Epilogue lines 10, 20). In these final actions, Prospero represents Shakespeare retiring from his craft and asking the audience for a send-off.

Frank Kermode presents an alternative reading of the play as a pastoral drama which, according to that genre's formula, is centered on a conflict between "the worlds of Prospero's Art, and Caliban's Nature" (xxiv). According to this reading, Caliban is representative of the innocent but primitive, "an evil natural magic which is the antithesis of Prospero's benevolent Art" (xxv). This reading establishes a binary of good and evil reminiscent of biblical virtue,

claiming that Prospero, "like Adam in Paradise… offered ineffective resistance to evil and was expelled; but after this he was, like Adam with the world before him, 'blessedly holp.'" Kermode proposed this reading in his introduction to the Arden edition of the play in 1954, which provides context for his perhaps problematic suggestion that Milan is morally superior to the island and that Caliban is a crucible meant to purify the characters for re-entry into fine society.

Paul Brown offers a postcolonial response when he calls *The Tempest* "not simply a reflection of colonialist practices but an intervention in an ambivalent and even contradictory discourse" (205). Brown evokes the real world example of Pocahontas and John Rolfe in which the English civil subject must other the native to affirm his divine right to domination. In *The Tempest*, Brown identifies a tension between order and disorder, with the colonizer using seeming disorder as justification to control and exploit. He views Stephano and Trinculo as caricatures of what he calls "masterlessness" and Caliban as representative of what he calls "savagism," with both of those terms referring to essentially the same concept: the crown unifies its subjects around the idea that they do not want to belong to a humiliating inferior class, whether that class live on the "internal margins of civil society" or "external margins of expanding civil power" (Brown 208). Finally, he compares Prospero's command of his island to England's reform of the Irish, whom they viewed as animalistic and thus incapable of assimilation into English society. Stated in more general terms, a postcolonial reading views *The Tempest* as a representation, whether consciously critical or not, of England's subjugation and aping of whole countries of Calibans who were living human beings.

The wide variety of critical readings of the *The Tempest* indicates that Shakespeareans are far from settling upon a conclusive interpretation of the work. My contribution to the academic

discussion surrounding *The Tempest* started as a narratological exploration. Narratology is a critical literary theory originating in the 1960s that originally scoured narratives in an attempt to identify universal characteristics, archetypes, and story arcs. By the twenty-first century, narratologists broadened their field's definition to "the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation" (Meister 623). I took a narratological approach by identifying violence and wit as foil plot devices in the works of Shakespeare. Returning to Hatchuel and Vienne-Guerrin's proposal that tragicomedies should have tragic endings but "miraculously" arrive at comic resolutions, I am unsatisfied by the suggestion that this reversal is miraculous. Even if the play contains tragic elements but ends without bloodshed, I am also unconvinced that the transition from struggle to resolution is, per Tolkien's definition of eucatastrophe, "sudden." Suspecting that the ending of The Tempest was the natural culmination of a plot device used consistently throughout the work, I speculated that while Shakespeare propels and resolves his tragic plots using violence, he propels and resolves his comic plots using wit.

Violence here refers to the infliction of bodily pain or harm, while wit is a more nuanced term. At the time of Shakespeare's career, the English were growing more conscious and proud of their language, and definitions of words had a degree of flexibility in that the language had not been standardized as it has today in dictionaries. In the online Oxford English Dictionary, many entries list multiple definitions for the same term with usage examples from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Lines from Shakespeare's plays are often illustrative examples for multiple of the varied definitions, showing how his works popularized particular usages

leaving a lasting footprint on the connotation of those terms, and also that he was an active participant in the playfulness with language characteristic of his era.

I will explore the conventional definitions of wit in a later section, and will, for now, define "wit" as what I perceived it to mean when I first studied *The Tempest*. In the context of Shakespeare, a discussion of "wit" sparks most quickly to mind Shakespeare's fools. Shakespeare often includes a character who imbues wisdom disguised as comic relief. This character's very name often blatantly points to the character's purpose as comic relief. In *King Lear*, we have the Fool, a name suggesting that he should specialize in nonsense. He challenges the audience's expectations by exhibiting more perception than any other character regarding the political chaos. *Hamlet* features Two Clowns, who are actually not employed as jesters, but are a working-class "gravedigger and his companion," their designation as clowns in the play suggestive of a presupposition of stupidity upon lower-class men (Bate 3). While their role in the play has the potential to provide slapstick, cathartic comedic relief with the tossing around of skulls, their wit shows through in semantic antics within a dense conversation with the protagonist about the meaning of life and death. Shakespeare challenges what it means to be witty by first playing on the societal expectation of dullness in working men whose formal education would not have exceeded a few years of grammar school, and then scripting those characters the cleverest lines of their play. Wit, under this frame of thinking, is not only wordplay, but a perceptiveness often displayed through the way a character uses their power of speech.

A literary foil usually refers to a pair of characters in the same story whose traits make them appear to be opposites but who actually function in similar ways in the plot. When

examined next to one another, one foil reveals the nature of the other in a way that counters a supposed binary relationship between the two. When I first supposed that violence and wit were foil plot devices, I was thinking in comparative terms between *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*.

The two plays resolve in opposite ways, *Hamlet* with a full overhaul of the established order and *The Tempest* with a re-establishment of a previously disrupted order. The conflict of *Hamlet* is initiated by an act of fratricide between Claudius and King Hamlet, a disruption of the political order by means of killing. Because the ghost of King Hamlet instructs his son to exact vengeance, violence against Claudius becomes Hamlet's driving motivation for the remainder of the play. Maurice Hunt explains the common reading of Hamlet as an apocalyptic work as a result of its suggestions that time is backwards, its referencing Doomsday most frequently of any Shakespeare play, and the apocalyptic quality of centennial years including 1600, when *Hamlet* was originally performed. In the British literary tradition, apocalypse is a state of universal human death with a sense that the current world is no longer inhabitable for life as we know it. *Hamlet* reaches an apocalyptic conclusion driven by violence in that every individual with a hand on the Danish crown is killed, clearing the way for a new order to be initiated by Fortinbras, whose entry immediately after the death points to that regeneration.

On the other hand, Shakespeare restores order in *The Tempest,* a play that, like Hamlet, features an offstage catalyst that the audience learns about from a victimized character rather than seeing the event play out. In *The Tempest*, that catalyst was Antonio's outwitting Prospero for the Milanian duchy, a brother displacing an elder brother, echoing *Hamlet*. In this displacing, we see our first clue that although blood is not shed on the stage during his play, violence is actually far from absent from the plot. Prospero tells Miranda that Antonio "a treacherous army

levied" to force them from their home (I.ii.128). Antonio used disorderly conduct to gain his position, and the plot of the play follows Prospero as his central motivation is to retake the duchy, which he does using his faculty of language in a way that directs the actions of the other characters to his advantage. The play's course leaves the characters, like the mariners after the opening storm, with "not a hair perish'd/ On their sustaining garments not a blemish,/ But fresher than before" (I.ii.217-9).

Both plays end with a rejection of that strategy that had so far propelled the plot. True, violence was the means through which the established order is overturned. However, there is some prizing of nonviolence in the sense that Hamlet, who chose to engage in killing, is dead, and Fortinbras "without raising up arms against his foe, ends up becoming the king of the entire country" ("Election Lights"). Fortinbras should not be considered a pacifist by any means. In his final speech, he says of the corpses of the main characters strewn across the stage, "such a sight as this/ Becomes the field," imparting a nobility on mortal violence in the context of war (V.ii. 371-2). What Fortinbras rejects is the use of violence to transfer power among the Danish court. A soldier can nobly fight, "but here," in the context of domestic homicide, the sight of bodies "shows much amiss" (V.ii.372).

*The Tempest*, then, ends with Prospero renouncing the wit that allowed him to accomplish his antics. In a lengthy speech extending fifty-five lines, Prospero celebrates all he was able to achieve "by [his] so potent Art," which I will in the next chapter define as his ability to manipulate as most fitting for the given situation (V.i.50). "But," he continues, shifting his speech from celebration to renunciation, "this rough magic/ I here abjure," and he promises to "break [his] staff" and "drown [his] book" (V.i.50-1, 54, 57). Both staff and book are visual

representations of his Art, with the latter also a broader symbol for knowledge. Here, my reading of the play as an exploration of wit can interact with a metatheatrical reading of the play; Prospero's renouncing his antics an echo of Shakespeare's retirement for playwriting. When viewed in this context, I wonder if Shakespeare is authentically apologetic, and, thus, whether Prospero's apology then holds a tinge of sarcasm.

I suspected that violence and wit might clearly oppose one another within *The Tempest*. I identified wit as a faculty of the mind that characters sometimes reject in order to engage in violence. Our Prince of Denmark planted that seed in my thoughts when he resolved "from this time forth/ My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth!" (IV.iv.68-9) This utterance represents a turning point, his rejection of all thoughts but those of violence. Although Shakespeareans debate the point in *Hamlet* at which the protagonist is closest to madness, the "bloody thoughts" line diverges from sanity by rejecting all thoughts besides violent ones. Madness is an altered state of consciousness, as is drunkenness, the state we find Stephano in when he, in *The Tempest*, parody's Hamlet's lines. Shakespeare himself wields wit by using the rhetorical strategy of parody to mock violence as a pursuit of drunkards. Stephano proclaims "I do begin to have bloody/ thoughts" when Caliban recommends they assassinate Prospero so Stephano can become king of the island (IV.i. 220-1). Shakespeare's suggests a disconnect between clear thinking and violence by placing these lines within the mouths of madmen and drunkards. Moreover, the lines imply that violence should be substituted for all other orderly cognition. The lines occur in the fourth act of each play, the point at which the audience should begin expecting onstage acts of violence in Shakespeare's tragic storylines.They refer to plans of violence against others. But

consider the visual image these characters evoke of their own brains. Blood only becomes visible when there is a wound. If these characters' thoughts are bloody, is their mind injured?

What I found in *The Tempest*, under closer investigation, is a play that demonstrates and ultimately upholds a status quo social hierarchy, one that is built upon a notion that violence is an acceptable motivator and status symbol towards the end of maintaining political power. The dynamic between the characters in the play, between Prospero and Caliban, between the Court and the Mariners, between Stephano and Trinculo, all involve the use of violence to demonstrate a power differential. Even though it does not include onstage violence at the level to be expected from Shakespeare's tragedies, *The Tempest* does not advocate for a replacement of violence with wit. Prospero is more cunning than he is witty, and characters who exhibit the epitome of wit, such as Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo, are played as puppets. Prospero acts as the puppeteer because he understands that it is not enough to have a sharp mind or charisma if these are not paired with cunning. There is no suggestion that Prospero is any more nonviolent than Hamlet, the language and plot of the *The Tempest* instead indicating he conceals violence using cunning.

My thesis is an exploration of a hypothesis. I did not write with the intention of proving my initial suspicions true and underplaying any evidence that emerged to the contrary. I wrote to investigate my idea and explain what arose from that investigation. These pages contain what emerged when I studied the play through the lens of my hypothesis, with novel observations born from points where both my hypothesis and those of other scholars reveal the complexity of Shakespeare's work. My hypothesis was: in the same fashion that Shakespeare resolves his tragedies using violence, he resolves his comedies using wit, making the two foil plot devices. Further exploration of the topic through textual analysis, review of existing critical essays, and

historical research led me to discover that my hypothesis both oversimplified *The Tempest* and threw my support behind the oppressor who conceals violence using cunning that we mistake for or excuse as something morally superior.

# Chapter 2

## Not in Vengeance, But in Virtù

"My high charms work," Prospero says, celebrating his victory over the nobles, who stand stupefied (III.iii.88). Ariel has just appeared in the form of a harpy, a Greek monster with a woman's head and bird's body, shrieking reprimands including personal details about the noble party's political treachery.

"And these mine enemies are all knit up," Prospero continues, "In their distractions: they now are in my power;/And in these fits I leave them" (III.iii.89-90). Shakespeare propels the plot of *The Tempest* with such moments in which Prospero uses his influence over Ariel or Caliban to scatter the other characters across the island, to baffle his rivals either personally or through his minions, and to reflect upon his own power. In the case of the above-referenced passage, Ariel constructs and destroys a scene before the nobles because of Prospero's promise to release him from slavery. Then, Ariel uses his shapeshifting capabilities and his knowledge of Prospero's political background to distress the nobles. Finally, Prospero celebrates the acquisition of power that he attributes to his "high charms" (III.iii.88). It appears that no Milanians were harmed in the making of the scene.

On my first read of *The Tempest*, I perceived in the play a narratological foil to Shakespeare's tragedies; I believed the play reaches its resolution through wit in the same way the tragedies reach their resolutions through violence. Originally, I engaged in the text with a modern understanding of "wit" as synonymous to "trickery." The connotation of that word, "trickery," is playful, defiant with the deviousness of a child. Within the word "trickery" is the word "trick," an isolated act of deceit, contributing to the episodic sense of the word. A presentist

critic who subscribes to the traditional reading of Prospero as a magician might use the word "trick" in connection with Prospero's dealings with other characters. The Oxford English dictionary dates the use of the word "trick" denoting "a spell cast on a person" in the context of "black folk-magic or voodoo" to the late nineteenth century ("trick, n." def. 5.c.). For those twenty-first century readers who mean optical illusions when they say "magic tricks," the focus of the word "trick" in connection with "magic" evokes the audience of a theatrical magic show. The source of entertainment in the show is being "tricked" in the sense of the word connected with "deceit," the magicians' art being their ability to manipulate their audiences into believing the illusion before them. In the liminal space between these definitions of trickery, I find Prospero's strategy, the strategy moving forward the plot of *The Tempest*.

The play's characters call this strategy Prospero's "Art." His "Art" is, in fact, the first detail we learn about Prospero. In the first line of the second scene, anxiously gazing into the storm, Miranda assumes that her "dearest father" has "by [his] Art" conjured the storm (I.ii.1). Mentioning both the familial relationship between the characters and attributing to Prospero the "Art" that will be a driving force of the play, this line has expositional purpose. The audience has just seen the mariners and nobles scrambling for their lives in the storm, and the first proposed explanation for that storm is Prospero's Art. What, then, is Prospero's "Art"?

Emma Smith reads "Art" as another word for Prospero's magic, that magic functioning in the play as a metaphor for the theatrical arsenal of a dramatist. Smith elaborates that theatergoers are "as much the victims of Prospero's magic" as the characters within the play, explaining that both the mariners of Act 1 scene 1 and the real world audience view a real storm, the former deceived by magic like the latter deceived by special effects (Smith 3). This reading both

supports a metatheatrical interpretation of the play as a whole and draws a connection between the play and its cultural influences. First, by drawing a connection between witchcraft and stagecraft, we understand how Prospero's grand display and ultimate renunciation of magic represents Shakespeare's creation of the play as a farewell to the theater, a masterpiece to testify to the mysticism of this discipline he promoted by his career before asking the crowd for a sendoff. Second, when we read Prospero, as Smith does, to embody a "magus-- the Renaissance idea of the learned occult philosopher," then Prospero's wizarding ways nod to magic as a serious academic discipline to Renaissance figures like John Dee and Marsilio Ficino (Smith 5).

Karol Berger puts forth a similar reading of Prospero's Art as a magical capacity to act on the four elements of the natural world, but "even more striking are the effects of his Art on men" (Berger 211). She features examples that display the influence of Prospero's magic on other people: Prospero's lulling Miranda to sleep and conjuring the masque scene to enamor Ferdinand. Berger perceives in Prospero's magic a powerful influence on "not only men's bodies, senses, and imagination but also their emotions and even the faculty of reason" (Berger 212). In this reading, Prospero holds the key to the perception of each peripheral character, revealing to them the reality of their circumstances at his own discretion. What each character understands about his own situation depends on what Prospero reveals. And Prospero relies upon misunderstanding to drive the plot, tampering with every character's faculty of reason. If this is a play whose plot is driven by wit over senselessness, then why does its events so largely depend upon the characters' having no wits about them?

The reading of Prospero's Art as his magic fits particularly well with readings of the play that cast our protagonist as a playwright or magus. However, the very fuel behind both readings

is Prospero's ability to manipulate situations in order to affect people. Both Smith and Berger call Prospero a magician because he manipulates his nautical nook to make the other characters behave as he likes. Magic, however, is not the whole of Prospero's Art, but a very iconic part. Magic, or rather, the common belief that Prospero possesses magic, is like a weapon, and Prospero's Art is an arsenal containing that weapon.

That people believe Prospero possesses magic serves him well, especially when he seeks to inspire fear. When Ariel reminds Prospero that his freedom is overdue, all Prospero must do is threaten to "rend an oak,/And peg [Ariel] in his knotty entrails," the same state that Prospero found Ariel in and one likened to "a torment/ To lay upon the damn'd" (I.ii.294-5, 289-90). A poetic way of saying: it was Hell. Ariel's belief that Prospero can use magic lends teeth to the threats that keep Ariel in servitude. The Art in this situation is not magic, because no magic is being used at the time. Rather, the Art is Prospero's understanding of how to manipulate Ariel to his advantage, in this instance through verbal threats of violence that he has convinced Ariel he is able to use magic to inflict.

Caliban too is enslaved by what he perceives to be magic, but is really Prospero's capacity to evoke violence with his language. In an aside, Caliban explains that he "must obey" because Prospero's "Art is of such pow'r,/ It would control my dam's god" (I.ii.374-5). In other words, Caliban perceives a fearsome capacity in Prospero's magic, and it is this perception rather than any real magic that motivates him to do Prospero's bidding. Caliban speaks these lines in reaction to Prospero's description of the violence he could commit against Caliban. If Caliban does not obey him, Prospero guarantees "I'll rack these with old cramps" (I.ii.371). The word "old" modifying "cramps" hints that Prospero has beaten Caliban previously, making the

Caliban's attribution of Prospero's influence to "Art" more intriguing. It might be that Caliban is so traumatized by physical abuse stretched across an unspecified number of years that when Prospero invents a fiction of sorcery to explain his capacity for cruelty, Caliban is receptive to that explanation. Regardless of the degree to which Caliban is wise to Prospero's manipulation, these lines reveal that Caliban obeys Prospero because he believes Prospero holds power so great to frighten divine beings into submission.Whether or not Prospero has the ability to enact harm to make those fears grounded is another question entirely.

Prospero's guise of magic is so intimidating that he must cast it off when he wishes to inspire something other than fear in a character. Before he can convince Miranda to "wipe [her] eyes" and soothe her heart from fear that her father's magic killed  mariners, Prospero has to disrobe from his "magic garment" (I.II.25, 24). He portrays magic as something separate from himself, housed in a garment that even another person, his daughter, can not just remove, but can "pluck" off, a verb normally used when the direct object is extremely light in weight, as with a hair, feather, or string of an instrument ("pluck, v.").  Here, Prospero is even manipulating how his daughter views his magic. He does not dispute that it is formidable, as it might prove advantageous for Miranda to believe her father capable of wrath, but he establishes the narrative that it is a formidable item separate from himself.

But, if Prospero lacks magical powers, how does he render Ferdinand frozen during a would-be sword fight? This too, Prospero achieved by emotional manipulation rather than spellcasting. Prospero explained in an aside that Ferdinand and Miranda "are both in either's pow'rs," both indicating that the couple are infatuated with one another and locating the element of control over the relationship in the hands of the lovers. This power balance is not to his liking;

he intends to further manipulate the situation “lest too light winning” Miranda’s affections “make the prize light” for Ferdinand (I.ii.453-4). Our protagonist shows an understanding of the psychology behind romance, subscribing to a theory that the challenge of the pursuit makes people value their lovers more highly. This statement is his explanation for what he is about to do: speak in what Ferdinand will later call “threats” to cause psychological stress for Ferdinand(I.ii.491).

What we mistake for the magical act in this scene originates as a brief stage direction in which Ferdinand “draws, and is charmed from moving” (*Tempest*, 39). How this action appears to the audience depends upon the staging. Is magic suggested by lighting, special effects, or sound effects? Does Ferdinand grunt in effort or appear frozen on stage? Is Ariel holding Ferdinand’s body or blade? All the text provides is that Ferdinand does not move because he “is charmed,” a direction bookended by Prospero’s provoking lines. Prospero threatens to bind Ferdinand and toss him into the sea, a fate Ferdinand swears to “resist… till/ mine enemy has more pow’r,” a line that, when Ferdinand does nothing, ultimately implies Prospero is indeed, more powerful than Ferdinand (I.ii.468-9). A watery grave is one Prospero has the insight to know is particularly fearsome for Ferdinand, seeing as the young man believes his father has on that same day died at sea. Prospero asserts that if Ferdinand were to charge at him, he “can here disarm [Ferdinand] with this stick/ And make [his] weapon drop” (I.ii.475-6). This threat does not directly refer to magic in any way, instead a boast that Prospero is so deceptive that he could wave a stick, don the robes of a magician, and use his intimate knowledge of his rival’s fears to compel him to drop a weapon.

Prospero counts the situation as won when Ferdinand, in his first lines since the supposed charm, lists out the sources of his emotional anguish: the imagined death of his father and peers, Prospero's "threats," and "the weakness which [Ferdinand] feels" (I.ii.41). Ferdinand catalogues these to explain that his desire to look at Miranda outweighs his various sources of distress. Note that all of these sources have some connection to violence, physical or supposed mortal suffering as a result of the schemes the audience knows to be orchestrated by Prospero. This passage informs Prospero that he has succeeded in two ways: orchestrating a multilayered exhausting situation for Ferdinand and withholding Miranda so that Ferdinand is more invested in satisfying his infatuation than in relieving his other stress. Realizing this, Prospero praises Ariel, which suggests he links his ability to rouse Ferdinand to the fantastical landscape he crafted through Ariel's labor. The ending of the scene solidifies a reading of verbal manipulation when Miranda assures Ferdinand that her father is "of a better nature, sir,/ Than he appears by speech" (I.ii. 499-50). His cruelty resides in his language, but he has neither the intention nor the direct capacity to make those threats realities.

In each of these situations, characters are intimidated by Prospero not because he uses any magic in those moments, but because they mistake Prospero's ability to manipulate for the capacity to use magic. The language of *The Tempest* is so closely associated with magic that the audience takes it literally. Prospero uses the vocabulary and dons the dress of a magician not to indicate an actual capacity for magic, but a different tool entirely that works like magic to manipulate. That tool is so well-honed that other characters take for granted that it has power over them. In reality, Prospero only possesses the power that the other characters give him once he wins them over using what is really his "Art," something Niccolò Machiavelli calls "virtù."

During Shakespeare's life, Machiavelli was a major source in discourse regarding political use of force, revolutionary in his perspective on how it should be used.

Machiavelli articulates a life philosophy Prospero practices and his sequence of life events parallel Prospero's circumstances. Political scientists study Machiavelli as the author of *The Prince*. "It is better to be feared than loved" is a Machiavellian quote emphasized in modern Comparative Politics courses to the extent of fossilizing Machiavelli in students' minds as ruthless, inflexible in his cruelty. The Machiavelli of common knowledge deadpanned a philosophy of power noteworthy for its lack of empathy. A depiction of Machiavelli as "godless, scheming, and self-interested" is one that not only proliferates modern classrooms, but also Elizabethan theater, where the "stage Machiavel" was a character modeled after a Machiavelli cast in the sinister light. Although this caricature made a significant appearance in Renaissance theater, the British Library calls it a "reductive framework," a shallow read of Machiavelli to be contrasted with "his actual writings, which are varied and complex and lean heavily towards republicanism" (British Library 1). Reducing Machiavelli to cruel and godless creates an entertaining villain but ignores what actually makes the Machiavellian prince unique.

A Machiavellian prince is not novel for his belief in inspiring fear in his subjects. A brief look at the kings, tyrants, and leaders who came before Machiavelli reminds us that if the soul of Machiavelli's philosophy were that harshness reaps results, he would not have been putting forth a new idea. The Machiavellian prince is novel because instead of leading by presuming and developing a fiction of his own morality, he understands his good and bad fortune to be a matter of chance. What matters is not that he is karmically worthy of his position, but that he knows how to work with the circumstances he is dealt in order to safeguard his power. When we

remember Machiavelli for his cruelty, we side with those who lavish in an ephemeral and unearned prosperity.

Machiavelli's contemporaries subscribed to the "moralistic theory of politics," that princes must tailor the exercise of power within Christian and classical moral conventions in order to secure success (Stanford 3). *The Prince* challenged this idea. Moral goodness, argues Machiavelli, does not make a prince more or less powerful, and does not make any demarcation between an illegitimate and a legitimate ruler. He argues that a leader's actions are important and his title meaningless on its face (Stanford 3). Machiavelli's critics did not call him a devil and atheist because he advocated for cruelty, but because he exposed the sham of absolute power. He shattered the ego of the King, telling him that his power was not God-given, but a matter of chance, and that transforming that chance into opportunity required effort and adaptability.

Throughout *The Tempest*, Shakespeare repeatedly shatters the ego of the king by placing laymen and aristocrats in both tragic and miraculous situations that demonstrate the worthlessness of a title and undeserved nature of most shows of authority. During the storm that opens the play, the Italian nobles enter seemingly to heckle and engage in an arbitrary show of authority over the boatswain and his crew, who have all hands on deck to keep from succumbing to the storm. When Gonzalo, advisor to King Alonso of Naples, reproaches the boatswain for coldly dismissing the nobles, the boatswain poses the rhetorical question "What cares these roarers for the name of King?' before again shooing the nobles(I.i.16-7). The boatswain does not have time to grovel with respectful pleasantries to the King and Duke when contending with a storm whose winds do not submit to the commands of a King. In the face of a very real storm, the title of King, an abstraction in the minds of men, is inconsequential. As if not understanding

this point, Gonzalo responds by scolding the boatswain to "remember whom thou hast abroad," continuing to use formal pronouns as if linguistic sophistication will give him the upper hand in this argument (I.i.19). The boatswain uses the casual "you" "myself" and "I" in his next remark in which he invites Gonzalo "if you can command these elements to silence… we will not hand a rope more; use your authority; if you cannot," then leave the crew alone to do their jobs (I.i. 21-4). The suggestion is ludicrous that the command of a noble has more power against a storm than the practiced boatsmanship of the mariner.

Shakespeare again belittles the worth of titles by including characters who vie for political titles even when washed up on an island. King Alonso and his advisor, Gonzalo, lie sleeping on the beach. Antonio, Prospero's brother who stole the office of Duke of Milan, stands watch with Sebastian, brother of the King. Antonio persuades Sebastian to assassinate both sleeping men to usurp the crown of Naples. After some talk, he sways Sebastian to participate in his own brother's murder. Antonio is poised to kill Sebastian's brother, and Sebastian calls him a "dear friend," proclaiming "as thou got'st Milan,/ I'll come by Naples" before himself commanding Antonio to draw (II.i.285-6). Both men believe that royal titles over Milan and Naples hold significance, but seem to forget that they are currently beached on an island, their ships wrecked. If it were not for the magical intervention of Ariel who repaired the ship and stirred winds to send them on their way, the nobles would have left a vacuum in their respective offices regardless of what names they called one another on this remote island. With neither Naples nor Milan in sight, the assassination would be a murder rather than a coup.

So, if titles alone are meaningless, what qualities are useful in contributing to the prince's success? The Mises Institute posits that in order to understand Machiavelli, we must view him as

"both the founder of modern political science and a notable preacher of evil," instead of arguing that one of those identities erases the other (Mises 5). In defense of this statement, the Institute explains that while Machiavelli does not counsel cruelty and deceit at every turn, he advises the prince to pursue any course of action that allows him "to maintain and extend his power, his rule over the state" (Mises 2). The ability to ascertain that course of action given his circumstances is what Machiavelli calls virtù. If the prince is successful when he rides the waves of his circumstances, it stands to reason that the obstacle of virtù is changing fortune outside of the prince's control. Machiavelli calls these changing tides of fate *fortuna*, "the abstraction that Latin and medieval thinkers devised to represent the arbitrary forces at work in the universe to impede a person's use of intelligent foresight" (Atkinson 3).

It is a lucky turn of fortuna and Prospero's taking advantage of that turn that allows Prospero to enact his schemes. He tells Miranda that "By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,/ (Now my dear lady) hath mine enemies/ Brought to this shore" (I.ii.178-80). His apostrophizing to Fortuna in a personified female form is consistent with Machiavelli's characterization of fortuna as a woman. Prospero has gained the opportunity to confuse, threaten, and make a mockery of his rivals, and attributes that opportunity to powers outside of his control. He will demonstrate virtù by taking charge of the opportunity he is presented with, which is the entire plot of the play.

What makes Prospero such a striking portrait of the Machiavelli of history is the similarity of their life stories. Machiavelli, like Prospero, was educated in the humanities, a student of Latin teacher Paolo da Ronciglione and likely a student at the University of Florence. Like Prospero, he held a government position; he was Second Chancellor of the Republic of

Florence. That is until, however, his fortunes changed. The republican government had cast out the Medici, and in 1513, the Medici returned the favor. For a period of multiple weeks, the Medici government imprisoned and tortured Machiavelli who was, like Prospero, an exile as a result of political conflict. Less than a year after suffering at the hands of the powerful, Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*. Machiavelli devoted his book to his tormentors, as Prospero devotes his schemes to his own; *The Prince* is dedicated "to the magnificent Lorenzo Di Piero De' Medici" (Prince vii). By wielding virtù in the face of fortuna, both Machiavelli and Prospero were able to demonstrate the emptiness of noble titles and gain notoriety for their observations. Neither man, however, dismantles the system he criticises. Both, rather, demonstrate how to dominate the existing system.

That not only the play's casual audience, but also academics publishing peer-reviewed commentary are so quick to accept Prospero as a sorcerer only supports the argument that his Art is not his magic, but his cunning. All happenings attributed to Prospero's magic are direct consequences of his exhibiting virtù. When read through a Machiavellian lens, Prospero possesses no supernatural powers, but the fact that his influence is so strong to be considered other-wordly is a testament to his ability to successfully manipulate both the characters and real-world audience of *The Tempest*. Prospero never casts a single spell but calls himself a sorcerer, and layman and academic alike take him at his word.

## Chapter 3

### Wit as a Conduit to Violence in *The Tempest*

When we humans speak, we want to be heard. We understand that the power contained in the words we choose is larger than the sounds they make. Prospero understands what he needs to say in order to manipulate the other characters. Each time he propels the plot, it is by speaking. It should come as no surprise, then, that the first time we meet his character, he is demanding that his daughter and the play's audience listen.

In his first act of onstage word-smithery, Prospero lulls his daughter, Miranda, distressed and begging that he abandon the antics of the storm, to sleep. Insisting that hearing the story of his usurpation will make it impossible for her to question his antics, Prospero announces that he "should inform [Miranda] farther" of her origin story (I.ii.23). He places great importance on his words being actually heard and understood by his daughter, compelling her to "ope [her] ear" and "be attentive," thrice breaking from his story to ask his daughter if she still listens (I.ii.37-8). Prospero asks "Dost thou attend me?" "Thou attend'st not?" and "Dost thou hear?" followed each time by Miranda speaking in intensifiers and hyperbole to insist that she listens "most heedfully" to his storytelling that "would cure deafness" (I.ii.78,87,106). The scene represents the first instance where Prospero moves the plot forward by speaking, his lines providing exposition to the audience, ensuring that the audience becomes aware of the conflict from his point of view and is in turn more likely to empathize with his cause, and pacifying his daughter to sleep so that he may focus on his schemes without her protesting on behalf of his victims, as she had initially done. Even as the scene aims to persuade the audience to Prospero's cause, it

uses that dominance that comes from speaking and being heard to present a daughter who is fearful or her own father, hinting at the sinister power of his speech.

By establishing himself to be a character who believes in the power of the spoken word, Prospero beckons us to interrogate the role of language in *The Tempest*, a role as multifaceted as that of violence within this play. Although we do not see characters die on stage, violence is present in the play in Prospero's graphic threats that inspire fear in the characters and thus compel them to do his bidding, the physical toll that his antics take on the characters, and in the implication that political violence will in no means be abolished because the play ends with a restoration of the status quo. Like violence, wit can take various forms, and the form exhibited by Prospero is consistent with Machiavelli's concept of virtù. Prospero saw that men whose wit is confined to their study are puppets of fortune, while men whose wit extends into social and political interactions are the puppeteers. Prospero the outcast was a puppet, Prospero the sorcerer a puppeteer.

Now that we have studied Prospero under a Machiavellian lens, we understand that he practices not magic but virtù, a mindset that rather than replacing violence, reinforces the effectiveness of threats of force. In the first chapter, I defined wit as a perceptiveness often displayed through the way a character uses their power of speech. I will here explain how I arrived at that definition before showing how *The Tempest* points to wit as not inherently oppositional to violence, but sometimes used to concoct violence and other times to counter violence. Three definitions of wit, as drawn from the Oxford English Dictionary, serve as a representational sample of the breadth of the word's meaning during Shakespeare's active years.

The simplest definition of wit is "the faculty of thinking and reason in general" ("wit, n." def. 2.a.). As an illustrative example of this usage, the Oxford English Dictionary pulls a line from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bottom, the actor who has just awoken in his normal form after being charmed with an ass's head and the infatuations of Fairy Queen Titania, calls his memories of the night "a dream past the wit of man to say/what dream it was" (IV.i. 215-6). By 'wit,' he refers to his mental capacity to understand and explain the contents of what he believes to have been a dream. If wit is the faculty of thinking, Shakespeare's characters tell us explicitly that wit can be violent. Following this definition, Hamlet when his "thoughts be bloody" and Stephano with his "bloody thoughts" are referring to wit and declaring it can be a means for concocting violence (*Hamlet* IV.iv.69 and *Tempest* IV.i.220-1).

Another definition builds upon the concept of wit as a faculty of thinking, adding with that faculty an association with sanity. The use of the word 'wit' in the phrase 'out of my wits' specifically refers to "mental faculties in respect of their condition; chiefly = 'right mind', 'reason', 'senses', sanity" ("wit, n." def. 4). Shakespeare places this usage, again an illustrative example in the Oxford English Dictionary, in the mouth of Malvolio, the butt of much of the characters' tomfoolery in *Twelfth Night*. Malvolio insists "I am as well in my wits, Fool, as thou art," to which the Fool responds, "But as well? Then you are mad indeed, if you be/ no better in your wits than a Fool" (IV.ii.93-5). Wits here are equated to sanity, to not only mental faculty, but the wellbeing of that faculty. The Fool is joking that if Malvolio's wits match his own, Malvolio must be mad. To apply this definition to our discussion of violence, we raise a question of whether someone who commits violence is necessarily out of their wits. This question lacks a clear answer, as evidenced by the continuing debate across criminal trials in which the defendant

pleads insanity. To say that people who act violently are in their wits is to seem to say that violence is rational. To say that people who act violently are necessarily out of their wits is to seem to deflect criminal responsibility away from the person who inflicted the violence and onto a clinical fault in their faculty of reason. Furthermore, those are not the only two possible answers; people with sound minds sometimes make senseless choices.

Neither of the two foregoing definitions specifically tie wit to language. We finally see an association of "wit" to language when we define "wit" as "quickness of intellect or liveliness of fancy, with capacity of apt expression; talent for saying brilliant or sparkling things, esp. in an amusing way" ("wit, n." def. 7). This definition combines the faculty of thinking with a prodigious ability to communicate through language. In a similar vein, "wit" can mean "the quality of speech or writing… calculated to surprise and delight by its unexpectedness" ("wit, n." def. 8.a.). Wit as ironic speech arises in *Much Ado About Nothing* when Leonato explains that "there's a skirmish of wit/ between" Beatrice and Benedick (I.i.61-2). The understanding of wit as a faculty dates back to Old English, and the understanding of wit as sanity dates back to at least the very beginning of the second millennium. The implied reference to language seems to have come about five hundred years later. In his exploration of Shakespeare's wit, Michael Booth aptly summarizes C.S. Lewis's observation "that the word "wit" meant mind, reason and intelligence before it meant exceptional creative or imaginative genius, before coming in the late seventeenth century to mean the conversational cleverness by which people display creative intelligence" (Booth 71). People originally understood the word to refer to mental faculties, but by the era of Shakespeare's rise to fame, creativity and eloquence were associated with the word.

Shakespeare chose the word "wit" sometimes to denote mental capacity, sometimes to denote sanity, sometimes to denote lustrous language, and still other times to denote a combination of these definitions. Critics historically credit Shakespeare with witty language, in part because he lived during a time when artists played around with the pre-standardized English language. According to Sister Miriam Joseph in *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language*:

> The extraordinary power, vitality, and richness of Shakespeare's language are due in part to his genius, in part to the fact that the unsettled linguistic forms of his age promoted to an unusual degree the spirit of free creativeness, and in part to the theory of composition then prevailing. (3)

Joseph's explanation accounts for why we face such a challenge when seeking to define what 'wit' would have denoted around the time of *The Tempest*'s first performance in 1611 and why Shakespeare had such the opportunity to exercise his wits through language. In mentioning his "genius," she evokes a Shakespeare himself possessed of sharp mental faculties, and in elaborating on the flexibility of English during his life, she directly connects those faculties with his language.

As a consequence of the evolution of the meaning of 'wit' and the point in that evolution where we find *The Tempest*, I will henceforth use 'wit' as it refers to a perceptiveness often displayed through strategic use of language. When I posed the question of whether *The Tempest* replaces violence with wit, the answer surprised me. Wit is the most significant avenue for plot in *The Tempest* in the way that onstage violence is the most consequential avenue in Shakespeare's tragedies. However, that wit often evokes violent images or justifies violence, leaving us with hardly a pacifist play.

At the beginning of the play, when the Boatswain repeatedly shouts at the nobles to leave him to his work and dismisses the importance of the nobles by telling Gonzalo there is "none" onboard "that I more love than myself," Gonzalo responds to this unwitting verbal insolence by promising violence with his own language (I.i.20). For speaking unfavorably towards his social superiors, the Boatswain's "complexion/ is perfect gallows" (I.i.29-30). This line is also a witticism suggesting that the ship will not sink, because it must reach land if the Boatswain is destined by "good Fate" for hanging (I.i.29-30). The threat of hanging suggests that those who use language to subvert their superiors deserve to be put to death. Specific word choice in Sebastian's and Antonio's lines solidify the relevance of social status to this battle of wits. Sebastian wishes a "pox" upon the Boatswain, who he calls "blasphemous" and a "dog," and Antonio tells the Boatswain to "hang" and that he is "insolent," a "cur," and a "whoreson" (I.i. 40-1). Both Sebastian and Antonio uses curses that refer to the Boatswain's inferior sociopolitical status, as if that status makes him a suitable candidate for violence. This fervent response to the disrespect they perceive in the Boatswain's language ascribes an importance to words so grave that insolent words in the mouths of working class men are taken as insurrection to be violently muted.

When Prospero approaches Caliban for slave labor, Caliban attempts to evoke violence in his own lines directed to Prospero, willing that "wicked dew… Drop on" Prospero and Miranda and "a south-west blow on ye and blister you all o'er" (I.ii.323-326). A slave using wit to curse his master with violence is a reversal of the hierarchical social order. Prospero punishes this reversal with suggestions of violence that he does not only threaten, but promises. He tells Caliban "For this [Caliban's curses], be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps," elaborating with

graphic threats of “side-stitches that shall pen [Caliban’s] breath up” and “each pinch more stinging/ Than bees that made ‘em” (I.ii.327-8, 331-2). Prospero is witty in his knowledge that verbal threats of violence will compel Caliban to do his bidding. Shakespeare here uses language to create sensory imagery of pain in the minds of the audience as a substitution for their seeing that violence onstage.

Later in the play, we do see an onstage act of violence as punishment for the charge of speaking unwittingly in a way that, again, is in noncompliance with a hierarchical order. In this instance, the hierarchy places Stephano, because Caliban has pledged him servitude, as superior to Trinculo. Caliban explains to the pair that Prospero is a “tyrant, a/ sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the/ island,” a line that explicitly credits Prospero’s wit for his successful subjugation of Caliban (III.ii.40-2). Ariel, stage directions indicating that he is “invisible,” says “Thou liest” so that Caliban and Stepano will believe that this was Trinculo’s insolent reply. For allegedly speaking this way to Caliban, Stephano threatens to “supplant some of [Trinculo’s] teeth” (III.ii.42, 48). When Ariel again says “Thou liest,” but this time in response to Stephano’s line, Trinculo’s supposed act of insolence has gone too far, so stage directions dictate that Stephano “beats him” (III.ii.73, 74). Disrespecting Stephano’s subject earned Trinculo a verbal threat of violence, but disrespecting Stephano himself, the hierarchical superior, merits an actual act of onstage violence. By charging Stephano with lying, he would not only be verbally subverting Stephano’s authority, but also discrediting the reliability of Stephano’s words. The play’s only instance of onstage violence is punishment for discrediting a rival’s language, calling their wit into question.

Although *The Tempest* prescribes violent punishment for those who speak unwittingly, the play also mocks our modern concept of witty language as amusing wordplay. At the opening of Act II Gonzalo, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Adrian, Francisco, and unspecified "others" wash up on the island (Arden 43). These characters, primarily Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio, spend nearly two hundred lines of dialogue before Ariel's entrance in a banter of wordplay. The nonsensical tone of the exchange is compounded for a modern audience because many of the puns and references are inaccessible today. Even some of the explanatory footnotes can only guess at the meaning of the witticisms, many prefacing their interpretation with disclaimers like "perhaps with reference to" and "may mean" (Arden 44-5). The actual happenings of the opening of the scene, however, remain apparent: while Alonso, King of Naples, grapples with the reasonable conclusion that he is stranded on a desert island and his son, Ferdinand, has perished, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Alonso ramble on in farcical wordplay.

Alonso regards this banter as nonsense, a sentiment to match the reaction of an audience, especially of a modern one. One of Gonzalo's first witticisms in the scene is his declaration that "few in millions/ Can speak like us" (II.i.7-8). In the context of the passage in which he is celebrating their survival, the line means that although suffering is universal, few people can speak to having experienced miracles like washing up on an island unscathed when they believed they would die at sea. However, because this passage is the first in a section of lengthy dialogue, by saying that few can speak like the nobles, Gonzalo is also bragging about their talent for wordplay. Shakespeare makes fun of Gonzalo's pride in linguistic wit by embedding that boastfulness within a line about the nobles' survival, implying that political cronies are so fond

of hearing themselves talk that they would even drone on in a verbal pissing contest while recovering from a near-death experience.

Throughout this scene, each time the characters try to engage Alonso in their chatter, he attempts to silence them, in each of these attempts using remarkably few words by comparison. In a play whose protagonist enacts his schemes using his way with words, the character with the highest political rank is a largely silent character, a fact in discord with a theme of the work: words are powerful. Many of Alonso's lines over the course of the play are only a few words long; "I heard nothing," "Lead away," and "Not I" are a few examples (II.i.308, II.i.320, III.iii. 42). His economic speech is a counterexample to the other noble's superfluous speech. Amidst the rambling at the beginning of scene two, Alonso twice says "Prithee, peace," an instruction to be quiet that the nobles ignore (II.i.9, 123). Finally, Alonso varies his command, instead saying "Prithee, no more: thou dost talk nothing to me," accusing the men of talking nonsense (II.i.166). Rather than being insulted, the nobles go off on a tangent about what it means to "laugh at nothing," confirming that their language is vacuous (II.i. 170). The scene reflects Shakespeare's understanding that people understand his wit to be a matter of amusing wordplay. He demonstrates his ability to engage in such wordplay for lines on end while characterizing this supposed wit as meaningless, especially compared to the strategic use of language that elsewhere in the play has the power to enslave and deceive. To celebrate wit in *The Tempest* is to celebrate impactful language, not words spoken for the sake of hearing oneself talk.

In addition to defining wit, the play stimulates the largely postcolonial discussion of who possesses wit. If Caliban is witty, Miranda wants to claim that wit as her own. In the middle of a verbal fight, Miranda questions how Caliban could dare disrespect her when she gave him the

gift of language. She recounts how she "took pains to make [Caliban] speak" because she "pitied" him (I.ii.356, 355). Caliban was born on the island, his mother an exiled Algerian witch, and Shakespeare never specifies how old Caliban was when his mother died. Because he remembers her laying claim to the island, Caliban should have been old enough to speak when she died, suggesting he would have spoken his mother's tongue. When Miranda supposes that Caliban "didst not, savage,/ Know [his] own meaning, but wouldst gabble like/ A thing most brutish," she is likely conflating her inability to understand his language with his inability to communicate (I.li..357-9). This distinction is reinforced by the word choice when she continues that she "endow'd [Caliban's] purposes/ With words that made them known" (I.ii.359-60). "Known" places the emphasis on her as the listener rather than Caliban as the speaker; he was not unable to speak before, she was only unable to understand him.

Miranda asserts that Caliban is not witty in his own right, but only capable to expressing himself in a civilized (suggested by her use of the words "savage" and "brutish" to describe his prior speech) way that she respects through the framework of the English language that she bestowed upon him. Caliban flips the power balance using the postcolonial strategy known as mimicry. By teaching him English, Miranda acted as the colonizer who "encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer," an act that attempts to belittle the subject's own attributes. However, when the colonized can speak like the colonizer, the mimicry "contains both mockery and a certain 'menace'" (Ashcroft 155). Subjects can now imitate in a way that puts a mirror up to the colonizer, and their ability to do so pokes holes in the othering the colonizer uses to distinguish himself from the subjects and thus justify abuses. Caliban celebrates Miranda's unintended consequence of teaching him English, his "profit on't/ Is, [he] know[s] how to

curse" (I.ii.365-6). In calling his speech "gabbling," Miranda reveals her own lack of comprehension, and in teaching him to speak the language she privileges and understands, she allows him to both mock her and remind her that her assumed divide between savage and civilized is actually asinine.

In our conversation of wit as the strategic use of language, othering is a nefarious use of wit to justify mistreatment against groups of people, the groups born from turns of phrase rather than real differences. Othering is, only five years ago in the United States, pointing to a couple hoping to marry and adding the label "gay" to the word "marriage" to legally prevent them from doing so. One of the main arguments Justice Kennedy put forth in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the June 2015 United States Supreme Court case affirming the right of same-sex couples to marry, was an argument against othering. To illustrate "that the petitioners were not seeking to create a new and nonexistent right to same-sex marriage," Kennedy cited preceding Supreme Court cases to explain that "*Loving* did not ask about a 'right to interracial marriage,' *Turner* did not ask about a 'right of inmates to marry'… Rather, each case inquired about the right to marry in its comprehensive sense" (*Obergefell*). Kennedy demonstrates here how legislators used language to create nonexistent distinctions as justification for withholding civil rights.

In the example of othering, the strategic use of language can lead to not only mistreatment, but horrific violence. On June 12, 2016, almost exactly one year after *Obergefell*, a gunman killed forty-nine and injured fifty three in one of the deadliest shootings in modern United States history. This shooting happened at Orlando Florida's Pulse nightclub, specified by news outlets as a "gay" club. Such acts of violence are objectively senseless and evidence that the use of language to engage in othering, in this case the historical arbitrary distinction between

heterosexuality and homosexuality reinforced by the very invention of those labels, can have devastating mortal consequences. Because of the actual difference in lived experience caused by this othering, othered individuals empower themselves by reclaiming terms like “gay” and “queer.” However, this example and too many others demonstrate that othering might start as a matter of semantics, but from that outset is a matter of life and death, directly connecting that perversion of wit to real violence.

Prospero uses this particular perversion of wit known as othering when he linguistically relegates Caliban to a category of his own. The name ‘Caliban’ is used in the play to denote an inferior race. When Miranda fawns over Ferdinand, Prospero reduces her infatuation to her having no grounds for comparison. He reminds her that she has only ever laid eyes on Ferdinand and Caliban, and, indicating Ferdinand, tells her that “To th’ most of men this is a Caliban” (I.ii. 483). Here Prospero is using Caliban’s name as if it is a category, a race of its own. Caliban too has picked up on this speech pattern, but repeats it with defiance. He says that he regrets having not slept with Miranda, as he would have “peopled else/ This isle with Calibans” (I.ii.353). By using Caliban’s name as a general term for a larger group, Prospero paints Caliban as something other, a grouping Caliban reclaims by mimicking the speech pattern like he mimicked Miranda’s English.

Although Prospero is successful in using his wit to appropriate Caliban’s labor, he needs Caliban’s skills and knowledge of the island, indicating that Caliban does possess wit of his own. Grace Tiffany argues that it is through his language that Caliban asserts his humanity that Prospero was so eager to erase, that Caliban’s “poetry reveals his imaginative power. Indeed, it is through Caliban’s rich descriptions that the magic island is most vividly presented to the

audience's minds" (35). Caliban describes how he "show'd [Prospero] all the qualities o' th' isle,/ The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile," lines that not only paint a picture of the island and determine how productions will construct the visual space of the play, but that also tell us that it is his knowledge of how to cultivate the land that allowed Prospero and Miranda to survive on the island (I.ii.339-40). Tiffany continues that Caliban's set of knowledge is not only invaluable to Prospero, but "will also prove useful to shipwrecked Stephano and Trinculo, who, like Prospero before them, exploit Caliban's knowledge and skills in their attempt to control the island" (34). Caliban's specialized knowledge, added to his ability to use language strategically in order to reclaim Prospero's insults and destabilize his authority, suggest that a person's wit is not determined by European or non-European origin.

Shakespeare's own reception is a testament to the mistaken assumption that formal education and eloquence are directly proportional. His contemporary, Robert Greene wrote a scathing critique of Shakespeare's work in which he called Shakespeare "an upstart Crow" an insult denoting "a novice" but that "may also refer to Shakespeare's lack of a university education; Greene was proud of his" (Russ McDonald 15). Despite not attending university, Shakespeare's language stood the test of time, his works almost unanimously canonized, while Robert Greene is hardly a household name. In fact, a majority of the well known founders of theaters did not hail from academically or financially rich backgrounds. In her presentation on the origin of Shakespeare's theater, Marcia McDonald points out that Shakespeare was the son of an illiterate glover and tanner, Ben Johnson the stepson of an illiterate bricklayer, Christopher Marlowe the son of a shoemaker, and James Burbage was a joiner's apprentice. These men were

not ivy league alumni, yet they were the minds behind what today's academy considers some of the wittiest literature ever produced.

Though both Caliban's and Shakespeare's brilliance attest to wit as universal rather than exclusive to a privileged class or nationality, the ending of *The Tempest* suggests that the elite will continue to direct their wit towards enacting violence towards their rivals and their postcolonial subjects. The audience could easily misread reconciliation in Caliban's declaration that he had acted foolishly and will "be wise hereafter,/ And seek for grace" (V.i.294-5). These lines can only be a truce to the extent that Caliban concedes power to the Europeans, his "seeking" for "grace" situating discretion over mercy in the hands of the nobles. If the nobles do not choose to be merciful, then the alternative would be violence or exploitation. Earlier in the play, Stephano expresses an intent to "keep [Caliban] tame, and get to Naples with him," because Caliban's physical appearance makes his ability to speak English so unexpected to Stephano that Caliban would make "a present for any emperor" (II.ii.70, 71). Such degradation of Caliban in exchange for money or entertainment seems all the more likely based upon the nobles' response to Caliban's plea for "grace." Each send Caliban away with dismissive one-liners. Even assuming the political conflict between brothers is resolved, the nobles continue to use their language to belittle Caliban as a form of othering to the end of justifying mistreatment.

There is no reason, however, to assume that the political conflict will not become violent in what follows the ending of the play. Sebastian and Antonio are characters eager to commit violence throughout the play. Their silence at the end of the play supports the argument for a return to violence once restored to their native soil. Sebastian's lines in the final moments of the play are limited to snide remarks that do not indicate a change in heart necessary for a man

involved in an assassination plot to become a pacifist. Antonio says nothing at all. By centering the events of the play on Prospero's speeches, Shakespeare leads the audience to believe that when Prospero is satisfied with the outcome of his tricks, the story is over. If the play's focus was instead on Sebastian and Antonio, the scene in which Prospero, feeling victorious, invites the nobles into his dwelling might not represent the falling action, but the rising action. The pair might stay behind, articulating an assassination plot against Prospero. There is no reason to believe the cycle of violence has ended. Even if Prospero's reign were to go unchallenged, Prospero uses his language as a violent tool, meaning that the ruler this ending privileges is not a pacifist.

I began my investigation hoping that *The Tempest* was a pacifist play, and reached the conclusion that it is not. At the beginning of my research, I hypothesized that in the same fashion that Shakespeare resolves his tragedies using violence, he resolves his comedies using wit, making the two foil plot devices. What I discovered was that the plot is not propelled by pure violence or pure wit, but by Prospero's cunning, his ability to manipulate, which is most apparent in the power of his violent language to evoke fear in the other characters so that he may control them. Wit and violence, then, do not conflict, but interact. Although we do not see onstage violence in *The Tempest* as the level we see it in Shakespeare's tragedies, violence permeates the language of the play, underscoring divides and prejudices based in social hierarchy.

# Epilogue

## How Do We Respond?

We now understand that *The Tempest* identifies power in language. That power can be used to entertain and to create magnificent art, but it can also be used to threaten, manipulate, and subjugate. Violence does not appear on stage in this play to the extent that it does in Shakespeare's tragedies. However, it features prominently in the play's dialogue. How is the audience to respond?

Although *The Tempest* does not replace violence with wit, Shakespeare did foster a replacement of violence with wit in some contexts. His canonical literature and invented words contributed to a culture of playfulness with language. In the twenty-first century, Western politicians are more likely to engage in battles of wits in the form of debates and mudslinging advertisements than they are to challenge one another to a duel or arrange a coup. Additionally, Shakespeare invested in the development of theater as an art form at a time when real life violence was a major source of entertainment. On any given day that a Shakespeare play was performed in Elizabethan England, "there was competition for the same audience in the form of bull-baiting, bear-baiting and cockfighting… and public executions with hangings, eviscerations, castrations, and quarterings" (Tobin 17). It would be an oversimplification to say that a choice of a play over an execution is a choice of wit over violence. Maybe, more accurately, it is the choice between watching real violence or simulated violence, watching a real man hanged or watching actors scream, block themselves strategically on the stage and apply what only appears to be human blood to simulate the violence of a scene like *King Lear*'s blinding of Gloucester (Schwingle). Nonetheless, Shakespeare cultivated wit as an optional alternative to violence.

To ask whether Shakespeare meant to challenge the status quo by depicting foolish nobles, a clever native man, and a manipulative quasi-wizard is to commit an intentional fallacy. What we do know is that Shakespeare's first audiences were of mixed social class, that he was creating art for the Stephanos and Trinculos as well as the nobles. On the other hand, Shakespeare was a businessman, receiving the most revenue from wealthy patrons paying for expensive seats, and relying on the support of the crown to remain onstage. While some believe that "potent themes regarding right versus might, illegitimate succession, and successful usurpation were recognized imperfectly by the government and so escaped" censorship, "another theory is that the authorities allowed the audience to be excited and then pacified," exiting at the play's end "to an unchanged social and political reality" (Tobin 23-4). Perhaps the audience could question their oppressors and colonizers vicariously through Shakespeare's characters, an experience that would provide them with enough satisfaction to forget they were returning to a reality unchanged from the way they had left it.

My call to action is for you to first take note of the violence imbedded in our language and what that suggests about our society's power dynamics. When you hear Prospero threaten to return Ariel to a state of "torment/ To lay upon the damn'd,'" think through the literal meaning of that phrase (I.ii.289-90). Do not ignore that the image it evokes is of torture in Hell, widely considered to be the worst pain imaginable. Also note the identity of the speaker and what he accomplishes through these lines. Consider how fear of violence is a motivator of submission, and how, as a result, obedience is often a consequence of nothing other than fear.

Next, give credit to the power of all voices. Listen to and project voices of the marginalized whose very marginalization was often promoted by the semantics of oppressors.

Support the work of artists who subvert master narratives and reclaim the insults used to degrade them. Listen to the stories told by the man who never completed high school and read an article by a Californian professor in the *New Yorker*, recognizing that what divides the two is not a discrepancy of wit. Consider that assuming so was the folly of Shakespeare's contemporaries whose names we no longer remember. But also know that it is not enough to affirm the worth of all voices. We must also interrogate our platforms in order to actively remove barriers to amplification.

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