Prospero's Art:
On Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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Abstract: With a view to uncovering the ultimate aims of Prospero's "project," I consider the two great productions of his magic: the betrothal masque of Act 4 and the harpy-banquet scene of Act 3. On the basis of a moral psychology that guides the use of his magic in these scenes, Prospero aims at a renewal of Italian politics that restores justice and moderation as central virtues of rulers. More broadly still, Prospero's "project" proves to be a critical but appreciative response Machiavelli.

Introduction

In no other of Shakespeare's plays does a single character so control events as does Prospero in *The Tempest*. As his "project" (2.1.294, 5.1.1, Epi.12)[1] unfolds over the course of the play, all (or almost all) of the other characters finally bend to his purposes. And since Prospero's "project" is aimed in the first place at recuperating the stolen dukedom of Milan, the central interest of the play is his management of the other characters in order to achieve that end. And as he brings that end to completion, he does appear singularly wise in the art of rule. Indeed, as one scholar has observed, we are "more interested in Prospero's wisdom in ordering events than in the way the other characters pursue their own ends."[2] True though this is, it is also true that part of Prospero's wisdom consists in his very understanding of "the way the other characters pursue their own ends," in his insight into the springs of human action. Moreover, as even brief reflection is sufficient to show, his "project" extends well beyond returning himself to power. For, to take only one example, the elaborate measures taken to secure the love-match of Ferdinand and Miranda are not strictly speaking required for that return. In fact, Prospero's "project" includes a delicate and extensive involvement with the other characters, altering the ends they pursue and shaping their souls. Our interest in Prospero's political wisdom and his management of events, then, compels us to wonder both about his understanding of the human beings with whom he involves himself and what his broader intentions are in involving himself with them as extensively as he does.[3]

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[1] The lineation is that of the Arden Shakespeare. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Methuen, 1983).

[2] Paul Cantor, "Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: The Wise Man as Hero," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (1980): 68.

[3] I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of students of political philosophy on *The Tempest*. Despite the infrequency with which I cite this work, I have learned much from it. See Howard White, *Copp'd Hills Toward Heaven: Shakespeare and the Classical Polity* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), esp. ch. 6; David Lowenthal, *Shakespeare and the Good Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997); Paul Cantor, "The Wise Man as Hero" (1980); Paul Cantor, "Prospero's Republic: The Politics of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," in *Shakespeare as*

Of course, Prospero's success in managing events depends not only upon his wisdom but also upon his "magic," or his "Art" (1.2.24-5) as he also calls it, for that magic increases his power immeasurably. Whatever difficulties one might encounter in interpreting the power he exercises over the elements, Prospero's use of magic is less an obstacle to understanding his wisdom in ruling than an aid, for by making Prospero's wisdom efficacious, his magic also makes it visible. Accordingly, in this paper I consider the two greatest and subtlest instances of Prospero's use of magic: the betrothal masque of Act 4 and the harpy-banquet scene of Act 3. These two episodes, each in its own way, is exemplary of the methods and aims of Prospero's art of rule and of the wisdom with which he deploys his magic. Moreover, granting access to Prospero's moral psychology and to the moral effect he aims to achieve, these two episodes are crucial to discerning the larger aims of Prospero's "project," which proves to be a reform of Italian politics at the heart of which is an appreciative critique of Machiavelli.

The Betrothal Masque of Juno and Ceres

The betrothal masque of Act 4 is the crowning event in the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda. Offered in celebration of their engagement, the masque both marks the end of the labors Prospero imposed on Ferdinand—labors Ferdinand now learns were but "trials of thy love" (4.1.6)—and looks forward to the happiness awaiting the couple in marriage. In expectation and confirmation of that happiness, Prospero uses his magic to create a spectacle of joy and festivity in which the goddesses Juno and Ceres bestow blessings on the couple and nymphs dance hand-in-hand with human harvesters. And yet, the masque does not immediately follow Prospero's acknowledgement of Ferdinand's success, for no sooner has Prospero

Political Thinker, ed. John Alvis and Thomas G. West (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), 239-55; Timothy W. Burns, *Shakespeare's Political Wisdom* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), ch. 5.

announced that Ferdinand "Has strangely stood the test" (7) of the trials by which he has won Miranda's hand, than he immediately imposes a new constraint, accompanied by a new warning. Should Ferdinand break Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the day of marriage, Prospero tells him,

> No sweet aspersions shall the heavens let fall
> To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
> Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew
> The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
> That you shall hate it both. . . (4.1.18-22)

So important is this exhortation to chastity that Prospero will return to it again 25 lines later and incorporate its message into the masque itself. Indeed, with its references to the "chaste crowns" of "cold nymphs", to "temperate nymphs", and to "the dismissed bachelor. . .Being lass-lorn", and, most importantly, by making Ceres' participation in the ceremony, and thus her blessings, contingent upon the exclusion of Venus and Cupid, the keynote of the masque is sexual temperance (4.1.66, 67-8, 132, 86-101).[4] Chastity prior to marriage is central to Prospero's most elaborate and theatrical lesson for Miranda and Ferdinand. What purpose does he hope to achieve by emphasizing chastity? And why does Prospero present this teaching in the form of the masque?

Prospero's basic objective is relatively straight-forward. He teaches sexual temperance in order to teach Ferdinand and Miranda self-restraint or moderation more generally. And if his choice of means is in part dictated by the paucity of temptations on the island, those means would also have recommended themselves by the power of the desire to be restrained—a power violently attested to by Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda (see 1.2.348-50). For this reason

[4] Egan rightly notes this crucial theme but goes too far in concluding that "the generative, sexual impulse . . .is strictly expelled from the world of the masque." Robert Egan, "This Rough Magic: Perspectives of Art and Morality in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1972): 178. The sexual impulse is not "strictly expelled," but rather subjected to rule, satisfied within the bounds of marriage alone, and directed toward reproduction. See especially 4.1.105.

alone, sexual self-restraint aids the cultivation of self-restraint more broadly. But Prospero's emphasis on self-restraint is primarily meant to have a political significance, for Prospero reasonably regards immoderation as an important and common cause of injustice. Consider again Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. Similarly, Prospero foils the conspiracy of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo by enticing them to reach out their hands for what is not their own, making that act of incontinence emblematic of their attempted crime. Stephano's inability to resist the temptation posed by the shining apparel laid before him illustrates his unfitness to rule (4.1.223-254). The alcoholic immoderation that stokes the fires of their conspiracy is yet another, comic image of the same problem.[5] The sexual temperance Prospero attempts to teach Ferdinand and Miranda, then, is meant to be a preparation for the moderation, and hence the justice, he hopes will characterize their future rule.

But Prospero's exhortation and his accompanying warning are a failure; rather than accomplish his end, they show the difficulty in accomplishing it. Despite Ferdinand's solemn assurances in response to that warning (4.1.23-31), only moments later Prospero finds the couple in an embrace warm enough to presage more. Accordingly, he exhorts them again to "be true" and "not give dalliance / too much the rein." But having done so, Prospero now adds a further observation: "the strongest oaths are straw / To th' fire i' th' blood" (4.1.51-53). He thus recognizes that neither Ferdinand's assurances nor the fear of a distant (and hypothetical) future in which disdain and discord have made the marriage bed hated are likely to succeed in restraining the passions of the couple. Against the tendency of love to throw off or break the constraints imposed on it,[6] fear and oaths prove weak and unreliable measures. And it is in the

[5] Lowenthal, *Shakespeare and the Good Life*, 44.
[6] On the tendency of love to lawlessness, see Miranda's two infractions of Prospero's injunctions (3.1.36-6, 57-9). Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda is a related, though different, case.

light of his recognition of the failure of his initial exhortation and warning that Prospero finally introduces the masque as a new means to govern the couple's desire, for with the masque Prospero no longer attempts to govern merely by inspiring fear but by addressing the hope of happiness that belongs to their love. Now that hope was displayed most powerfully through the labors Prospero had imposed on Ferdinand. For Ferdinand's willingness to labor in the tasks of a slave for the sake of Miranda and her wish to shoulder those burdens herself to alleviate his pains—in short, their willingness to suffer for their love—showed that they expected from it a good so surpassing in excellence as to compensate for any trials they suffered in its behalf (3.1.1-7). And it is that hope for a supreme good to which the masque appeals in its effort to encourage self-restraint.

The masque begins with Iris bidding Ceres to join Juno "A contract of true love to celebrate; / And some donation freely to estate / On the blest lovers" (4.1.84-6). In responding to this call, Ceres makes her participation in the masque contingent upon the exclusion of Venus and Cupid. But in affirming that Ceres need have no fear of their company, Iris reminds Ferdinand and Miranda of their late dalliance: "Here thought they to have done / Some wanton charm upon this man and maid, / Whose vows are, that no bed-right shall be paid / Till Hymen's torch be lighted: but in vain" (4.1.94-97). On the brink of a masque that promises the blessings of the gods, Iris reminds the couple of the threat posed by their brush with immoderation. To the extent that fear remains, it is not fear of punishment but fear of the collapse of their hopes.

Prospero's choice of Juno and Ceres as the two goddesses of the masque is charmingly appropriate, and not only because of their traditional role in marriage ceremonies. In the previous Act, Prospero had listened as Ferdinand, affirming his love of Miranda, had called out: "O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound / And crown what I profess with kind event, / If I

speak true" (3.1.67-70). Prospero thus arranges his masque such that the Queen of Heaven and (with only slight liberty of interpretation) the Queen of Earth do in fact bear witness to their love and do in fact "crown with kind event" the declaration of that love. The happiness that the masque promises to the young couple is thus a gift conferred upon them by the gods. In keeping with this, the appearance of the goddesses on stage is meant to confirm for Ferdinand and Miranda their sense that their love somehow connects them to the gods. For when they first see one another and fall in love, both Miranda and Ferdinand suspect that the other is a divine being (1.2.412-4, 420-2, 424-5). Now to be sure, that first impression does not last. But neither does it simply vanish. In his last speech of the play, Ferdinand assures his father that though Miranda is mortal, nevertheless, "by immortal Providence she's mine" (5.1.188-9, see also 1.2.415-7). Prospero's art in the masque is directed to strengthening this feeling: both in bringing the goddesses onstage to bestow their blessings and in representing a happy commerce of gods and men in the concluding dance of nymphs and human harvesters, Prospero articulates, and hence affirms and deepens, what the lovers had already sensed in their experience.

Prospero, however, does not leave it at that. He introduces moderation into the vision of their happiness, making it the condition on which the fulfillment of their hopes depend. But just as with his choice of Juno and Ceres, so too does Prospero's introduction of moderation—of moral virtue—have a root in their love. Both Ferdinand and Miranda had testified to their confidence in the excellence of their beloved's character, and it was the presumed presence of such virtue that was part of the source of that love (1.2.460-2 and context, 3.1.46-8). The introduction of moderation, then, is not so foreign as it may first appear. By entering into their experiences, by articulating and drawing on its various elements, Prospero addresses the longings of the lovers' hearts and speaks to how they can achieve what they long for. As a result, the

masque, unlike his earlier warning, is a success. And, confident in that success, when the masque finally ends, Prospero invites the couple to retire unchaperoned to his cell and "there retire" (4.1.161-2). And at their next and final appearance, when Prospero reveals the couple to Alonso and the court party in Act 5, they are engaged in a game of chess, safely parted by the board between them.[7]

Thus far we have concentrated on the form of the masque, but what its content, and, in particular, the content of the blessings? Juno begins: "Honor, riches, marriage-blessing, / Long continuance, and increasing, / Hourly joys be still upon you! / Juno sings her blessing on you." (4.1.106-109). Then Ceres:

> Earth's increase, foison plenty,
> Barns and garners never empty;
> Vines with clust'ring bunches growing;
> Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
> Spring come to you at the farthest
> In the very end of harvest!
> Scarcity and want shall shun you;
> Ceres' blessing so is on you. (4.1.110-117)

The blessings offered by the goddesses are those of worldly goods: of honor or of power and authority, of wealth, and the fruits of agriculture. However appropriate for future rulers, the deeper significance of the blessings, and Prospero's intention in offering them, emerges only by noticing their relation to an earlier scene in which Gonzalo, the old, honest, and loyal councilor to the king of Naples, imagines a commonwealth "Had I plantation of this isle" and "were the King on 't" (2.2.139, 141). In his commonwealth, says Gonzalo, there would be "no name of magistrate;" there would be no "riches;" and of "contract, succession, / Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; / No use of metal, corn or wine, or oil." In short, Gonzalo would banish

[7] By concentrating on the sexual overtones of chess, Poole overlooks the contrast between the embrace at 4.1.51 and the separation at 5.1.172. William Poole, "False Play: Shakespeare and Chess," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2004): 52-53 and 65-66.

from his commonwealth all that constitutes the blessings of Juno and Ceres. Juxtaposing nature to civilization, Gonzalo finds in nature a spontaneous abundance sufficient "to feed my innocent people" (2.1.155, 160). With "all foison, all abundance" secured by nature, there would be no "treason, felony, / Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine" (2.1.156-7). The vice and violence so characteristic of civilized life, and so palpably present onstage in the form of Antonio and Sebastian, are avoidable. Not nature, but "civilization" itself gives rise to them by establishing inequalities of rank and fortune and by making natural plenty no longer sufficient. Sovereignty, private property, agriculture, metallurgy—"civilization" and its arts—are a sort of curse that awakens the vices that make of human life a trial. In their absence, therefore, Gonzalo's people, all equal and idle, would remain "innocent and pure" (2.1.151).

Because Gonzalo's "Golden Age" is a challenge to the blessings of the masque, which accepts and endorses the very things Gonzalo rejects (compare 4.1.106-117 with 2.1.144-149), it forms the background against which we must try to understand those blessings. Likewise, Prospero too accepts the vices that Gonzalo suggests accompany the "blessings" (5.1.126-9, esp. 128-9). In what sense then are the "blessings" of civilization genuine blessings? Why bless Ferdinand and Miranda with these blessing if they are accompanied by vice and violence? In the first place, these blessings are presented in the masque as marks of divine favor, the deserving of which depends on the practice of moderation. And by making the condition of the blessings the practice of moderation, Prospero may intend to suggest that the blessings of civilization become truly blessings—that is, truly good—only when they stand on the ground of moderation. In this way, Prospero intimates that the very goodness of the goods of civilization depends upon moderation or upon moral virtue more generally. But this observation also shows that Prospero does not simply reject Gonzalo's attack. Taken on its own, civilization and its goods are at best a

mixed blessing. But for those possessed of moderation, the necessity of living with, and hence learning to manage, the propensity to vice that arises together with those very blessings does not of itself turn those blessings to curses. But Prospero may also think beyond the private good of Ferdinand and Miranda to the public good which ought to be their concern as rulers. And in this respect, he may hope to impress upon them the thought that good rule, understood as moderate rule, is requisite to make of civilization a blessing more widely applicable.

And yet, one might still wonder whether Prospero has fully met Gonzalo's challenge. Are the goods of civilization good enough to outweigh the cost of self-command and of the vice and violence that accompany them? Although the masque responds to Gonzalo's critique of civilization, it remains silent about one item among those of which Gonzalo had spoken. Nowhere among the blessing of the masque is there mention of "Letters" or learning. Gonzalo, however, in addition to sovereignty, property, agriculture and so forth, had also eliminated "Letters" (2.2.146), and rightly so, for the possibility of letters depends upon the civilization he calls into question. Now, for Prospero, learning of the sort that tore him away from a concern with rule remains a good greater than his kingdom (1.2.167-8). It may well be, then, that the most important good of civilization, at least to Prospero, is the understanding of the world that it makes possible, and that it preserves and transmits in "letters," even if the conditions of that possibility also introduce new moral perils. The masque, in other words, may point beyond the blessings it promises to Ferdinand and Miranda by silently drawing to our attention the blessing of understanding.

And the dissolution of the masque itself offers us a glimpse of one aspect of that understanding, just as it also reminds us of treason and felony. For the masque is brought to a sudden end by Prospero's recollection of the murderous conspiracy of Caliban, Stephano and

Trinculo. Calming Ferdinand's alarm at the sight of his agitation, Prospero then delivers the most famous speech of the play.

> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
> Are melted into air, into thin air:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on; and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep. (4.1.148-158)

Here, in the expression of his understanding of the world, Prospero stands in his sharpest contrast to Ferdinand and Miranda. For by reflecting on the impermanence of all the world contains and of the very world itself, and by stating that all who inherit the world "Leave not a rack behind," he intimates the absence of any permanent care, or even any lasting memory, of human beings. But for Ferdinand and Miranda, it is "immortal Providence" that has brought them together and the providential care of the gods that blesses them. But this very contrast may also indicate a certain similarity, for Prospero, on the one hand, and Miranda and Ferdinand, on the other, look beyond the present world—the one to its final impermanence and the other to gods whose favor or disfavor shapes this world. For neither, then, could politics or rule occupy the totality of their concerns. In this respect, the masque confirms one of Prospero's central objectives with Ferdinand's trials: to help him to see that his love of Miranda and all it promises is more important to him than his own or any kingdom. Having called on heaven and earth to crown with kind event his declaration of love, Ferdinand then makes that declaration: "I, / *Beyond all limit of what else i' the' world,* / Do love, prize, honour you." (3.1.71-3, my emphasis; see also 3.3.37-9 and 5.1.172-3).

If Prospero thus supplies Miranda and Ferdinand with an understanding of the world and of themselves different than his own, it nevertheless shares the sense that there is something of deeper significance to human life than politics. And Prospero has perhaps given an indication in the speech we have been considering of why he might have chosen to encourage this sense in Ferdinand and Miranda. "We are such stuff as dreams as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep"—so Prospero concludes his reflections. What does Prospero mean by this beautiful line? I think he means that despite and because of our very mortality, human beings tend to make images of themselves and the world—however imaginary, however dream-like—in accordance with which they attempts to live their lives—Antonio and Sebastian, Caliban and Stephano (see 2.1.203-4, 216-222, 267-269; 3.2.102-106, 29 with 33-35, 83-84) no less so than Ferdinand and Miranda. The character of a human life—the ends one chooses to pursue—would then depend to a great extent on the character of these dreams. In recognition of this tendency, Prospero creates his masque.

The Banquet-Harpy Scene and Alonso's Penitence

Just as the masque is the culminating event of Prospero's "project" for Miranda and Ferdinand, so is his forgiveness of his enemies in Act 5 the culminating event in his "project" with respect to them. Now this act of remarkable generosity on Prospero's part is in no way diminished by the fact that Prospero never intended his enemies any harm (1.2.15, 29-30). Nor is it sufficiently explained as the outward expression of his resolve that "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" (5.1.25-28), for we do not yet know why "nobler reason" is on the side of forgiveness rather than vengeance. It is true that an answer may seem to

be supplied in the immediate sequel, for Prospero avers that "they being penitent, / The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further" (5.1.28-30). And Alonso is indeed deeply repentant, so much so that upon seeing Prospero he immediately returns Milan and begs pardon (5.1.118-119). But to say nothing of the fact that Antonio and Sebastian display no such repentance, we do not yet know how Prospero understands Alonso's penitence, why he thinks it reliable, and hence why his purposes should extend no further.

To understand Alonso's penitence and the anguish from which he suffers in Act 5, we must go back to the third Act, where, in the other great production of his magic, Prospero addresses the crimes of Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian. As he does in the masque for Ferdinand and Miranda, so here Prospero speaks to the court party by calling on the aid of Ariel and other spirits. To "strange and solemn music" Prospero's spirits spread a banquet before them and "dancing about it with gentle actions of salutations" invite Alonso and the others to eat (3.3, stage direction following line 17). But when they reach for the food laid before them, Ariel appears "like a Harpy" amidst thunder and lightning, claps his wings and the banquet vanishes. The theatricality prepares Ariel's "three men of sin" (3.3.53) speech which follows immediately. But it serves its own purpose too, for it illustrates the first lesson of Prospero's effort: as the purported good of the food is replaced by a punishing harpy, so the purported good of a usurped Milan is now, as Ariel proclaims, to receive its due punishment. The crucial importance of the speech that follows is underlined by the fact that, although the speech is delivered by Ariel, Prospero leaves no doubt that it was composed by him and delivered as written (3.3.85-6).

> You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,—
> That hath to instrument this lower world
> And what is in 't,—the never surfeited sea
> Hath caused to belch you up; and on this island,
> Where man doth not inhabit,—you 'mongst men
> Being most unfit to live. (3.3.53-58)

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But remember,—
For that's my business to you,—that you three
From Milan did supplant good Prospero:
Expos'd unto the sea, which hath requite it,
Him and his innocent child: for which foul deed
The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
Incens'd the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,
Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
Ling'ring perdition—worse than any death
Can be at once—shall step by step attend
You and your ways; whose wraths to guard you from—
Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls
Upon your heads,—is nothing but heart-sorrow
And a clear life ensuing. (3.3.69-82)

The aim of the speech, supported by the terrifying appearance of a harpy, is to present the reality of providential forces at work in this world which, delay though they may, never fail to avenge past wrongs, as they now do against Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian. But in the very act of making this claim, Ariel is forced to turn more directly and exclusively to Alonso, for the brunt of the punishment—the purported death of Ferdinand—falls on him. And of the three men, Alonso is the one affected most deeply by Ariel's performance. While Antonio and Sebastian attempt to defend themselves with drawn swords against the "fiends" (3.3.102), Alonso sinks in grief, finding his guilt proclaimed all around him and accepting the death of Ferdinand as the price of his crime: "the billows spoke. . .The winds did sing. . .and the thunder. . .pronounc'd / The name of Prosper; it did base my trespass. Therefore my son i' th' ooze is bedded" (3.3.96-100).

Now, Prospero's approach to Alonso through the death of Ferdinand is recommended by what we see of Alonso earlier in the play. To begin with, his first substantial lines are expressions of grief over the loss of his son (2.1.103-5). More importantly, Alonso appears from

the beginning inclined to accept responsibility for that loss, for when Sebastian cruelly asseverates that "The fault's your own," Alonso dejectedly replies, "So is the dear'st o' th' loss" (2.1.131). Alonso's responsibility would seem to rest on his responsibility for his daughter Claribel's marriage to the King of Tunis, which forced a voyage across the Mediterranean and created the occasion of Ferdinand's death. And Alonso himself points to the marriage, wishing now that "I had never / Married my daughter there! For, coming hence, / My son is lost" (2.1.103-5). Because the marriage is the proximate cause of Ferdinand's death, and because he is responsible for that marriage, Alonso is formally responsible for Ferdinand's death too.

But Claribel's marriage to the King of Tunis was insisted upon by Alonso, despite being loathed by Claribel and objected to by his friends and councilors. It is resented by Sebastian and almost certainly by Claribel too, and perhaps also by others (2.1.119-127). Might, then, Alonso suspect, in light of the expression of Sebastian's resentment and now that he is himself paying the price for that marriage, that he was wrong to insist on it, that he was morally wrong to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to his own purposes? I think he does, and that he accordingly regards the marriage not only as a proximate cause but as the moral cause of Ferdinand's death. And being responsible for that marriage, he is also morally responsible for the death of his son. At any rate, though Alonso wavers regarding whether Ferdinand has in fact died in the storm (2.1.318-319, 3.3.7-9), and thus also wavers with respect to his own culpability, when he does accept that Ferdinand has died he nowhere entertains the idea that his death was simply a matter of chance, the unlucky result of a freak storm at sea. Alonso's moral experience, then, such as we see it early in the play, is bound up with the love of his children. Grieving over Ferdinand, he is stimulated to consider anew his actions toward Claribel. And yet, it is obviously the case that just as his moral sensibility posed no obstacle to turning out Prospero and Miranda from Milan

and exposing their lives to the sea, so his love of Claribel posed no obstacle to sacrificing her happiness. When the play opens, Alonso's awareness of both his love of his children and his moral commitments is apparently a dim one, and Prospero's objective with respect to him is therefore to deepen that awareness, and, more particularly, to deepen the later by means of deepening the former.

Given the importance of Claribel's marriage to Alonso's moral experience, why did he insist it? This aspect of the play has received scant attention.[8] Nevertheless, one commentator has argued persuasively that Alonso marries Claribel to Tunis for the sake a grand plan—inspired by Machiavelli—to unify Italy and secure its southern flank.[9] However improbable such a claim may appear at first, it is supported by two important features of *The Tempest*. First, the political backdrop of the play emphasizes the struggle for power in which a southern Italian kingdom comes to dominate a northern Italian dukedom. Indeed, although Milan is nominally Antonio's, Alonso so controls it that he can speak in the presence of Antonio of Ferdinand as "mine heir / Of Naples *and Milan*" (2.1.116-17, my emphasis; see also 137).[10] Having drawn attention to the fact that Alonso has secured himself in both the North and South, Shakespeare makes us wonder whether Alonso's ambitions extend to the Roman lands that lay between. And this suspicion is supported by the second feature: Claribel's marriage to Tunis is the occasion for a series of jokes about "widow Dido" that lead to a blurring of the geographical distinction between modern Tunis and Dido's Carthage.[11] However irrelevant to the action of the play the

[8] Kunat rightly observes that the "frame device" of Claribel's marriage "has generally been ignored because it does not seem essential to the action" of the play. John Kunat, "'Play me false': Rape, Race, and Conquest in 'The Tempest,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2014): 311.
[9] Lowenthal, *Shakespeare and the Good Life*, 32-36.
[10] For further evidence of Alonso's control of Milan, see 1.2.112-13 and 5.1.118; cf. 5.1.132-4.
[11] Kermode observes that these "apparently trivial allusions" have "never been properly explained." Kermode, *The Tempest*, 46, fn. to 2.1.74. One great strength of Lowenthal's interpretation is precisely that it offers an account of the significance of these jokes. Kunat, by contrast, fails to take up this task. Kunat, "'Play me false,'" 311-12, 325.

jokes may seem, the allusions to Dido and Aeneas recall the Virgilian pre-history of Rome, and, in particular, the broken marriage underlying the Punic Wars.[12] In this light, Alonso's marriage of his daughter to Tunis may well appear an alliance to repair the ancient rupture and protect the southern border of what Alonso may hope to be a new, unified Italy. And for this end—for his Machiavellian enterprise to make a new Rome protected as it was not before—the sacrifice of his daughter's happiness appeared a price worth paying.

Capitalizing on Alonso's new awareness of the depth of his love of his children, Prospero turns, in the Harpy scene, to deepening Alonso's moral sense—to bringing that sense more forcefully before him and to making it operative in his life. He therefore confirms Alonso's feeling of moral culpability for Ferdinand's death. In doing so, however, Prospero reorganizes the landscape of Alonso's guilt, for he replaces Claribel's marriage as the source of that responsibility with the injustice done both to Prospero and to Miranda. Now, such a step is, of course, necessary for Prospero's purposes, but it might seem to replace an immediate and clear cause with one remote in time and less obviously connected to the events leading to Ferdinand's purported death. Weakening the causal connection, the substitution might in turn weaken Alonso's guilt. And yet, the substitution makes sense, both morally and psychologically. First, it makes the two-fold punishment—exile from the world of men and the loss of Ferdinand—commensurate with the crime—exile from Milan and the likely death of an innocent child. The minsters of fate or destiny, though long-delaying, act in accordance with justice. And second, by including the injustice done not only against himself but also against Miranda, Prospero addresses the source of Alonso's conscience. For as we have seen, his concern with morality arises from his love of his children—from his concern with Ferdinand's welfare and Claribel's

[12] See especially *Aeneid*, 4.590-629.

happiness. And his own grief over Ferdinand may therefore help him to see the gravity of the crime committed against Miranda, against an "innocent child" exposed to the merciless sea. And that crime, needless to say, was part and parcel of the political crime against Prospero. Alonso's new awareness of his love of his children is the handle Prospero uses to deepen his concern for justice.[13]

To briefly summarize the argument thus far: Prospero finds Alonso already inclined to believe that he is to blame for Ferdinand's death. Alonso's guilt, then, is in no way the product of Prospero's art, even though it was Prospero's art, in raising the storm and separating father and son, that produced the occasion for his experiencing it. And Prospero further uses his art to confirm Alonso's inclination, thus removing any lingering doubt about his culpability, and to connect Alonso's guilt for Ferdinand's death to the injustices committed against himself and Miranda. But the most important use of his art is to bring Ariel onstage as a divine avenger of injustice, thus making the providential forces that care for justice and punish injustice palpably real. And in bringing that punishment in the way he does, he sharpens Alonso's own sense of his guilt, for he teaches him that he has offended not only against Prospero and Miranda, but against nature and the gods too. Now the outcome of Prospero's use of his art in this way is that Alonso's guilt so tortures him that he is driven to thoughts of suicide. After recognizing that Ferdinand has been taken in recompense for his trespass, Alonso proclaims in despair: "I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded, / And with him there lie muddied" (3.3.101-2). By inflicting this enormous psychic pain, Prospero succeeds in making justice a force in his life. And as we have already noted, when he returns to his senses in Act 5, Alonso, righting his

[13] For further confirmation of the importance of the crime against Miranda in Alonso's own mind, see 5.1.197-8, where Alonso begs Miranda's forgiveness, and 5.1.143-152, where Prospero's conceit that he too has a lost a child in the late storm elicits from Alonso his only display of compassion in the play.

wrongs to the best of his ability, returns Milan and begs Prospero's forgiveness. But Prospero's success goes farther still than merely recovering his dukedom. For as Alonso's surrender of Milan shows, Prospero has succeeded in making justice a deeper concern for Alonso than his ambition. For Alonso, then, Prospero has awakened moral concerns that limit his political actions. And in all of this Prospero simply amplifies what was already implied in Alonso's sense that he had wrongly sacrificed Claribel's happiness to political aims.

But however well Prospero succeeds with Alonso, he fails with Antonio, and his failure is instructive. Unlike Alonso, Antonio remains unrepentantly silent in response to Alonso's forgiveness (5.1.130-134). In this way, he confirms the freedom from the pangs of conscience that he had claimed for himself earlier in the play. When Sebastian tepidly objected to the murder of Alonso by referring to the conscience, Antonio replied:

> Ay, sir; where lies that? If 'twere a kibe,
> 'Twould put me to my slipper: but I feel not
> This deity in my bosom. . . (2.1.271-273)

Keeping Alonso's experience in mind, perhaps it should not be a surprise to find that Antonio lacks any strong attachment of love to another human being.[14] As a result, Prospero is unable to work on his soul as he does on Alonso's; the raw material is missing for deepening his moral experiences. And without those experiences, Antonio remains to the end without that "deity in [his] bosom" to punish him for his wrongs. There is, then, a limit to what Prospero can achieve with his magic. He can indeed use his magic to inflict pains on Antonio, but he cannot transform

[14] The play includes one reference to a child of Antonio's, a son whom Ferdinand concludes has died in the storm (1.2.440-441). In a footnote to this passage, Kermode reports that since this is the only such allusion, scholars have thought it a vestige of source material or an early draft. He further reports the dissent of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who speculated that Antonio's son had sailed in one of Alonso's other ships, and that Ferdinand assumed that those ships and their passengers had been destroyed in the storm. See Kermode, *The Tempest*, 38. If Coleridge is right—or if any solution of that nature is right—Antonio's lack of grief is all the more striking.

those external punishments into internal ones. To continue with those punishments would be but cruelty; and where no good outcome is foreseeable, there is no good reason to continue.

Accordingly, Prospero's forgiveness of Alonso, on the one hand, and Antonio and Sebastian on the other, are of different sorts. His forgiveness of Alonso is offered freely in recognition of Alonso's grief and repentance, with confidence in the moral revolution that has taken place in him, and knowledge of the basis of that revolution. In contrast, his forgiveness of Antonio and Sebastian is prefaced by the threatening notice that he knows of their conspiracy and "here could pluck his highness' frown upon you, / And justify you traitors: at this time / I will tell no tales" (5.1.127-9). Their conspiracy to murder Alonso Prospero holds in reserve against future attempts at wrongdoing. While he may forgive Antonio, he does not mistake his forgiveness for trust. Knowing the limits of what he can accomplish, Prospero is moderate in his aims and cautious in his attitude. He makes no attempt to eliminate vice altogether; he simply remains ever-watchful, seeking to control it as best he can.

Conclusion: Prospero's Art and His Intentions

In both the masque of Act 4 and the harpy-banquet scene of Act 3, Prospero's art is directed to articulating in word and image the feelings and thoughts that are already present—even if only dimly recognized—in his addressees. But in the process of articulating those feelings and thoughts, Prospero also modifies or adds to the experiences in question. In the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, he attaches their hopes of happiness to moderation, bringing virtue into the center of their vision; and in the case of Alonso, Prospero alters his understanding of the moral causality at work in Ferdinand's death, thereby transforming and deepening his moral experience. The first object of his art is thus to teach morality, and whatever the differences in

the two cases, his success in both depends on two crucial factors. First, Prospero finds in the love of one person for another, whether of parent for child or of lover for beloved, the germ of a moral concern that he develops into a broader moral perspective. Second, he supports his moral teaching by underscoring the gods' care for the morality that he teaches. Prospero's moral success, however, initiates a still larger political reform, for by concentrating his moral teaching on the future rulers Ferdinand and Miranda and the present King of Naples, Prospero intends to restore moderation and justice to a privileged position in Italian political life. And entailed in that reform, as we have seen, is the recognition on the part of Ferdinand and Alonso that there is something of deeper importance to them than their kingdoms and their ambitions. In sum, Prospero's political art aims at a moral and political reform of Italian politics, and it accomplishes those ends by a transformation of the ends and priorities of the characters whom he affects. And yet this transformation, as we have also seen, is authorized by the characters themselves, for such a transformation as Prospero accomplishes is possible only because their experiences of love and morality are already a challenge to the priority of politics.

Prospero's reform, however, can be placed in a still larger context, one best seen by considering his education of Alonso. By encouraging Alonso's sense that justice imposes limits to political action, Prospero drives a wedge between political success or efficacy, on the one hand, and morality, on the other. And this amounts to an objection to the teaching of Alonso's master, Machiavelli, for it was Machiavelli who most famously sought to eliminate the distinction, and hence the tension or conflict, between moral and political virtue.[15] In doing so, Machiavelli suggested that there were no trans- or extra-political concerns that rightly controlled political action; politics was neither to be guided nor inspired nor limited by considerations that

[15] *The Prince*, ch. 15.

transcended strictly political ones. That perspective is powerfully, if subtly, conveyed in *The Tempest* by Alonso's sacrifice of Claribel's happiness for the sake of his new Rome. And his education at the hands of Prospero, in turn, undoes his effort to live according to Machiavelli's teaching.

But if Prospero restores the distinction between moral and political virtue, he nevertheless exhibits an appreciation of an important aspect of Machiavelli's teaching. When the Master and Boatswain are reunited with the Neapolitan party, Alonso finds in their return something "more than nature" can account for, concerning which an "oracle / Must rectify our knowledge" (5.1.243-45). In response to this indication of Alonso's new willingness to consult oracles, and, by extension, their interpreters, Prospero urges him not to worry over the strange events and promises to "resolve you, / Which to you shall seem probable, of every / These happen'd accidents" (5.1.246-250). There is every reason to doubt that Prospero intends to tell Alonso the truth of all that has happened on the island, and in particular, the truth about his providential experience. [16] But by promising to explain events to Alonso, Prospero makes himself, rather than the oracle, their interpreter; rather than surrender Alonso to religious powers, he maintains control over him, thus blunting the most extreme or dangerous political consequences of the belief in divine providence that he has nourished in him.

But if Prospero shares some of Machiavelli's concerns, how is one to understand his ultimate political objective? Why reopen the distinction between moral and political virtue Machiavelli had sought to close, precisely when that distinction lends itself to dangers Prospero, like Machiavelli, seeks to forestall? To see what Prospero hopes to achieve politically, we do

[16] I agree with Burns that Prospero's "probable" account will accord with the "pious education in divine providence" he has provided. But to leave it there leaves unexplained the significance of Prospero's promise of an explanation. Burns, *Shakespeare's Political Wisdom*, 213.

best to turn to Ferdinand and Miranda, for as the play ends, they are poised to assume control, sooner or later, over both Milan and Naples (1.2.58, 5.1.150). And though it is difficult to know what the character of their rule will be, their final exchange offers a glimpse. Drawing Alonso and his men toward his cell and beckoning them to look in, Prospero reveals Ferdinand, alive and well, playing at chess with Miranda.

> Miranda: Sweet lord, you play me false.
> Ferdinand: No, my dearest love,
> I would not for the world.
> Miranda: Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,
> And I would call it fair play. (5.1.172-175)

To be sure, Miranda has much still to learn about human beings (see 5.1.181-4), but she has evidently absorbed something of the lessons of her father's mistaken withdrawal from politics in Milan. And, in the face of Ferdinand's striking readiness to surrender the "world," she reminds him of what governance requires of them. Sketched here is both the sense that politics is not the deepest human concern and the recognition that this need not lead to an irresponsible renunciation of the "wrangling" that good rule requires and even justifies. [17] In this respect, Ferdinand and Miranda prove an to be imitation of Prospero himself, who has shown by his action in the play there is no essential incompatibility between wise political rule, and the harsh measures it requires, and the recognition that politics is not the highest end of human life. And if Prospero's ranking of rule, together with his awareness of the limits of what can be politically and morally accomplished, contributed to his moderation, he may have hoped that the double-perspective embodied in the chess scene would contribute to the moderation of Ferdinand and Miranda's rule that he had also tried to inculcate in the masque.

[17] Contrast Poole "False Play," 70. Shrewder are the observations of Loughrey and Taylor, who note the significance of the scene for "the play's political action and its concern with the idea of government." Bryan Loughrey and Neil Taylor, "Ferdinand and Miranda at Chess," in *Shakespeare Survey* 35, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 114.

The reform that Prospero thus accomplishes is characterized by two features: the restored distinction between moral and political virtue, and the sense, even or especially among rulers, that there are human ends more important than political ones. And if Prospero himself favors the second feature on account of the potential dangers of the first, the second feature too is not free of dangers, as Ferdinand's words suggest. But especially if Prospero's political reformation is finally imperfect, we may wonder whether he does not have an additional objective. By drawing attention to ends that claim to transcend political life, and by restoring the potential for conflict between political and moral virtue, Prospero may seek to encourage reflection of the sort he himself evidently engaged in regarding the variety of human ends, their competing claims, and the hierarchy among them. His own activity in *The Tempest* bears ample witness to his understanding of the tension between those ends, of its sources and of its significance for human life. Indeed, that understanding is the core of Prospero's political wisdom, and it is that wisdom that Shakespeare chooses the display in *The Tempest*. Perhaps, then, Prospero's moral teaching is meant also to reopen a path leading to the wisdom so artfully deployed in his magic throughout *The Tempest*.