

# interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

September 1983    Volume 11 Number 3

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# interpretation

Volume 11 number 3

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limit) \$7. INTERPRETATION appears three times a  
year.

Address  
for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing,  
N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

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# Shakespeare's Apology for Imitative Poetry: *The Tempest* and *The Republic*

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So all my best is dressing old words new,  
spending again what is already spent: Sonnet LXXVI

## 1. PLATO'S CHALLENGE TO THE IMITATIVE POET

There is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Socrates explicitly attests to that fact in Book X of Plato's *Republic* (607b). Yet Socrates' intent, at least as expressed in Book III of that dialogue, is not to banish or destroy poetry but to strip it of its autonomy. According to Socrates, in the best polity, poetry and music, especially the latter, have an important function to fulfil with respect to the education of the young. Poetry and music are allowed to exist, however, not for their own sakes, nor for the pleasure they are admittedly capable of affording, but because of the contribution they are able to make, when under the tutelage of a wise legislator, toward the production of what Socrates calls "good disposition" or virtuous character. Consequently only those forms of poetry and music that serve the purposes of such a legislator are to be permitted. In Book III a famous distinction is made between the narrative and the imitative poetic styles. Imitative poetry (dramatic art) directly presents, rather than recounts, actions and speeches. According to what is said in Book III, imitative poetry is to be allowed, but only when it imitates the speech and emotions of good men and their praiseworthy actions. Imitation of the actions of bad or ridiculous characters, or even of good persons momentarily doing something unworthy, is forbidden. In the words of Adeimantus, the only poet admitted into the best city will be "the unmixed imitator of the decent" (397d).<sup>1</sup> The practical consequence is the outlawing of both comedy and tragedy.

Not only is it forbidden to imitate base or wicked men; the soldier-guardians will not be permitted to imitate the behavior of any persons having natures less noble than their own. Specifically, they are not allowed to imitate women (particularly women in love), slaves, bad men, madmen or craftsmen, the forbidden types being enumerated in that order. Examples of craftsmen who are not to be imitated are smiths, the rowers of triremes and those who call time to such rowers. The lexicographers, Liddell and Scott, translate the Greek word "κελευστής," employed by Plato to designate those who call time to the row-

1. All references to *The Republic* are based on the translation by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968).

ers, as “boatswain.” The Socratic prohibitions continue. It is also forbidden to imitate noises made by animals, the sounds of natural phenomena such as thunder, the sounds made by inanimate objects (axles and pulleys, for example), as well as the sounds of musical instruments.

Let us now turn to a preliminary consideration of some superficial aspects of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*. In the first place, an imitation of each of the forbidden human types figures conspicuously in the play. Miranda is a woman in love, Caliban is a slave, and Antonio and Sebastian are unequivocally bad men whom, along with Alonso, Ariel claims to have made mad (III.iii.57–60).<sup>2</sup> The ship’s crewmen in Act I, scene i, are examples of craftsmen possessing and exercising a skill very similar to that of the oarsmen of a trireme, and the boatswain who gives them orders is clearly the counterpart of Plato’s boatswain who calls time to the rowers. Perhaps there is nothing remarkable or surprising about this coincidence. It is a different story, however, when we come to consider the details of the nonhuman auditory phenomena which Socrates would prohibit his guardians from imitating. Socrates presents two lists of these phenomena. The first list (396b) includes the following:

horses neighing  
 bulls lowing  
 the noise of rivers  
 the crashing of the sea  
 thunder (and everything of that sort)

The second list (397a) specifies:

thunder  
 the noise of wind and hail  
 the noise of axles and pulleys  
 the notes of trumpets, flutes, pipes and the sounds of all the instruments  
 the cries of dogs, sheep and birds

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare performs a remarkably thorough job of violating these prohibitions. Storm noises figure most prominently on the lists of sounds that the poet is not to imitate, thunder being the final item on the first list and the initial item on the second list. It is hardly necessary to point out the importance of imitating such sounds in any production of *The Tempest*. Stage directions at the beginning of Act I, scene i, as given in the First Folio read “a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard.” In Act III, scene iii, stage directions again call for thunder and lightning when Ariel appears before “the three men of sin” in the form of a harpy, and it is thundering in Act II, scene ii, at the time of Trinculo’s discovery of the prostrate Caliban. Vivid descriptions of the roaring of wind and waves, both figuring on the list of forbidden sounds,

2. All references to *The Tempest* are based on the sixth edition of the Arden *Tempest*, edited by Frank Kermodé (London: Methuen, reprinted 1975).

abound in the first two scenes of the play. Imitating the sounds made by the rigging and the pulling of ropes in Act I, scene i, would probably produce noises auditorily close to the sounds of axles and pulleys that Socrates says should not be imitated. With regard to “the sounds of all the instruments,” we may note that the storm noises of the first scene are punctuated by the sound of the shipmaster’s whistle. In Act III, scene ii, Ariel plays a tune on a tabor and a pipe as a means of charming Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban into following him to the “filthy-mantled pool” in which they are ignominiously immersed (IV. i.175–84).

The imitation of animal sounds also figures prominently in *The Tempest*. We have seen that Socrates specifically interdicted imitating the neighing of horses, the lowing of bulls, and the cries of dogs, sheep and birds. Horses seem to be absent from Prospero’s island. Sheep are mentioned, but are neither seen nor heard. In Act II, scene i, Sebastian pretends to have heard “a hollow burst of bellowing / Like bulls,” but this noise is not directly imitated on stage. However, the play does feature most conspicuously a direct imitation both of barking dogs and crowing cocks. Ariel’s song in Act I, scene ii, goes in part:

Foot it featly here and there,  
And sweet sprites bear  
The burthen. Hark, hark.

Now the chorus of sprites imitates the barking of dogs.

[*Burthen dispersedly*] Bow-wow.  
ARIEL The watch dogs bark:  
[*Burthen dispersedly*] Bow-wow.  
ARIEL Hark, hark! I hear  
The strain of strutting chanticleer  
Cry—[*Burthen dispersedly*] Cock a diddle dow (I.ii.381–9).

So far as I know, there is no parallel to this direct imitation of animal cries in any other part of the Shakespearean opus. It is the more striking in this context because the barking and crowing appear in no way relevant to what is occurring on stage nor to the development of the plot. The barking of dogs is presumably imitated again at the end of Act IV, this time in a way that is relevant to the plot, when Prospero and Ariel prepare to drive out the murderous trio of wine-loving servants. Stage directions specify: “*A noise of hunters heard. Enter divers Spirits, in shape of dogs and hounds, hunting them* [that is, the servants] *about; PROSPERO and ARIEL setting them on*” (IV.i.254).<sup>3</sup>

3. The play fairly teems with references to animal sounds. In addition to barking dogs, crowing cocks, and bellowing bulls, we have the howling of wolves, the roaring of lions, the mowing and chattering of apes, the hissing of adders, the crying of owls and the lowing of a cow. I.ii.288; I.i.315–16; II.ii.9,13–14; V.i.90; IV.i.179. More broadly, it is hard to overestimate the role played in *The Tempest* by nonhuman sounds. The play begins with the noise of thunder, wind, and

So far I have done no more than to point out that many kinds of dramatic imitation forbidden by Socrates make an appearance in *The Tempest*. As yet I have not developed evidence to support the hypothesis that Shakespeare, in composing this play, had in mind the relevant *Republic* passages. But even if the reader is indulgent enough to grant, for the sake of argument, that such is the case, it will surely appear that Shakespeare's intention was to defy and to ridicule the restrictions imposed by Socrates on the exercise of dramatic art. I do not wish to deny that there is a sense in which Shakespeare was teasing his formidable philosophical critic. Yet I believe that his purpose extended far beyond simple mockery. There is another deeper way in which he may have conceived of the relation between *The Tempest* and *The Republic*. It is this possibility that I wish to explore.

In Book X of *The Republic* Socrates both broadens and deepens his earlier criticism of imitative poetry or dramatic art. In contrast to Book III, it now appears that no imitative poetry of *any* kind is to be admitted into the best city (595a). At the conclusion of his discussion Socrates says: “. . . only so much of poetry as is hymns to the gods or celebration of good men should be admitted into a city” (607a). It is not entirely clear whether it is permissible to celebrate good men by imitating them. Having concluded the criticism of imitative poetry which constitutes his justification for its banishment, Socrates raises the possibility that the criticism might be refuted either by the poets themselves, making “an apology in lyrics or some other meter,” or by the lovers of poetry (not themselves poets), giving “an argument without meter on its behalf” (607c). He admits that there might be counterarguments capable of showing that poetry is not only pleasant “but also beneficial to regimes and human life.” To such arguments, he says, “. . . we shall listen benevolently. For surely we shall gain if it should turn out to be not only pleasant but also beneficial.” In other words, he intimates that there may be imitative poets who are allies and servants of the philosopher-ruler, instead of his enemies. I suggest that Shakespeare responded to the Socratic challenge. I believe that he intended *The Tempest* to exemplify precisely the kind of poetry of which Socrates here speaks, poetry which is not merely pleasant but which is “beneficial to regimes and human life.” He conceived of *The Tempest*, I shall further argue, as a dramatic and poetic imitation of *The Republic* itself. It may be appropriate to remind ourselves of the simile of the divided line in Book VI of *The Republic*. The

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roaring waves, punctuated by the ship-master's whistle. At its close the boatswain gives the following description of Ariel's awakening of the ship's crew:

We were dead of sleep,  
 And—how we know not—all clapp'd under hatches;  
 Where, but even now, with strange and several noises  
 Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains,  
 And no diversity of sounds, all horrible,  
 We were awaked; (v.i.230–5)

play bears to the dialogue the same relation that the objects belonging to the lowest quarter of the line bear to those of the quarter immediately above. *The Tempest* is a kind of reflection or image of *The Republic*, just as "appearances produced in water and in all close-grained, smooth, bright things" (509e) are images of actual physical objects, including artifacts. In his apology for imitative poetry, spoken in meter, Shakespeare will show that the existence of such an image is indeed beneficial to "regimes and human life." His deliberately lavish employment of the forbidden forms of imitation I regard as the consequence of his claim that, using the guidelines set down by Socrates himself, he has successfully defended the right of imitative poetry to exist in the best polity. What he has legitimated, he produces in full measure.

The criticism of poetry developed in Book X has several parts, most of which cannot be discussed here. One famous argument attempts to establish that the ontological status of poetry, and of imitative art in general, is low. The imitative artist is said to copy the artifact produced by a craftsman who in turn employs for his model the form or idea of the thing. Thus the couch made by the carpenter is an imitation of the form of the couch (the real couch, the couch that is in nature) and the couch as portrayed by the painter is an imitation of the carpenter's couch. As such it exists at two removes from reality. Socrates explicitly says that the status of the tragic poet is the same as that of the painter of the couch (596a–597e). But the analogy is obviously false. In the first place, poets, whether comic or tragic, are not typically concerned with the representation of artifacts; their objects of imitation are human beings.<sup>4</sup> Of course, there is a sense in which Plato might regard particular human beings as images or copies of the form of humanity. Consequently the artist who paints a portrait of a particular person could be said to imitate an imitation. But the dramatic poet, as opposed to the historical biographer, is not primarily interested in individuals. His characters are representations of human types or kinds, such as the brave man or the avaricious man. As the poet in *Timon of Athens* tells us, he seeks to depict ". . . all kinds of natures, / That labour on the bosom of this sphere" (1.i.66–7). For Plato these types or natures would presumably themselves be forms. So Socrates' stricture against the poet as an imitator twice removed from reality appears to be unjust. However, if I am correct in thinking that Shakespeare conceived of *The Tempest* as an imitation of *The Republic*, there is a sense in which, half playfully perhaps, he accepted for his work the ontological status accorded to imitative art by Socrates. For *The Republic* is indeed a man-made artifact ("a pattern in speech of a good city," 472c) which imitates a form or forms, and an imitation of it will be twice removed from reality. Shakespeare has the task of convincing his philosophical opponent that his imitation of an imitation is not to be despised.

Perhaps the most serious attack on poetry which is developed in Book X of

4. This point is made by Bloom in his "Interpretive Essay," *op. cit.*, p. 429.

*The Republic* is an ethical one. It consists of the claim that the imitative artist describes, appeals to and nourishes the lowest part of the soul, the part that is the seat of the passions, the wellspring of grief, laughter and sexuality. In so doing, he starves and weakens the higher element that alone is capable of reasoning and calculation. The tragedian does this by presenting in an attractive way a hero mourning over his great misfortunes. Such a spectacle, by engendering pity and fear in the spectator, has the effect of numbing the higher part of his soul. His reason under ordinary circumstances would prevent him from giving way to public expressions of his own grief. But it is put off its guard by the fact that the mourning is being done by someone else. Given an opportunity shamelessly to bewail the misfortunes of another, the irrational, pitying part of the soul is soon emboldened to do the same when the misfortunes are its own. Suffering vicariously and pleasurably the sufferings of another does not lead to understanding; it leads to moral weakness. In just the same way, the laughing and sexual parts of the soul are encouraged by the comic poet to laugh at jokes the person would have been ashamed to make himself. Thus both the tragic and the comic poet foster and water the baser desires that ought, for the sake of achieving excellence, rather to be starved and dried up (605c–606d).

Does Shakespeare, in presenting to us *The Tempest*, play the role of either the tragic or comic poet, as described by Socrates? The answer appears to be that he does not. Whatever may be said of other plays, in this drama Shakespeare seems to have foregone eroticism and erotic jokes. *The Tempest* is not the work of a comic poet in Plato's sense. Nor is it the work of a tragic poet, as conceived by Plato. This play affords almost no occasion for pity or fear on the part of the spectator. The only exception is the very first scene, in which the tempest is depicted. Here the spectator believes he observes a ship and its passengers in dire peril. However, the degree of pity and fear he is capable of experiencing is severely limited by the fact that the characters are as yet unknown to him, so that he has had no opportunity to develop sympathy for them. Moreover, they are not presented as being particularly attractive. From the second scene onward, the play is remarkable for its lack of dramatic excitement. In that scene we learn that everything that happens on and in the immediate vicinity of the island, including the seeming tempest, is under the control of Prospero who, through the instrumentality of his magic art, possesses superhuman powers. We also learn that Prospero is both a wise and a good man, who like the just man of Book I of *The Republic* does harm to no one, not even to the enemies who had sought to take his own life (1.ii.15). All concern over the safety of the ship's mariners and passengers is dissipated so far as the audience is concerned. Ferdinand believes his father to be drowned, his father entertains the same opinion concerning his son, but we know that both of them are alive, well, and in no danger. Ferdinand and Miranda believe that, due to Prospero's seeming animosity, the future course of their love is most uncertain, but the spectators are not in suspense. In asides directed to the audience Prospero has

indicated that he desires nothing more than to see the young people united, after they have been properly prepared. It is a singular tribute to Shakespeare's genius that a play so lacking in dramatic suspense, so deliberately calculated not to arouse the emotions of pity or fear in the spectator, is nevertheless capable of so engrossing his interest.

Thus Shakespeare exonerates himself, insofar as this play is concerned, from the charges Socrates brings against the tragic and the comic poet. In addition, Shakespeare seems concerned to show us that at least some of the various sorts of imitations that are forbidden in *The Republic* can be made to serve purposes worthy of Socrates' approval. Alonso reports that the storm noises, especially the thunder, awakened him to a sense of his guilt, thus preparing him for penitence.

O, it is monstrous, monstrous!  
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;  
The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,  
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounced  
The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass.  
Therefore my son i' th' ooze is bedded; and  
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,  
And with him there lie mudded (III.iii.95–102).

In the same scene Ariel imitates a harpy clapping its wings and the lesser spirits that are his ministers imitate other strange shapes, half-human and half-animal. All these imitations are shown as instrumental in bringing about the humbling of the "three men of sin." We have already seen that Ariel's song in Act I, scene ii, includes direct imitation of the barking of dogs and the crowing of cocks, thus breaking two Socratic prohibitions simultaneously. But it has an effect upon the soul of Ferdinand quite opposite to that which, according to Plato, typically results from imitative poetry. Instead of inflaming his passions, it calms them. Rather than inciting him to further lamentation over the presumed loss of his father, it leads him into a state of tranquility.

Sitting on a bank,  
Weeping again the King my father's wrack,  
This music crept by me upon the waters,  
Allaying both their fury and my passion  
With its sweet air: (I.ii.392–6)

## 2. PROSPERO AND SHAKESPEARE

The Epilogue to *The Tempest* is spoken by Prospero, who has just renounced his magic powers and for the first time appears to the audience as an ordinary mortal. The magic seems also to have departed from Shakespeare's poetry.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
 And what strength I have's mine own,  
 Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,  
 I must be here confined by you,  
 Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
 Since I have my dukedom got,  
 And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell  
 In this bare island by your spell;  
 But release me from my bands  
 With the help of your good hands:  
 Gentle breath of yours my sails  
 Must fill, or else my project fails,  
 Which was to please. Now I want  
 Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant,  
 And my ending is despair,  
 Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
 Which pierces so, that it assaults  
 Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
     As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
     Let your indulgence set me free.

The Epilogue has been analyzed in depth by Colin Still in his book, *The Timeless Theme*, the second half of which is devoted to a most interesting interpretation of *The Tempest*.<sup>5</sup> Still regards the play as an allegorical expression of ideas contained both in the pagan mystery religions and in the mysteries of the Christian religion. Although I cannot agree with his overall interpretation, my debt to him is great. Specifically, with regard to the Epilogue, there is little for me to do except to summarize his commentary.

Still points out that there are many difficulties in the view that the Epilogue is a mere conventional "plaudite." Its ostensible theme is a plea addressed to the audience by Prospero to liberate him from the island. "I must be here confined by you, / Or sent to Naples." Still inquires, "But is it true? It certainly is not true that Prospero, in his aspect as the Duke of Milan, is prevented in any way from quitting the Island, in its aspect as his exile home." He "has already promised the travellers a speedy voyage to Naples and signified his intention to accompany them . . . ."<sup>6</sup> But Prospero's statement becomes intelligible if we think of him as a representative of the author. In the Epilogue Shakespeare speaks directly to us, his audience, his readers. He tells us that his artistic work is finished. "Now I want / Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;" He has done all that he can. It is now up to us to do our part. "Gentle breath of yours my sails / Must fill, or else my project fails." Illumination is shed upon the metaphorical

5. Colin Still, *The Timeless Theme* (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1936), pp. 127–244. The epilogue is discussed at pp. 240–4. Still does not link *The Tempest* with *The Republic*.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

meaning of these words by the fact that "Shakespeare several times describes the work of his pen as a bark floating upon the water."<sup>7</sup> In Sonnet LXXXVI sails are employed as a metaphor for poetic verse. So Shakespeare tells us that "*the sails of his verse are spread, and it is for us (his readers) to fill them with the breath of our own genius.*"<sup>8</sup> How can we do that? By interpreting the play, by penetrating to the meaning that lies below the surface. "Shakespeare designed the Epilogue for the express purpose of pleading for release in the sense of interpretation."<sup>9</sup> If we fail to respond to that plea Shakespeare will be forced to dwell "in this bare island" by our spell. All I can add to Still's interpretation of the Epilogue is the suggestion that the island on which Shakespeare fears he will be forced to dwell is to be identified with the stage upon which the play has just been enacted. It is bare now because at the end of the performance the properties have been removed. Shakespeare intimates that if we do not release the inner meaning of the play through an act of interpretation the work will remain a stage play only, a mere piece of theater, a charming entertainment. The spell by which we, his readers, could confine him to the island is "our uncomprehending literalism" imprisoning him "within the bare and narrow limits of his nominal story, an exile from his intellectual kingdom."<sup>10</sup>

There are many parallels between Shakespeare and Prospero. In the first place, both of them are creators of tempests. *The Tempest* created by Shakespeare is clearly not a natural phenomenon; it is a dramatic illusion. What of the tempest raised by Prospero's magic powers? Is it a real storm at sea? Does he bring about a real shipwreck? Certainly the passengers and crew go through the experience of a terrible storm; at its climax it seems to them that the vessel splits (I.i.60-1). Those who arrive on the island believe that she sank; Miranda also thinks she saw the ship "Dash'd all to pieces" and then swallowed by the sea (I.ii.5-13). But Ariel makes it clear that this never actually happened. He reports to Prospero:

Safely in harbour  
Is the King's ship; in the deep nook, where once  
Thou call'dst me up at midnight to fetch dew  
From the still-vex'd Bermoothes, there she's hid: (I.ii.226-9)

Significantly he adds:

. . . for the rest o' th' fleet,  
Which I dispers'd, they all have met again,  
And are upon the Mediterranean flote,  
Bound sadly home for Naples;  
*Supposing* that they saw the king's ship wrack'd,  
And his great person perish (I.ii.232-7; italics mine).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

Both suppositions are incorrect. In fact, the ship suffered no harm whatsoever. At the end of the play the boatswain testifies that it “Is tight and yare and bravely rigg’d as when / We first put out to sea” (v.i.224–5). Alonso is led to make the appropriate comment: “These are not natural events;”. Furthermore, Ariel’s account of the St. Elmo’s fire, that caused the passengers to think the ship was in the possession of devils, plainly shows there was no real lightning.

*I boarded the king’s ship; now on the beak,  
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,  
I flam’d amazement: sometime I’d divide,  
And burn in many places; on the topmast,  
The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly, (I.ii.196–200; italics mine)*

What the passengers took to be lightning was nothing more than Ariel appearing to them in the form of St. Elmo’s fire. The tempest was an illusion. Prospero is not a sorcerer who works upon waves and winds; he casts his spells over the minds of men. The tempest, of course, is only the first of Prospero’s many exercises in the art of illusion making. Alonso and his followers are brought to penitence by means of all manner of strange apparitions; Caliban and the drunken servants are set upon by spirits appearing in the shape of dogs and hounds. For the benefit of Ferdinand and Miranda, Prospero, like his creator, makes use of his powers of enchantment to stage a theatrical performance. Both Shakespeare and Prospero are masters of the art of illusion.

So great are Prospero’s magic powers that he is able to accomplish all his purposes within the space of a single afternoon. The action of the play is compressed into a four-hour period, lasting from two in the afternoon until six (I.ii.239–41; v.i.3–5). Elizabethan plays were usually staged in the afternoon and, with intermissions, took approximately that length of time to perform. Thus the internal dramatic time of the play is identical with the performance time, a circumstance differentiating *The Tempest* from every other work in the Shakespearean dramatic opus. Both the spectators in the theater and the islanders of the play spend an afternoon, from two until six, under the spell of a master magician. *The Tempest* is spatially as well as temporally unified. The action in its entirety takes place on, or near, Prospero’s island. I have already suggested that the island may symbolize the stage. This hypothesis, if correct, would link the scene of Prospero’s magic making with that of Shakespeare’s.

In view of the fact that *The Tempest* is certainly among the last plays, and is probably *the* last play Shakespeare wrote, many commentators have suggested that Prospero’s renunciation of his magic art stands for Shakespeare’s abandonment of the theater. I do not think that this interpretation by any means exhausts the significance of Prospero’s renunciation, but I do believe that the analogies between Shakespeare and Prospero are sufficiently numerous to justify us in thinking that it is one of the intended meanings. It is an interesting

fact that in the speech abjuring his “rough magic” Prospero claims to have done something that he, as a character in *The Tempest*, could hardly have performed.

          graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth  
By my so potent Art (v.i.48–50).

But only one person died on Prospero's island—that was Sycorax, Caliban's evil mother. It seems exceedingly unlikely that Prospero would have wished to open her grave. However, it makes perfectly good sense to say of Shakespeare, the author of the history plays, that by his “so potent art” he opened many graves and let forth their sleepers. In this speech, as in the Epilogue, Shakespeare seems to substitute himself for Prospero.

Another similarity between Prospero and Shakespeare is to be found in their seemingly ambivalent attitudes toward their respective powers of enchantment. In his great renunciation speech (v.i.33–57) Prospero eloquently testifies to his appreciation of the enormous potency of his art. Just so, Shakespeare in the Sonnets expresses deep confidence in the abiding greatness of his poetry.

Not marble nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes shall outlive this pow'rful rhyme (Sonnet LV).

Yet Prospero also belittles his art, calling it “rough magic” and referring to his subordinate ministers (other than Ariel) as “weak masters,” “meaner fellows,” and “rabble.” He speaks of the masque which is about to be performed before Ferdinand and Miranda as “some vanity of mine Art” (v.i.41; IV.i.35–41). Curiously enough, the Sonnets also contain passages in which Shakespeare disparages his own dramatic art.

Alas 'tis true, I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,  
Made old offences of affections new.  
Most true it is, that I have looked on truth  
Askance and strangely (Sonnet CX).

O for my sake do you with fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand (Sonnet CXI).

The last two lines suggest that Shakespeare believed the composition of imitative poetry was not his proper work and that his involvement with the theater was deflecting his nature from its highest activity. Like Prospero, Shakespeare

apparently abandoned the practice of his art while at the very peak of his powers. We shall return to this puzzling topic later.

### 3. THE TEMPEST WITHIN *THE TEMPEST*

The first scene of the play, which depicts Prospero's illusory tempest, is a microcosm of the larger Shakespearean *Tempest* in which it occurs. It is not surprising, then, that it should contain an enunciation of at least two of the principal themes of the play. The scene opens with an exchange between the ship-master (the captain of the ship) and the boatswain, who is in charge of the crew.

MAST. Boatswain!

BOATS. Here, master: what cheer?

MAST. Good: speak to th' mariners; fall to 't, yarely, or we run ourselves aground:  
bestir, bestir (I.i.1-4).

The master then exits and, although he makes a stage appearance in Act V, speaks not another word for the remainder of the play. Meanwhile the boatswain begins to give orders to the mariners, commanding them to take in the topsail.

It is always useful to pay particularly close attention to the opening lines of a Shakespearean play. *The Tempest* is no exception. Why does Shakespeare choose to begin his play in just this way? Why, in particular, does he go to the trouble of introducing the master at all, since his subsequent role in the drama seems virtually nil? The answer, I believe, has at least two parts. First, the exchange between the master and the boatswain consists of a command given by a superior to an inferior, and of the acceptance of that command by the inferior. The very first word of the play is an utterance of command. The suggestion is conveyed to us that *The Tempest* will somehow be concerned with ruling and that its theme will be—at least in part—political.<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, of course, a ship is a metaphor for the state. It is interesting to recollect that it was Plato who coined this metaphor in a very famous passage in *The Republic* (488a-489a). The introduction of the ship-master serves a second purpose. We see that the crew members receive their orders from the boatswain, but that over the boatswain there stands a yet higher authority. So the "political structure" of the ship has a tripartite character. We shall see that the notion of three orders or three classes will become a dominant theme in *The Tempest*, as of course it is in *The Republic*. In the very first lines of the first scene, then, a link, albeit a small one, is forged between Shakespeare's play and Plato's dialogue.

The boatswain's labors are interrupted by the arrival on deck of Alonso,

11. *Measure for Measure*, which is also concerned with politics and ruling, begins in exactly the same way. *Measure for Measure* in many ways is closely related in theme to *The Tempest*.

King of Naples, and his entourage. They pester him with questions, interfering with the performance of his duties. He at first politely requests them to keep below. When they do not comply, he becomes annoyed and commands them in the strongest terms to return to their cabins. They are angered at being spoken to in such a tone by a social inferior, and Gonzalo reminds him of their high rank. The boatswain responds with contempt, pointing out to the courtiers that their titles will not help them to cope with the storm and the waves. "What cares these roarers for the name of King?" he asks, adding, ". . . if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the presence, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority:" (1.i.16–23). Thoroughly infuriated, three members of the royal party proceed to rain invectives on the boatswain. Gonzalo says that a person of his character is clearly destined to die on the gallows; it would be impossible for him to be drowned. In fact, according to Gonzalo, this certainty that the boatswain was born to be hanged rather than drowned constitutes their greatest hope of coming safely through the storm. Gonzalo makes that point three times in this scene and, when he reencounters the boatswain in the last act, repeats it a fourth time (1.i.28–33, 46–8 and 57–9; v.i.216–20). Antonio calls the boatswain "cur", "whoreson", "insolent noisemaker"; Sebastian addresses him as "you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog" (1.i.40–5), and in Act V Gonzalo says to him: "Now, blasphemy, / That swear'st grace o'erboard, not an oath on shore?" (218–19). Strangely enough, the fact is that the boatswain never utters any blasphemies.

What is at issue in this exchange between the boatswain and the courtiers? It appears to be a contest over the right to rule. On the one side we have the boatswain who has no rank or title whatsoever. What the boatswain has is knowledge of how to run the ship. If anyone can save the ship, it is he. He is the "true pilot" mentioned by Plato in the context of his description of the ship of state, the true pilot who is the image of the true ruler. On the other side we have people who bear royal titles and who wield political authority, but who know nothing about running a ship. Shakespeare is setting up for us an opposition between knowledge and authority, between the natural ruler whose qualification is his knowledge of how to rule the state and the conventional ruler whose qualification is his inherited title or his electoral mandate. Questions concerning the natural title to rule occupy the center of the stage both in *The Republic* and in *The Tempest*. In this little scene Shakespeare indirectly indicates his agreement with the Platonic teaching that the natural or genuine claim to rule is based on knowledge or skill, and not on title, whether inherited or obtained in some other way.<sup>12</sup> It is well to remember that this play was written

12. Since writing this essay, I have read Paul A. Cantor's "Prospero's Republic: The Politics of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*" in *Shakespeare as Political Thinker* edited by John Alvis and Thomas G. West (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), pp. 239–56. Despite many important differences, there is a considerable affinity between our interpretations of the play. In particular, Cantor gives an analysis of 1.i (pp. 241f.) which is very similar to the one I offer here.

during the reign of King James, a monarch not inclined to look favorably upon any disparagement of the divine right of kings. The shocking quality of the assertion that the right to rule is based on knowledge, rather than on title, is indicated by the reaction of the members of the king's party to the boatswain's statements. Sebastian calls him blasphemous, not because he utters sacrilegious oaths, but because he undermines the philosophical foundation of political regimes based on convention. Gonzalo asserts he is fated not to drown but to hang. Why should he be hanged rather than drowned? The answer, I suggest, is that a death caused by drowning in a sea storm is a death due to the power of nature. But a death on the gallows is the antithesis of a natural death. The boatswain has not offended against nature; his offense is against conventional political authority. Therefore it is proper for him to die at the hands of that authority.

Two themes, then, emerge from the initial scene of the play. The first is the conflict between natural or genuine title to rule, based on knowledge, and conventional title, based on inheritance or social rank. The former is shown as superior to the latter. The second theme is only faintly foreshadowed in the tempest scene, but will become highlighted as the play unfolds. The best or natural political order is depicted to us as tripartite in character. To put it in another way, there are two levels of rulership; the true ruler, the highest master, requires an auxiliary. Lacking such an auxiliary, the best political order will "run aground." The Platonic character of both of these themes hardly needs pointing out.

#### 4. PROSPERO AND HIS HOUSEHOLD

##### *Prospero*

The second scene begins with a conversation between Prospero and his daughter, Miranda, in which he relates to her the story of his earlier life. In the course of this narration several very interesting points emerge. Apparently Prospero had at one time been an extremely successful ruler. Speaking of the early period of his reign, he says of his Milanese Dukedom:

Through all the signories it was the first,  
And Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal Arts  
Without a parallel (I.ii.71-4).

Then Prospero lost interest in governing. Referring to the liberal arts, he says:

. . . those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother,  
And to my state grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies (I.ii.74-7).

In the Middle Ages the liberal arts were considered to consist of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy). The quadrivium is identical with the set of studies which Plato in *The Republic* regards as a prelude and preparation for the highest study, dialectic or philosophical inquiry. It has been suggested that the secret studies upon which Prospero embarked while in Milan constituted not the pursuit of philosophy, but the study of magic—the very same magic which enabled him to perform the feats of sorcery that brought about the subjugation of his enemies on the island. Now there is one piece of evidence that tends to support this hypothesis. Prospero apparently did possess some magical powers at the time of his arrival on the island, for he says to Ariel:

Thou best know'st  
What torment I did find thee in; thy groans  
Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts  
Of ever-angry bears: it was a torment  
To lay upon the damn'd, which Sycorax  
Could not again undo: it was mine Art,  
When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine, and let thee out (I.ii.286–93).

Other evidence, however, strongly indicates that the study of magic was not Prospero's primary preoccupation while in Milan. In the first place, he clearly states that he abandoned the governance of his dukedom in order to study the *liberal arts*, and the latter can hardly be identified as magic. Second, it is clear that in Milan Prospero lacked the magical powers he possessed on the island. This is demonstrated by the fact that he was impotent to oppose the ministers of Antonio and Alonso who set him and his little daughter adrift upon "A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd, / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast;" (I.ii.146–7). Prospero's inability to defend himself and Miranda against their abductors in Milan is contrasted with his power on the island to paralyze and disarm Ferdinand (I.ii.465–95) and, through the instrumentality of Ariel, to frustrate the murderous purposes of Antonio and Sebastian (II.i.292–300). Awakening the sleeping Gonzalo to the danger these unsavory characters present to his life, Ariel says to him:

My master through his Art foresees the danger  
That you his friend, are in;

In Milan, however, Prospero is utterly unable to foresee any of the dangers threatening both his rulership and his life. The Duke of Milan, however learned he may have been, was certainly no magician.

It seems reasonable, then, to assume that the secret studies in which Prospero was transported and rapt were either of a philosophical nature or at least designed to prepare him for philosophy. In other words, he gave up practical affairs and political life for the sake of pursuing theoretical wisdom. This pas-

sage cannot help but remind us of the myth of the cave and the story of the philosopher's ascent from the cave into the light. In *The Republic* the cave represents not only the intellectual darkness in which the mass of mankind lives; it is also closely associated with the city and with political life. The men who hold up the artifacts that are shadowed on the wall of the cave may be regarded as the politically authoritative molders of opinion.<sup>13</sup> Like the philosopher in *The Republic*, once liberated from the shadow world of politics, Prospero had no desire to return to it. Ruling to him had become a burden. To rid himself of that burden he irresponsibly "cast the government" upon his all too eager brother. Unlike the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, he did not even trouble himself to investigate the manner in which his deputy was performing the ducal duties. In Book I of *The Republic*, Socrates says that if the best men refuse to rule, they will have to pay the penalty of being themselves ruled by inferiors (347c). Prospero soon felt the full weight of this terrible penalty.

### *Miranda*

At the beginning of their conversation, Prospero addresses Miranda as: ". . . thee, my daughter, who / Art ignorant of what thou art" (1.ii.17–18). The superficial meaning of these lines is that she does not realize her high social rank. But the deeper meaning is that she does not know herself; she is ignorant of her own nature. Prospero has to educate her. Educating her consists in asking her a series of questions designed to reawaken her latent memories of her past.

PROS. . . . Canst thou remember  
A time before we came unto this cell?  
I do not think thou canst, for then thou wast not  
Out three years old.

MIR. Certainly, sir, I can.

PROS. By what? by any other house or person?  
Of any thing the image tell me, that  
Hath kept with thy remembrance.

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

PROS. Thou hadst and more, Miranda (1.ii.38–48).

Prospero goes on to tell her that she was formerly a princess, the daughter of the Duke of Milan, himself a prince of power and ruler of the first of the signories. The resplendent past is contrasted with the wretchedness of the present, in which Prospero is no more than the "master of a full poor cell" (1.ii.20).

In this passage, we may find a reflection of the Platonic myth of recollec-

13. For a fuller discussion of this point see Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," *op. cit.*, p. 404.

tion. In its glorious past the human soul, unencumbered by a body, once gazed directly upon the intelligible forms. Being born, becoming encased in a mortal body, is a form of descent in which the soul forgets the knowledge it once possessed. Education consists in helping the soul to remember that which it has forgotten. Learning is recollection. The task of education is best accomplished by the Socratic technique of asking questions, a technique exemplified *par excellence* by Socrates' questioning of the ignorant slave boy in the *Meno*.

In interpreting a dramatic work so artistically and philosophically complex as *The Tempest*, it would be a mistake to try to attach a single symbolic meaning to each of the characters or to seek a single symbol for each of the ideas that is being represented. Shakespeare's technique is multirepresentational. The leading ideas are represented in many different ways and some of the characters symbolize more than one thing. I suggest that one of Miranda's functions in the play is to symbolize the human soul. The glorious past existence of the soul is represented in Miranda's case by her resplendent life as Princess of Milan. Her trip to the island represents the soul's descent from the intelligible heaven to its encasement in a mortal body. Under Prospero's questioning, she begins to recollect something of her marvellous past. It should be observed that life in Milan and the expulsion from Milan do not have the same significance for Miranda as they have for Prospero.

### *Caliban*

When Prospero and Miranda arrived at the island they found there two inhabitants. One of them was Caliban, the son of the hideous witch Sycorax who had been deported from Algiers "For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing . . ." (1.ii.264-5). Caliban is described as half-human and half-monster, with distinct fish-like characteristics. Prior to Prospero's arrival he did not possess the gift of speech and his intelligence is represented as low, if not subhuman. Caliban is a creature dominated by bodily appetites and impulses. One of his first statements upon appearing on stage is: "I must eat my dinner" (1.ii.332). Much of his talk throughout the play turns on food. Seeking to win the favor of the servants, Stephano and Trinculo, he offers to procure for them all kinds of tasty eatables:

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;  
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;  
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee  
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
Young scamels from the rock (11.ii.167-72).

When Stephano offers him liquor, Caliban immediately becomes addicted to it and is prepared to worship Stephano as a god. His complete lack of self-control in sexual matters is demonstrated by his attempt to rape the child, Miranda.

Caliban's nature, then, is dominated by the appetites for food, drink and sex. Prospero repeatedly refers to him as a slave. In Act I, scene ii, he applies that appellation to Caliban no less than six times. Indeed, Caliban is a perfect example of what Aristotle had in mind when he talked of the natural slave. Caliban is a person in whom the rational faculty is weak, if not altogether absent, and who is ruled by the bodily desires. As such, he lacks the capacity to rule himself. He will experience contentment or misery according to the nature of the person who rules over him.

In Act I, scene ii, Prospero summons Caliban to his presence by the following words: "What, ho! slave! Caliban! / Thou earth, thou! speak" (i.ii.315–16). Now Shakespeare frequently uses earth as a symbol of the body. One example, out of many possible illustrations, may be found in the first line of Sonnet CXLVI: "Poor soul, the center of my sinful earth," where "my sinful earth" clearly stands for "my sinful body." I suggest, then, that in this play Caliban stands for the body or for that lowest part of the soul which, according to the teaching of *The Republic*, is the seat of bodily appetites.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, of course, Caliban represents that considerable portion of mankind dominated by such appetites.

Shakespeare echoes the severe attitude taken by Plato toward human beings of this type. Many commentators have accused Prospero of cruelty and harshness in his dealings with Caliban. But Shakespeare goes out of his way to show that at the outset of their relationship Prospero dealt with Caliban kindly, even indulgently. Caliban says:

. When thou cam'st first,  
Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me  
Water with berries in 't; and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night: . . . (i.ii.334–8)

And Prospero replies:

. . . I have us'd thee,  
Filth that thou art, with human care; and lodg'd thee  
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child (i.ii.347–50).

That experience taught Prospero that Caliban had a nature "which any print of goodness wilt not take" and he subsequently changed his methods. Prospero made the discovery that the body, and the human type which is governed by the desires of the body, cannot be ruled by reason, by persuasion or by kindness. "Thou most lying slave, / Whom stripes may move, not kindness" (i.ii.346–7). Rule over the body cannot be rule by consent of the governed. It must be despotic. Caliban and what he stands for can be governed only by the fear of phys-

14. Cantor (*op cit.*, pp. 244f.) gives a similar analysis of Caliban.

ical pain. Furthermore, the value of “higher education” for Caliban is strictly limited. Caliban himself says:

You taught me language; and my profit on 't  
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For teaching me your language! (I.ii.365–7)

Nevertheless, Caliban has a function to perform. He is indispensable. When Miranda complains that she does not like to look at him, Prospero replies:

But, as 'tis,  
We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,  
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices  
That profit us (I.ii.312–15).

Caliban is not without charm, when obedient to Prospero and in a good mood. The difficulty is that he is frequently rebellious. The body or the desiring part of the soul resents being ruled, even for its own good. It wants to be independent, to live for itself, to satisfy its desires as it wishes. And when in a state of rebellion, Caliban can be vicious. An example of his capacity for ugliness is the instruction he gives Stephano concerning the best way to murder Prospero.

Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him  
I' th' afternoon to sleep: there thou mayst brain him,  
Having first seiz'd his books; or with a log  
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,  
Or cut his wezand with thy knife (III.ii.85–9).

The body is not attractive when it rebels against the rule of reason.

That Caliban is a member of Prospero's household is a fact of great importance. When he appears on the stage in the last act, Prospero says of him: “this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (v.i.275–6). Caliban is a part of Prospero. Even the most perfect man cannot extinguish in himself the demands of the body. He can, however, bring them under the control of reason. Prospero's harshness to Caliban must be understood, at least in part, as severity toward an element of his own soul. In the final scene of the play Caliban voluntarily accepts Prospero's rule, recognizing that he is better off under Prospero's governance than he is under the control of the drunken Stephano and Trinculo. This is a figuring in dramatic terms of the virtue of temperance, as explicated in Book IV of *The Republic*. The lower and higher parts of the soul agree that the higher part should rule (432a).

There is evidence, moreover, that Prospero's treatment of Caliban is not characterized exclusively by punitive severity. In the second scene of the third act Stephano and Trinculo have been frightened by the music played to them by the invisible Ariel. Caliban reassures them with the following speech:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.

Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,  
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,  
 I cried to dream again (III.ii.133–41).

It seems clear that the “sounds and sweet airs” that delighted Caliban did not have a natural cause. He was not listening to the noises made by winds and waves, but rather to “voices” and “a thousand twangling instruments.” Prior to the shipwreck, the only inhabitants of the island, besides Caliban himself, were Prospero, Ariel and Miranda. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the music heard by Caliban was a product of Prospero’s magic art, provided perhaps through the instrumentality of Ariel or his subordinate spirits. Likewise, it seems improbable that Caliban’s brutish mind would be capable, unaided, of producing the marvellous dream images which he describes. Left to himself, Caliban thinks chiefly of sensual satisfactions. Prospero, I suggest, brings to Caliban pleasures that the latter would not be able to provide for himself, pleasures which are indeed sensuous, but not sensual. These are the highest pleasures of which Caliban’s nature is capable. The services rendered to Caliban by Prospero may be thought of as analogous to those provided by Shakespeare, the dramatist, to the least educated members of his audience.

If Caliban stands for the body, what are we to make of his deceased witch-mother, Sycorax? Sycorax had much the same nature as her son, but with this difference. She was far cleverer and much more powerful. In one respect, she resembled Prospero. She was a sorceress of no mean ability. She is the only character in the play, besides Prospero and Ariel, to possess a knowledge of magic. The result of her greater knowledge and power was a character far more evil and dangerous than that of Caliban. If Caliban stands for the body simply, then Sycorax represents the body in its most malignant aspect, as possessing the power to control the intelligence. That Sycorax possessed such a power will be evidenced in her relationship with Ariel.

### *Ariel*

It is not clear from Shakespeare’s text whether Ariel had originally lived alone on the island or whether he was brought there from Algiers by Sycorax. But the text does make clear that for an indefinite period of time he was Sycorax’s servant. Whether this period included a time of servitude in Algiers, prior to Sycorax’s deportation, is obscure. Because Ariel was

. . . a spirit too delicate  
 To act her earthy and abhorr’d commands,  
 Refusing her grand hests (I.ii.272–4),

Sycorax punished him by imprisoning him in a cloven pine, in which condition he did "painfully remain a dozen years" until Prospero on his arrival released him. Prospero, however, also put Ariel in a condition of servitude. Ariel's twelve years in the cloven pine have been exactly matched by twelve years of serving Prospero (1.ii.53–5).

There is a curious fact about Ariel. He possesses superhuman powers. He can transport himself instantaneously from one place to another; he can make himself invisible; he can assume any shape he pleases. Yet, despite these extraordinary abilities, it seems he is easily enslaved. Neither Sycorax nor Prospero has any difficulty in reducing him to servitude. It is important to note that both of these periods of servitude are strictly involuntary so far as Ariel is concerned. Certainly his service to Prospero must have been far less distasteful to him than was his enslavement by Sycorax. Even under Prospero's rule, however, he is constantly restless, always longing for his liberty. There is something that he has in common with Caliban, namely the desire to be independent and to live for himself as he himself chooses.

Prospero frequently calls Ariel by the name of "spirit" and in the Folio's listing of the names of the actors he is described as "an airy spirit." In this play the term "spirit" has a very specific meaning. It is used to designate immaterial intelligences, not themselves human, although capable of appearing in human shape. Thus Ferdinand, watching the masque, inquires about the actors: "May I be bold / To think these spirits?" (iv.i.118–19). The force of the question is intended to be: "Am I right in thinking these are not real human beings?" Quite aside from terming Ariel a spirit, the text makes it clear that Ariel is less than a full human being. Obviously the appetitive element is entirely absent in him. To be sure, he has desires, but they are not bodily appetites. He is not incapable of emotion; he suffers under the torments laid upon him by Sycorax and rejoices in his forthcoming freedom. But the appetitive part of the soul is not all that is missing in Ariel. He lacks many of the most basic human emotions. As Prospero tells us, he is not one of our kind; he does not "passion" as humans do (v.i.23–4). In Act V Ariel himself indicates to Prospero that he has no affections. Speaking of Alonso and his followers, he says to Prospero:

Your charm so strongly works 'em,  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

PROS. Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL Mine would, sir, were I human (v.i.17–20).

Pity is alien to Ariel. Presumably so is its opposite emotion, anger. Here we see the chief difference in the emotional constitutions of Ariel and Prospero. Prospero feels both pity and anger. When he recalls the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of evildoers he quite naturally experiences a certain degree of righteous wrath. Apparently not so with Ariel. In Act I, scene ii, Prospero with an-

gry eloquence reminds him of the atrocities Sycorax committed against him. Listening but listless, Ariel responds to the story of his own torments with an occasional “No, sir” or “Ay, sir.” At one point, to Prospero’s deep annoyance, he gives an absent-minded answer that clearly indicates he has been day-dreaming (I.ii.281–4). This apparent incapacity to feel justified indignation is a sign that the spirited element of the soul, according to Plato the seat and source of anger, is also missing in Ariel.

Caliban and Ariel each represent a part, but a part only, of the human soul. Significantly Prospero tells us that when the island was inhabited only by these two, it was “not honour’d with / A human shape” (I.ii.281–4). Caliban represents bodily desire. What does Ariel symbolize? His name suggests that he is somehow connected with the element of air. Indeed, he seems to be a flying, rather than a walking being, and he describes himself as riding “on the curl’d clouds” (I.ii.191–2).<sup>15</sup> Just as Prospero called Caliban by the name “earth,” so he addresses Ariel as “thou, which art but air” (v.i.21). Pet names for him include “bird” (IV.i.184) and “chick” (v.i.316).

What does the element, air, signify for Shakespeare? Sonnets XLIV and XLV are our most helpful source of information, for they deal with the four elements: fire, air, water, earth. In Sonnet XLV there is an explicit identification of the element, air, with thought.

“slight air and purging fire”

“the first my thought, the other my desire”

Furthermore, in Sonnet XLIV some of the attributes Ariel possesses are asserted to be properties of thought.

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,  
Injurious distance should not stop my way;  
For then, despite of space, I would be brought,  
From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.  
No matter then although my foot did stand  
Upon the farthest earth removed from thee;  
For nimble thought can jump both sea and land,  
As soon as think the place where he would be.

I think we may conclude that, as Caliban stood for the body, so Ariel represents thought or the agency which is capable of thought, namely the intelligence.<sup>16</sup> If this interpretation is correct, it explains why Ariel lacks passions, for according to Platonic psychology the passions belong to a part of the soul which is separate from reason or intelligence. It also enables us to explain the curious fact previously noted that Ariel, despite his superhuman powers, is easily enslaved. For it is a striking characteristic of the intelligence that it can be

15. It must be said, however, that he is also able to move in the other three elements. He swims, dives into the fire (I.ii.191) and does Prospero’s business in the veins of the earth (I.ii.255).

16. For a different interpretation of Ariel’s significance see Cantor, *op. cit.*, pp. 245–7.

enslaved by desire. The soul as a whole, or its desiring part, is capable of employing the intelligence as a tool to serve its own ends. Yet Ariel's yearning for freedom suggests that the intellect does have its own proper activity, its own goal. It has a kind of nonbodily desire which is specific to itself. These characteristics of Ariel seem to conform very well to Plato's analysis of the intelligence and its *eros* for wisdom.

How, then, shall we explain the meaning of Ariel's two periods of servitude? Ariel's enslavement by Sycorax must represent the imprisonment of the intelligence by the body and the bodily appetites. This is represented by Shakespeare as the most terrible, the most agonizing kind of incarceration that the intellect can possibly suffer.

### *Prospero and Ariel*

The meaning of Ariel's subjection to Prospero is not so easy to discern. The following reflection might be helpful. Like Caliban, Ariel is a member of Prospero's household, and hence a part of Prospero. Ariel not only represents intellect per se; specifically he stands for Prospero's intellect. Ariel's service to Prospero suggests that Prospero is somehow enslaving his own intellect, just as Prospero's severe rule over Caliban indicates that Prospero is curbing his own bodily desires. Prospero is forcing his intellect to work at something other than its proper activity. From Prospero's behavior in Milan we can gather something about the activity his intellect prefers. In Milan Prospero devoted himself to the study of the liberal arts, or more generally, to philosophical investigation. What Prospero did not wish to do was to continue to bear the burden of ruling the state. In Milan Prospero's intellect was given free play; it did what it wanted to do and nothing else. On the island, it is denied its liberty; it labors for the benefit of others. While recognizing the justice of the demands made upon it, it yet longs for freedom (I.ii.247–300).<sup>17</sup>

If this interpretation is correct, I think we may conclude that Prospero's activities on the island pertain to ruling and to the political responsibilities which he shirked in Milan. For Prospero, Milan is the site of philosophizing; the island is the site of political rule. The situation is the exact reverse of what we might have expected. This reversal is the seal, the lock, that Shakespeare placed over the inner meaning of the play. When the seal is broken, we see that Prospero's compulsory voyage to the island, during which he "deck'd the sea with drops full salt" and "under his burthen groaned" (I.ii.155–6) is the exact counterpart of the philosopher's forced descent into the cave, as described in Book VII of *The Republic*. That this is so, Shakespeare indicates to us by caus-

17. Many commentators have thought that Ariel stands for the creative imagination, specifically Shakespeare's. The composition of poetic drama, however, would seem to be a function of the creative imagination and it is difficult to understand why the latter would desire to be released from its proper work. But if Ariel represents the intellect, its proper work would be philosophy or theoretical understanding. Prospero is preventing Ariel from engaging in this activity.

ing Prospero to live, while on the island, in what is referred to as a “cell” (I.ii.20,349; IV.i.161,216; V.i.84). The cell is not a house. Caliban makes this quite clear when in Act III he states that as yet Prospero has no house (III.ii.95). But a cell which is not a house must be some kind of natural cell. Now a natural cell capable of housing human beings can only be a cave. That Prospero’s cell is in fact a cave is borne out by a reference to “the mouth of the cell” (IV.i.216).

On the island, Prospero lives in a cave. The island *is* the cave. Prospero’s original abandonment of political activity represents the young philosopher’s ascent from the cave of political life and politically determined opinion. His secluded life in his Milanese study stands for the period of the philosopher’s education, the first part of his day in the sun. Prospero’s life and activity on the island correspond to the period of political rulership that, according to *The Republic*, every mature philosopher must be compelled to undergo. His return to Milan at the end of the play represents the philosopher’s release (or at least partial release) from political activity, his reascent from the cave back into the sunlight of philosophy.

From these premises we may infer that the study of magic art that occupied Prospero on the island represents something entirely different from the philosophical or prephilosophical studies in which he engaged during his Milanese days. Prospero pursued philosophy for his own benefit.

I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated  
To closeness and the bettering of my mind (I.ii.89–90).

We already know that Prospero’s magic consisted chiefly of the power to create illusions, to control men’s imaginations. Prospero studied and practiced magic for the sake of others. The power of magic making is clearly linked by Shakespeare to ruling.<sup>18</sup> Ariel is the prime instrument that Prospero employs to create illusions and apparitions. It is no accident that Prospero’s renunciation of his magic art and his emancipation of Ariel occur simultaneously, nor that they both coincide with Prospero’s departure from the island.

In this connection there is an interesting contrast between Prospero’s book of magic, which he drowns in Act V, and the volumes from his Milanese library furnished to him by Gonzalo at the time of his exile. These volumes, Prospero tells Miranda, “I prize above my dukedom” (I.ii.168). They are the books in which he immersed himself while in Milan. But it seems they are not to be identified with the book of magic. The latter is a single volume, “my book,” as opposed to the several or many volumes that Gonzalo retrieved from Prospero’s library. Appropriately enough, the book of magic appears to be of instrumental value only. Once Prospero has subjugated his enemies and has united Miranda with Ferdinand the task of rulership is completed and he has no further use for

18. The passages dealing with the noble lie in Book III of *The Republic* are most relevant to this analysis.

the book. Not so with the volumes from his library. There is no reason whatsoever to think they are slated for drowning.

We are now in a position to understand the ambivalence displayed by Prospero toward his magic as well as that which Shakespeare exhibits toward his theatrical art. Both appreciate the potency of their respective powers of enchantment; both recognize the benefits they are able to confer upon others through the exercise of these powers. Each of them regards the practice of his art as a form of ruling. Neither finds this practice the highest form of activity of which he is capable. I suggest that Shakespeare, like Prospero, considered his true function, his proper activity, to be that of philosophizing.

## 5. THE THREE CLASSES

Let us turn to a consideration of the way in which Prospero's magic art is exercised and the effects which it produces. The initial event is Ariel's transformation of the ship on which Alonso's party is travelling into a literal likeness of hell. According to Ariel:

. All but mariners  
Plung'd in the foaming brine, and quit the vessel,  
Then all afire with me: the King's son, Ferdinand,  
With hair up-staring, —then like reeds, not hair, —  
Was the first man that leap'd; cried, "Hell is empty,  
And all the devils are here" (1.ii.210–15).

Thus the experience of hell is succeeded by a kind of baptism or cathartic purification.<sup>19</sup> This is the one experience which all the passengers have in common. Subsequently they are separated into three groups, each of which receives a distinctive treatment. Ariel says: "In troops I have dispers'd them 'bout the isle" (1.ii.220). The first troop consists of Alonso and his entourage, hereafter to be referred to as the Court Party.<sup>20</sup> Stephano and Trinculo, together with Caliban, make up the second troop. The third consists simply of Ferdinand. It is interesting to note that Ferdinand alone is supervised directly by Prospero. The other two groups are under the control of his auxiliary, Ariel. There is a difference, however, in the way in which Ariel exercises this control. To the Court Party he shows himself, although in a disguise. For the courtiers he creates visual as well as auditory apparitions. He allows himself only to be heard by Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo. Further, he employs a host of lesser spirits to inflict upon them a variety of physically painful sensations of a sort never experienced by the members of the Court Party.

This threefold division of the ship's passengers was foreshadowed by the tripartite structure of command on board the vessel. Each of the groups corre-

19. This point is discussed at considerable length by Colin Still, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–4.

20. I follow Still's terminology here.

sponds to a basic human type, to a particular kind of nature. Each, I suggest, represents one of the classes of *The Republic*.

### *The Court Party*

When we first encounter the Court Party, we find its members engaged in a prolonged and futile search for Ferdinand. Part of their ordeal is constituted by fruitless wandering that terminates in despair. Alonso is plunged in grief over the apparent loss of his only son. His sorrow is to some extent shared by the kindly Gonzalo, his elderly counsellor, and by the courtiers, Adrian and Francisco. The belief that they have irrevocably lost something infinitely precious is the first element in a long series of chastisements in store for the members of this group.<sup>21</sup>

The central part of their punishment is meted out to them by Ariel, who creates for them the illusion of a banquet served up by a number of monstrously shaped apparitions. Their amazement at this spectacle knows no bounds. They do not realize that what they see is merely an appearance produced by art. They do not know that they are looking only at "spirits." Gonzalo's exclamation: "For, certes, these are people of the island,—" (III.iii.30) shows that he considers these creatures to be human beings as real as he himself is. The Court Party members cannot distinguish between appearance and reality.

The effect of the vision, however, is to undo the cynicism and skepticism which had previously characterized the attitude of the two wicked brothers, Antonio and Sebastian. Now, they say, they will believe any stories of strange sights brought home by travellers. They will accept the existence of unicorns, of the phoenix and of other mythological beings (III.iii.21-7). The sight of the incredible, in other words, disposes them to believe. For them this is a step forward. The highest level of achievement open to them is faithful service as soldier-guardians, as auxiliaries to the philosopher-king. According to *The Republic*, the chief test of a good soldier-guardian is his ability to receive and hold fast to the correct beliefs prescribed for him by rulers who possess true knowledge. Unfortunately, Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian have never had a ruler to prescribe correct beliefs for them. Even if they had been exposed to correct beliefs, however, their high opinion of their own wisdom would have prevented them from accepting those beliefs as true. The effect of the apparition is to humble their pride. This humbling is a necessary precondition of their ultimate acceptance of Prospero as their ruler.

The second part of the apparition begins when, recovering from their amazement, they attempt to consume the proffered banquet. Ariel appears in the guise of a harpy and claps his wings upon the table, causing the banquet to disappear. Ariel next pronounces to the "three men of sin" a terrifying speech. He reminds them of the crime they have committed against Prospero and Miranda and

21. Cf. Still, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-158.

threatens them with "Ling'ring perdition—worse than any death / Can be at once—" if they do not immediately repent and reform. Only "heart-sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" can save them from the most ghastly of fates (III.iii.77–82).

For the first time Alonso becomes aware of his appalling guilt. It is a recognition followed by a state of desperation, but the desperation is in turn succeeded by the deepest remorse. Remorse will prove to be the cleansing agent that will purge him of sin and sinful ambition. It is not at all clear, however, that Antonio and Sebastian share his guilt and remorse. Gonzalo appears to believe that they do. He says:

All three of them are desperate; their great guilt,  
Like poison given to work a great time after,  
Now 'gins to bite the spirits (III.iii.104–6).

However, as Kermode points out, Gonzalo, although present, has not heard Ariel's speech to the "three men of sin", which was designed for their ears only.<sup>22</sup> Consequently he does not understand the reason for their desperation. Neither in this scene nor in Act V do Antonio and Sebastian show any signs of repentance. It seems more likely that their reaction is simply one of fear.

Shakespeare makes distinctions among the members of the Court Party. Gonzalo is a man of benevolent disposition who does not willfully commit wicked actions and who actively seeks to mitigate the evil effected by the wickedness of others, as is demonstrated by his kindness to Prospero and Miranda in their hour of need (I.ii.160–8). Because of this the punishment inflicted on Gonzalo by Prospero is far milder than that suffered by Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian. He is not made to believe that he has lost a son; the harpy does not appear to him; the island which seems to Antonio and Sebastian a barren place, "perfum'd by a fen," to him looks luxuriantly green (II.i.45–55). Nevertheless, there are limits to his moral virtue. He continues to serve the king whom he knows to have conspired with Antonio to murder Prospero and his daughter. In fact, he obediently carries out the orders to set them adrift on "A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd, / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast;" (I.ii.146–7), although he does have the courage partially to violate the spirit of those orders by providing the unfortunate pair with food, water, clothing and, above all, the books that Prospero prized above his dukedom. Gonzalo's subservience to the established political authority, no matter how unjust its acts, fits well with his extraordinary antagonism to the boatswain. Gonzalo believes the right to rule is based exclusively on inherited title, and hence that the anointed king should never be questioned. Consequently he thinks anyone who asserts that legitimate claim to rule is founded on knowledge rather than title is a blasphemer who deserves death by hanging. Yet the beliefs which guide his actions appear at variance with the political philosophy contained in his famous Golden Age speech, based, as has

22. Frank Kermode, ed., *The Tempest*, *op. cit.*, p. 92, n. 99.

often been pointed out, on Montaigne's *Des Cannibales* (II.i.139–64). In that speech he maintains that the best society would be a state of nature in which there are no laws, no sovereignty, no rulership whatsoever. The apparent discrepancy between his practice and his theory can in part be attributed to his intellectual deficiency. Antonio and Sebastian poke fun at his inconsistency in claiming that were he the king of the isle he would “with such perfection govern” that there would be no sovereignty. But I think that there may be a connection between his subservience to conventional authority and his opinion that an anarchical society is best. Gonzalo does not understand the purpose of political rule, at least as that purpose was conceived by a philosopher like Plato, and hence he does not see that it requires knowledge or art. In his speech, he twice states that the people of his “kingdom” will be innocent. He never mentions goodness or virtue. Clearly he identifies virtue with innocence. The people of his society will behave decently, not because they have knowingly resisted temptations to behave otherwise, but because they know of no alternative to decency. In that respect, as in its lack of political institutions, Gonzalo's Golden Age resembles the “healthy” city described by Socrates in Book II of *The Republic* (369c–372d), a city which in that dialogue is destined to be superseded by a far different sort of regime. The Platonic view, which distinguishes clearly between innocence and virtue, is that men cannot become virtuous without instruction and training of the most intensive and all-pervasive kind. It is the prime purpose of the state to provide that instruction. Clearly this purpose cannot be carried out unless the rulers possess knowledge of the highest kind, knowledge of what virtue is, together with the art to instill it in their subjects. Unlike virtue, innocence does not require to be implanted in men; it does not depend on training or instruction. Gonzalo believes that if men are not corrupted by laws, commerce and other trappings of civilization, they will exist in a state of innocence and purity, requiring no governance. (It hardly needs remarking that in the character of Caliban Shakespeare provides us with a counterexample to this view.) Gonzalo's naive equation of virtue with innocence leads him, then, to believe that no government is the best government and also to deprecate the role of knowledge in rulership. Hence in a community possessing political institutions he sees no alternative to the legally constituted authority, regardless of how foolishly or unjustly that authority may behave.

It seems entirely clear that Prospero adheres to the Platonic conception of the purpose of political rule and of what is required to carry it out. His regime is the polar opposite of Gonzalo's placid, anarchic utopia. Prospero's island is more intensively governed than any actual community has ever been. Through the instrumentality of Ariel and the lesser spirits he is omnipresent; all of his subjects are constantly under his surveillance and supervision. The purpose of his rule is to bring each of them to the highest degree of virtue of which he is capable.<sup>23</sup>

23. “Is there anything better for a city than the coming to be in it of the best possible women and men?” *Republic*, 456e.

Despite his intellectual failings and moral imperfections, Gonzalo is represented to us as essentially a good man. It is reasonable to assume that he would have resisted the temptations to which Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian succumbed even if he had been assured that his crimes would go unpunished. In that sense, he is virtuous. Alonso is a man who could not resist temptation, and in that sense he is vicious. But his viciousness is curable. He can be led to true repentance; he can be genuinely reformed. The effect of Prospero's magic upon him is to lift him to the moral level of Gonzalo. In the future, we may believe, he will not require the fear of punishment to restrain him from wickedness. It is otherwise with Antonio and Sebastian. They are, in a sense, morally incorrigible. But I think Prospero does succeed in teaching them something. They learn, or at least are made to believe, that crime does not pay. For this reason they, too, will refrain from future wickedness. They will be tractable to Prospero's commands because they will fear his power.

Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian are men who are chiefly motivated, not by desire for bodily gratifications, but by ambition, by a desire for power and glory. In the language of *The Republic* they are members of the class in which silver is the primary metal. The spirited element in their souls is excessively dominant and has caused them to become tyrannical. The purpose of the punitive justice inflicted upon them is to curb their spirited element and to render them gentle. When that has been accomplished they will be fit to serve Prospero as his auxiliaries. The purpose of the punishment is at most the reform of character. There is never any question of providing them with intellectual training.

*The Servants: Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban*

The second scene of Act II presents a hilarious account of the circumstances under which the members of this trio get together. Their meeting culminates in the passing around of a bottle of sack, which Stephano managed to salvage from the ship. First things first! Both Stephano and Trinculo are, to say the least, heavy drinkers. As for Caliban, he is so entranced by the delights of what seems to him a celestial liquor that he believes Stephano must be a god. In his enthusiasm he is ready to kneel, to kiss Stephano's foot and to perform all manner of obeisances never expected of him by Prospero. He casts aside his allegiance to Prospero and accepts Stephano as his new lord. In this respect his action parodies Antonio's treachery to Prospero in Milan. Strangely enough, this trading off of a good master for a bad one produces in him an illusion of newly acquired freedom. He sings a wonderful song proclaiming his independence from Prospero.

No more dams I'll make for fish;  
Nor fetch in firing  
At requiring;

Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish:

'Ban, 'Ban, Cacaliban

Has a new master: —get a new man.

Freedom, high-day! high-day, freedom! high-day, freedom! (II.ii.180–6)

Freedom is also a concern of Stephano and Trinculo. In the second scene of Act III they, too, sing a song about it. It goes:

Flout 'em and scout 'em,

And scout 'em and flout 'em;

Thought is free (III.ii.119–21).

Caliban points out that they have got the tune wrong. To the astonishment of Stephano and Trinculo the melody is then correctly played on a tabor and pipe by the invisible Ariel, who is watching them. What is the meaning of this strange episode? I suggest the following answer. Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban do not know what true freedom is. They mistake the emancipation of the appetites from the rule of reason for freedom of thought. This is why they are said to get the tune wrong. Ariel, who is also concerned with freedom, has a far better understanding of its meaning; consequently he plays the “freedom” tune correctly. For Ariel freedom means the emancipation of the intellect, first from the rule of the body, and second, from the requirements of rulership.

The trio comprised by Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban is in some ways a parody of the royal trio made up of Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian. Clearly the members of the first threesome are representatives of a human type lower than that exemplified by the members of the Court Party. Unlike Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian, who are concerned with power and glory, the three servants are primarily directed toward the pleasures of food, drink and sex. They are men who are dominated by the appetitive part of the soul; as such they are members of Plato's lowest class. It is true that their clumsy attempt to assassinate Prospero is a comic imitation of the similar action undertaken by Antonio and his Neapolitan allies, but we should observe that what really motivates Stephano to agree to the murder plot is his desire to possess Miranda. There is no hope on Prospero's part of ever producing moral virtue in the souls of these individuals. They are less corrigible than the members of the royal party. Influencing their imagination does not suffice to rule them; they must be controlled by the fear of physical pain. They will never be able to rule themselves; they will never be free of the need for external control. Antonio and Sebastian could be taught that crime does not pay in a single lesson. The servants, one sadly imagines, will always need to have a stick held over them.

Clearly Prospero and Ariel require a powerful instrument to control and to chastise the trio of murderous clowns. For this purpose they employ a number of spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds. The dogs proceed to hunt the servants across the island, while goblins pinch them and afflict them with various

sorts of cramps. Now in *The Republic* Plato makes a famous comparison between the soldier-guardians and dogs (375d–376b). Furthermore, he makes it plain that one of the functions of the guardian class is to put down rebellions originating in the lower elements of the society. The spirits in *The Tempest* who assume the form of dogs play exactly the same auxiliary role in relation to Prospero and Ariel as is played by the soldier-guardians in relation to the philosopher-rulers. Within Prospero's household, Ariel is the representative of intellect and Caliban personifies bodily desire. So far, we have had no character representing the spirited part of the soul, the part which is the dominant element in the soldier-guardians. That lack, it seems to me, is filled by the dog-spirits. In this connection the names by which Prospero and Ariel call their dogs are of some interest. There are four of them: "Mountain," "Silver," "Fury," and "Tyrant." We recall that according to *The Republic*, silver is the metal which God has mixed into the souls of the auxiliaries. The name "Fury" possibly reflects the Platonic teaching that the spirited element in the soul, which is dominant in the soldier-guardians, is the seat and source of the emotion of anger. "Tyrant" might have been selected because of the concern Plato expresses that the guardians may turn upon the citizens, becoming their savage masters, if the proper educational measures to prevent this are not taken (416a–b). "Mountain" seems a strange name for a dog. It is conceivable that Shakespeare chose it with a view to Plato's description of the site the guardians will select for their encampment. It is to be a site from which the guardians can anticipate and avert both internal disobedience and external attack (415d). Such a site would naturally be an elevated location, a hill or a mountain. So there are some grounds for the speculation that all four names are derived from *The Republic's* description of the guardians and their way of life. Needless to say, the interpretation of the play which I am offering does not depend upon the truth of this claim.

### *Ferdinand*

When we first meet Ferdinand we find him mourning his father's death and expressing no interest at all in the fact that he has just become, as he believes, the King of Naples. Since his sentiments are expressed in a soliloquy, we can assume they are sincere. Ferdinand, then, unlike most members of the court party, is not dominated by the desire for power, honor or fame. At the same time, his intense love for Miranda seems in no way lustful. He is no more dominated by the bodily appetites than by a desire for kingship and glory. He is free of the imperfections and vices that characterize the other human beings who fall into Prospero's hands.

Prospero, however, refuses to allow an immediate consummation of the love between Ferdinand and Miranda. Instead, he subjects Ferdinand to a series of severe ordeals. These ordeals consist in part of a training in bodily asceticism.

He is placed on a diet of sea-water and “fresh-brook muscles, wither’d roots, and husks” (1.ii.465–6). The major emphasis, however, is on severe and prolonged physical labor. Prospero compels him to toil all afternoon carrying and piling thousands of logs. This poses a problem. If Ferdinand is already in a state of moral perfection, why submit him to these severities? Since he has no faults to atone, the discipline cannot be punitive in nature.

Once again, I believe we can find our best interpretive clue in the teachings of Plato. In *The Republic* there are two entirely different systems of education. One is designed for the soldier-guardians. It consists of a combination of musical and gymnastic training designed to produce moral virtue. The other kind is for the potential philosophers. It consists primarily of intellectual training and is designed to produce intellectual virtue. I suggest that Prospero’s treatment of the Court Party corresponds to the first kind of education, his treatment of Ferdinand to the second. It is important to note that, aside from Caliban, Ferdinand is the only person on the island to do any real work.<sup>24</sup> His physical labor, log carrying, corresponds to the intellectual labor of the students of philosophy in *The Republic*. The subject matter of the prephilosophical education in *The Republic* consists primarily of mathematics. The philosophical education proper is identified with dialectic, which among other things involves training in logic. This is the discipline that culminates in the vision of the good; Plato stresses that it is the only route by which one can arrive at that goal (533c). Suitable candidates for the study of dialectic must be persistent and love hard work, for the discipline involves hard study and a labor of learning (535b–c).

The scene in which we see Ferdinand carrying logs is the same scene in which he and Miranda plight their troth to each other. It is the fifth out of nine scenes that comprise the play. Literally as well as figuratively, it is the central scene. In the course of it much emphasis is placed on the logs, on the strenuousness of the task of piling them and on the fact that Ferdinand would find the task intolerable, were it not the case that successfully completing it is a necessary condition for the attainment of Miranda. “For your sake,” he says to her, “Am I this patient log-man” (III.i.66–7). Why does Shakespeare choose log piling as an appropriate training for Ferdinand? Is it possible that the logs possess a symbolic significance? It has been suggested that there may be a pun on the words “log” and “logic”. If there is any merit in this speculation, Ferdinand’s labors might be considered as an analogue to the training in dialectic. It is interesting to note that in *The Statesman* the Eleatic Stranger teaches Young Socrates that the student of dialectic must learn to overcome his natural impatience with lengthy arguments (286b). Patience is an indispensable virtue for the dialectician.

There is, however, a second and gentler part of Ferdinand’s education that consists of witnessing the masque in Act IV. The masque is perhaps the prime

24. Cf. Still, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

example in *The Tempest* of imitative poetry serving the function assigned to it by Socrates. This is ironic, because the masque, which belongs to the species of the-play-within-a-play, is poetry that is doubly imitative. It is performed by actors who imitate spirits who, in turn, are imitating goddesses. The masque combines imitative poetry with music, song and dance. Now Socrates concludes his discussion of poetry and music in Book III of *The Republic* by asserting that rhythm and harmony imitate or follow speech (poetry), while speech imitates and accompanies a certain kind of character or disposition of the soul. Not only speech and music, but all the crafts, including painting, weaving, embroidery, housebuilding and furniture making are said to display either grace or gracelessness.

And gracelessness, clumsiness, inharmoniousness, are akin to bad speech and bad disposition, while their opposites are akin to, and imitations of, the opposite—moderate and good disposition (401a).

Therefore it will be necessary for the statesman to supervise, not only poets, but all craftsmen and to compel them to impress only the image of the good disposition on that which they produce. He must look for

. . . those craftsmen whose good natural endowments make them able to track down the nature of what is fine and graceful, so that the young, dwelling as it were in a healthy place, will be benefited by everything; and from that place something of the fine works will strike their vision or their hearing, like a breeze bringing health from good places; (401c)

But the rearing in music is most sovereign, because

. . . rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them; and they make a man graceful if he is correctly reared, if not, the opposite (401d).

It is hard to imagine any example of poetic art that more perfectly embodies the characteristics of gracefulness, harmoniousness and rhythm than does the poetry of the masque, or which would be more likely to engender a graceful, harmonious and temperate disposition in the hearer. Unquestionably Shakespeare intended that the dance should display similar attributes, for the stage directions call for the Reapers to join with the Nymphs in “a graceful dance.” Ferdinand appropriately says of the masque as a whole: “This is a most majestic vision, and / Harmonious charmingly” (IV.i.118–19). Thus both grace and harmoniousness are explicitly asserted by Shakespeare to be characteristics of this spectacle.

In terms of content, the poetry of the masque consists chiefly of a series of nature images, nearly all of them marked by extraordinary beauty, gentleness and tranquility.

Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas  
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;

Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,  
 And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;  
 Thy banks with pioned and twilled brims,  
 Which spongy April at thy hest betrimms,  
 To make cold nymphs chaste crowns; (IV.i.60–6)

Such poetry is, indeed, “a breeze bringing health from good places.”

There is, however, an even more striking respect in which the masque fulfils one of the chief purposes attributed by Socrates to the proper kind of poetic and musical education. The end of that education is to produce “musical” or “harmonious” men who display the virtue of moderation or temperance. Specifically, it is to produce men who will be moderate and restrained in sexual matters.

“Is the naturally right kind of love to love in a moderate and musical way what’s orderly and fine?”

“Quite so,” he said.

“Nothing that’s mad or akin to licentiousness must approach the right kind of love?”

“No, it mustn’t” (403a).

Socrates concludes the discussion of music by saying:

At least it’s ended where it ought to end. Surely musical matters should end in love matters that concern the fair (403b–c).

This comment may be said to sum up the action of *The Tempest* as a whole, but it has particular application to the masque. The context into which the masque is introduced is Prospero’s tending of Miranda’s hand in marriage to Ferdinand and his subsequent stern admonition to his prospective son-in-law that his daughter’s virginity be respected as inviolate until the day of the wedding festivities. Despite Ferdinand’s firm assurances, Prospero finds it necessary to repeat the admonition prior to the beginning of the masque. An echo of Socrates’ comment concerning the maddening effect of sexual pleasure resounds in Prospero’s warning: “. . . the strongest oaths are straw / To the fire i’ the blood:” (IV.i.53–4).

Now insofar as the masque may be said to contain a story-line, the plot revolves about the defeat of Venus and her son, Cupid, by the more chaste goddesses, Iris, Ceres and Juno. Venus and Cupid do not make an appearance and consequently are not directly imitated. But they are said by Iris to have made an attempt to charm Ferdinand and Miranda into paying an illicitly premature bed-right. Iris narrates that, being repulsed by the lovers, the erotic goddess and her waspish-headed son have fled in defeat and humiliation, and that Cupid has renounced his vocation. The masque celebrates the moderate and musical love of Ferdinand and Miranda who refuse to allow themselves to be defiled by anything resembling licentiousness. Participating in this celebration are “temperate nymphs” and “cold nymphs,” wearing “chaste crowns.”

The art of Prospero or Shakespeare is capable of creating terrifying apparitions in order to cleanse the guilt of wicked men such as Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian. This art can also be employed for higher ends. Clearly, one of Prospero's purposes in creating the masque is to educate Ferdinand and Miranda in the musical way of life, by moderating their passions. It may also be intended to prepare them for the sight of intellectual visions that far surpass even the lovely images of nature evoked by the masque's spirit-goddesses. For when we next see Ferdinand and Miranda they are discovered in Prospero's cell, where they have been enjoying the fullest privacy. Despite their earlier inclination toward amorous dalliance, now they are not making love. Instead, they are playing at chess, a game that is an obvious symbol of intellectual activity. Still says, remarking on this scene, "Traditionally, it is said that chess symbolises the relation of the human spirit to the ideal."<sup>25</sup> Whether or not Still is correct on this point, Webster's Dictionary attests to the fact that an early form of the game went by the name "philosopher's table." Perhaps the poetry of the masque is intended to serve as a prelude to and a preparation for philosophy. In fact, we see that it does perform this role in the play. The fading of the vision of the masque is immediately succeeded by and becomes the occasion for Prospero's great philosophical speech addressed to Ferdinand.

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 (iv.i.148–58).

What Prospero says in this speech bears a striking similarity to Plato's teaching in *The Republic* concerning the realm of becoming.<sup>26</sup> There are few, if any, instances in the whole Shakespearean opus of such an explicit enunciation of a major philosophical doctrine.

It is time to give further consideration to Miranda's significance in the play.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

26. For a different interpretation of the speech see Walter Clyde Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1959), Ch. VI, n. 57, pp. 243f. Curry says: "Shakespeare's great passage on the evanescence of the world and what is in it is distinctly Christian and conventional in spirit." Curry is correct in pointing out that Christians conceived of the world as beginning and passing away in time. However, he neglects to consider the anti-Christian significance of the lines:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on; and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

Her name means, literally, “that which is to be wondered at.” Union with Miranda is the goal and purpose of all of Ferdinand’s labors, as the vision of the good is the object of the labors of the philosopher in *The Republic*. Like the vision of the good, Miranda is described by both Ferdinand and Prospero as supremely beautiful and supremely desirable, far outstripping in value everything else the world has to offer. For Prospero she is “that for which I live” (IV.i.4). I have suggested that one of Miranda’s functions in the play is to represent the human soul. In her relationship with Ferdinand and Prospero, however, I believe that she stands for wisdom. Union with Miranda signifies attainment of the truth. This is what Ferdinand means to say when he tells his father that he has received from Prospero a second life (v.i.194–5).

It now becomes clear that Prospero’s chief purpose in raising the tempest and in bringing Alonso’s party to shore was to unite Ferdinand with Miranda. When Ferdinand and Miranda pledge themselves to each other, Prospero says: “My rejoicing at nothing can be more.” In other words, as a philosopher, and as an old philosopher, his chief concern is to find a successor. He needs to discover a young, potential philosopher, to whom, after the proper testing and training, he can transmit his most precious possession, wisdom.

## 6. SHAKESPEARE’S IMITATION OF THE PHILOSOPHER-KING

Socrates’ contention that the imitative poet feeds the lower part of the soul while starving the higher part is closely related to his claim that such a poet will inevitably be led to imitate the passionate person of mixed and variegated character, the person who is typically riven by conflicts. The complicated, tempest-tossed soul makes a much more interesting subject for dramatic portraiture than does the simple, steady, tranquil character of the man who is unqualifiedly good.

Now then, the irritable disposition affords much and varied imitation, while the prudent and quiet character, which is always nearly equal to itself, is neither easily imitated nor, when imitated, easily understood, especially by a festive assembly where all sorts of human beings are gathered in a theater. For the imitation is of a condition that is surely alien to them (604e).

Clearly, it is even more difficult for the dramatic poet to present as his protagonist a philosopher, especially a philosopher actively engaged in the pursuit of wisdom. What was possible for the imitative art of the Platonic dialogue is not possible for the imitative art of the theater.<sup>27</sup>

Within the limits of artistic possibility, Shakespeare in *The Tempest* attempts to answer this criticism. In the character of Prospero he displays to us a man who, at least by the end of the play, has become perfectly virtuous. Prospero,

27. This point is made by Bloom in his “Interpretive Essay,” *op. cit.*, p. 360.

of course, had always been an essentially good man, but both in Milan and on the island he suffered from certain imperfections that detracted from his virtue. His vice in Milan may be described as a kind of high-minded selfishness. His dedication to the betterment of his mind caused him to become forgetful of his obligations to his subjects and his state. He had not yet learned, in the words of the drunken Stephano, to "shift for all the rest" (v.i.256). This failing was largely corrected when, on the island, he accepted the burdens of rulership. We are made to see, however, that vestigially the vice lingered on. First of all, in the early period of his relationship with Caliban he fell into the same sort of mistake that he had originally made with regard to his brother. In both cases, failure to recognize the native depravity of those with whom he was dealing caused him to be vastly overtrusting. Perhaps it is characteristic of noble men to assume that others have natures similar to their own, at least until painful experience teaches them otherwise. After Caliban attempted to rape Miranda, Prospero came to understand very clearly what sort of measures were required in order to govern a being of that sort. Yet, in Act IV we witness another failure on Prospero's part to exercise adequate control over Caliban. This time the failure was not due to ignorance of Caliban's nature or of his vicious intentions; Ariel had been keeping Prospero advised concerning the progress of the servants' conspiracy. The failure was due exclusively to inattention. Prospero's enjoyment of his association with Ferdinand and Miranda, the beings to whom he was spiritually akin, obliterated from his mind, at least temporarily, the necessity of coping with lower but more urgent matters. This was the mirror image of his original mistake in Milan. However, once having recalled Caliban's mutiny to mind, the vehemence of Prospero's reaction strongly indicates to the audience that he would never again relapse into this kind of self-indulgence.

His other moral failing, if indeed it should be reckoned as such, is exhibited by Prospero only on the island and never in Milan. Many commentators have seen him as overirascible and excessively punitive, especially in his dealings with noble characters such as Ferdinand, Miranda and Ariel. Some have thought him also harsh in his treatment of Caliban, who after all cannot help being the brutish thing he is. If this criticism of Prospero is sound, it would seem to confirm Plato's contention that the dramatist inevitably finds the irritable disposition an attractive object of imitation! But it is by no means certain that the criticism is justified. With regard to Ferdinand and Miranda it is clear that Prospero's anger is merely feigned. Threatening speeches to Ferdinand and stern admonitions to Miranda are interspersed with asides to the audience in which Prospero expresses his joy over their falling in love. If any doubt about his true feelings were to remain, it would be dispelled at the beginning of Act IV when Prospero says to Ferdinand, "all thy vexations / Were but my trials of thy love" (IV.i.5-6). The seeming anger expressed by Prospero to Ariel is probably no more genuine than that directed to Ferdinand. Prospero knows he needs to threaten Ariel in order to keep him "correspondent to command," but

there can be no doubt that he loves his “bird” nor that he is deeply sympathetic to Ariel’s desire for liberty. It is notable that Prospero never expresses anger toward these characters when speaking in soliloquy or with other personages. He exhibits anger, or the appearance of anger, only to their faces, and always for tactical reasons which he either explains or are readily explainable. This is not the case, however, in his relations with the evil characters of the play. His anger toward Antonio, and to a lesser extent toward Alonso, is both deep and genuine. That is clearly revealed in his narration to Miranda of the events surrounding his deposition and by his admission to Ariel, “with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick” (v.i.25).

The threats and curses Prospero directs to Caliban in Act I, scene ii, might conceivably be interpreted merely as a means of frightening him into obedience, but Prospero’s soliloquy in Act IV makes plain the state of his true feelings toward Caliban.

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature  
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,  
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;  
And as with age his body uglier grows,  
So his mind cankers. I will plague them all,  
Even to roaring (IV.i.188–93).

However, Prospero has excellent cause to be angry with Antonio and Caliban. They are, after all, his would-be murderers. In *The Republic* Socrates asks:

And what about when a man believes he’s being done injustice? Doesn’t his spirit in this case boil and become harsh and form an alliance for battle with what seems just? (440c)

There is no indication that anger under these circumstances is blameworthy. It is the function of the spirited part to throttle and frustrate wicked desires, especially in oneself, but also in others. In so doing the spirit properly allies itself with the reason against the appetitive element. Nevertheless, according to Platonic teaching, the spirited part of the soul should itself be under the control of reason. It should be obedient to the reason as a dog is obedient to the shepherd that owns it (440d).

At one point in Act IV it does appear that Prospero has lost control of his spirited element. This occurs in the middle of the masque when Prospero remembers the plot against his life that is being hatched by Caliban and his confederates. Ferdinand says:

This is strange: your father’s in some passion  
That works him strongly.

And Miranda replies:

Never till this day  
Saw I him touch’d with anger, so distemper’d (IV.i.143–5).

Prospero himself refers to his need to still his "beating mind." The extremity of Prospero's anger may be caused in part by his realization that he himself is to blame for letting the conspiracy progress as far as it has. Perhaps he recognizes that he has relapsed into the indifference to political urgencies that had caused his downfall in Milan. If so, his anger would be directed at least partially toward himself, and this may explain its intensity.

In any case, at this point in the play Prospero's soul, as Miranda tells us, is clearly in a distempered state. But the disturbance is short-lived. By the beginning of Act V he has recovered his composure. His speech to Ariel contains an explicit recognition of the proper relation between reason and spirit, as that was understood by Plato.

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part: the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further (v.i.25–30; italics mine).

At the end of the play Prospero fits perfectly the description of the just man in *The Republic*, the man who possesses a well-balanced, harmonious soul in which reason rules over the spirited and desiring elements. Prospero's theory of punishment is identical with Plato's. The purpose of the chastisements he metes out is to reform those who are reformable and to restrain the incurably wicked. Prospero may be tempted by thoughts of revenge, but in the last analysis he never aims for vengeance. Even his anger toward Caliban has abated. The repentant monster is offered pardon and allowed to seek for grace (v.i.292–5). Prospero's rule over his subjects is both perfectly beneficent and perfectly wise. He not only corresponds to the just man as described in *The Republic*, he is the image of the philosopher-king. Michael Platt correctly remarks "his rule is without law, it aspires to a justice and goodness above mere positive human law."<sup>28</sup> In *The Statesman* the Eleatic Stranger tells us that the truest and best constitution is one without laws. It is patterned on the doctor's supervision of his patients and on the ship captain's control over his crew. The best political order is one in which a wise ruler, unfettered by a legal code, continually makes fresh decisions in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the moment as to what is best for each of his subjects and for the city as a whole.<sup>29</sup> Continuing this theme, the Athenian Stranger of *The Laws* states that the best of constitutions is born when "supreme power is combined in one person with wisdom and temperance."<sup>30</sup> In the rulership of Prospero Shakespeare has exemplified perfectly such a constitution.

28. Michael Platt, "Shakespeare's Apology for Poetic Wisdom," p. 10 (unpublished).

29. *Statesman*, 295b–297e.

30. *Laws*, 712a.

As author of this play, Shakespeare has accomplished what seemed nearly impossible for the imitative poet to do. Not only has he portrayed a perfectly good man; in the character of Prospero he has given us a full-scale portrayal of the philosopher. In fact, the play provides three depictions of the philosopher's life, for Ariel and Ferdinand must also be reckoned among the company of *The Tempest's* philosophers. Prospero's life history, as revealed to us in the play, includes a representation of four phases in the philosopher's career. The education of the philosopher (his ascent from the cave of political life) is depicted quite realistically by Prospero's withdrawal from the governance of his dukedom in order to devote himself to "the bettering of his mind" (I.ii.90). Subsequent phases are represented metaphorically. The involuntary sea journey is the counterpart of the forced descent into the cave; the exercise of magic art on the island corresponds to the period of political rule; the release from the cave is symbolized by the renunciation of magic and the impending return to Milan. In Prospero's case the emphasis is on the period of political rule. This is the only phase of his life actually imitated on stage. The case of Ariel is similar. His life on the island, like that of Prospero, represents political rulership. His emancipation from servitude symbolizes the second ascent from the cave. His life history, however, contains no phase depicting the education of the philosopher. In his story that period is simply omitted. What is substituted for it is a representation of prephilosophical life, that early phase of the potential philosopher's existence during which he is still enslaved by the desires of the body. This period, of course, is represented by Ariel's servitude under Sycorax and his imprisonment in the cloven pine. With respect to Ferdinand, however, the emphasis is entirely on the first ascent, the period of philosophical education. But we receive an intimation that the succeeding phase of rulership will presently begin, for apparently Alonso is about to abdicate in his son's favor (v.i.148-52).

Three is the critical number in *The Tempest*, as it is in *The Republic*. Just as the play contains three depictions of a philosopher, so, I would suggest, there figure in it three representations of Shakespeare. I have already put forward the claim that Prospero and Shakespeare in some important ways are intersubstitutable. I have also argued that Ariel symbolizes Prospero's intellect. But if Prospero is identified with Shakespeare, and Ariel with Prospero's intellect, it follows that Ariel also represents Shakespeare's intellect. When we think of Prospero as Shakespeare's *alter ego* we put the stress on the former's role as a magician and we conceive of his magic as the analogue of Shakespeare's poetic art. Ariel, however, is also a potent magician and a master of the art of creating illusions. In fact most of the apparitions and illusions of the play, including the tempest itself, are directly produced by him, rather than by Prospero. His superhuman powers in some ways exceed those of Prospero. His abilities instantaneously to transport himself wherever he wishes and to assume any shape he pleases are particularly suggestive of Shakespeare's theatrical art. There is another way in which the two are linked. Shakespeare's complaint: "And almost

thence my nature is subdued / To what it works in, like the dyer's hand" could be placed in Ariel's mouth even more appropriately than in Prospero's. If Prospero's renunciation of his magic parallels Shakespeare's withdrawal from the theater, so does Ariel's emancipation. Ariel, then, is altogether as legitimate a representative of the author as is Prospero. According to one perspective Shakespeare is to be identified with Prospero; according to another he is Ariel. What we should not do, however, is to attempt to view the play from both perspectives simultaneously. When we think of Ariel as Shakespeare's *alter ego* we should regard Prospero in his aspect as a philosopher, rather than as a magician-poet. Shakespeare as Ariel is a poet serving a philosopher who is distinct from himself and to whom he is subordinate. If Shakespeare is Ariel, then Prospero is Plato. Shakespeare as Prospero is philosopher and poet in one, just as Prospero is both a student of the liberal arts and a practitioner of magic. That he, too, is both of these things seems to be subtly implied by Shakespeare.

It may be that there is another character in the play who, like Ariel, represents Shakespeare as an imitative poet in the service of a philosopher. Specifically, this character stands for Shakespeare in his capacity as the author of *The Tempest*. He is the lowly boatswain with whom we became acquainted in the first scene. To use the language of *The Republic*, the boatswain is represented as being an auxiliary to the ship-master. It is his special function to "speak to the mariners," transmitting to them the commands of the master, very much as the auxiliary class in *The Republic* enforces the decrees of the philosopher-rulers. Unless that office is performed, says the master, the ship will run aground. We saw earlier that the ship can be regarded as a metaphor for the state. It can also be viewed as a symbol of *The Republic*, Plato's greatest work on the subject of the state. As the author of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare serves as Plato's auxiliary. He "speaks to the mariners" by transmitting the teachings of *The Republic* to a far wider audience than would ever be comprised by the readership of that book. Inevitably this means that he cannot speak on the same level as did Plato. There can be no discussion of the forms; the philosophical argumentation must be omitted. Appropriately enough, the boatswain gives the orders: "Take in the topsail," "Down with the topmast! Yare! lower, lower!"

Yet Shakespeare's accomplishment is very great. Not only has he succeeded in portraying the philosopher and the best political order, he has represented them to his audience as supremely admirable. The absolute and unfettered rule of wisdom is depicted as an extremely desirable state of affairs which results in the greatest possible happiness for the ruled. Many persons who have never read *The Republic* or, having read it, have rejected its teachings concerning the best way of life and the best regime, are nevertheless enchanted by *The Tempest*. Few can fail to admire Prospero; few could wish not to live under his rule.

We can imagine Shakespeare saying to Plato: You ask me to justify my imitative art and to show cause why I should not be banished from your city. You

have yourself admitted that the philosopher-ruler requires an auxiliary to defend him from his enemies and to help him rule the nonphilosophic multitude. I shall be your guardian, your boatswain, your Ariel. My weapon is my power to enchant, and thereby to persuade those who cannot or will not listen to your arguments. In *The Republic* you say that upon emerging from the cave the neophyte cannot look directly at the celestial bodies; he must first see them reflected in the water. In my watery play your divine appearance shall shine, and those who cannot gaze directly upon you will see your reflection there. Of your bones are coral made. Those are pearls that were your eyes. Nothing of you that doth fade, but doth suffer a sea-change into something rich and strange. Do you love me, master? no?