

“In This Last Tempest”: Narratives of Dying Well on the
English Stage from the Moralities to Shakespeare

by

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Class of 2013

An essay submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Theater

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Acknowledgments

As with any major endeavor, the final product of this thesis is the result of the influences, contributions, and support of far too many people to name in the space allotted. However, a few people must be recognized for going above and beyond the calls of duty and friendship.

First, of course, is Yuri Kordonsky, who has been a mentor and an inspiration to me practically since I set foot on this campus: working with you has been one of the greatest privileges I have known. Thank you for teaching me that directing is both an art and a craft, that the stuff of theatre is the material for dreams, and that limitations truly are creative.

Second, of course, are all the people who made my production of *The Tempest* a reality, particularly my brilliant cast: Zach Libresco, Emily Hunt, Paulie Lowther, and Maddy Oswald. Thank you for your devotion, your passion, and your light. To work with such talented actors on such an ambitious project is a project I can only dream of repeating.

Thanks are also due to the rest of the Theatre Department, particularly Jack Carr, for welcoming me to Wesleyan and for his constant support and encouragement; Rashida Shaw, for inspiring me to think as a scholar and a teacher; Cláudia Nascimento, for demanding that I never be less than my best; and professor emeritus David B. Jaffe, for his passion, energy, and relentless exhortations aimed at improving a young clutch of actors that I had the honor to be one of.

Infinite thanks to the many artists who have had such a powerful influence on my thinking and creating, particularly Tessa Young and Emmie Finckel, brilliant designers; Bonnie J. Monte and Brian Crowe of the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, who taught me to cut, direct, and play with Shakespeare; the entire population of the Accademia dell'Arte in Arezzo, both permanent and my classmates in Spring 2012; and, of course, Second Stage, which gave me a place to dream and create before I knew what my dreams even were: you are the best people I could possibly have as mentors and colleagues.

Last but certainly not least, thanks to Andrea Ruiz-Lopez and to my family, Stephen Orvis, Carol Ann Drogus, Will Orvis, Walt Orvis, and Mary Lou Orvis, who have all supported this project since it was just an idea in my head and contributed their immensely useful reflections, thoughts, intuitions, and jokes to the process to keep me sane and to keep me on track. I love you all.

Introduction: The Fundamental Struggle

Thow I be nakyd and pore of array
And wurmys knawe me al abowte,
Yit loke ye drede me nyth and day;
For whan Deth comyth ye stande in
dowte!
Ebyn lyke to me, as I yow say,
Shull all ye be here in this rowte,
Whan I yow chalange at my day,
I xal yow make right lowe to lowth...
—Mors, *The N-Town Death of Herod*,
ca. 1468-1500¹

...To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay,
there's the rub:
For in that sleep of death what dreams
may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal
coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life...
—Hamlet, *Hamlet* III.i.64-69, ca. 1600

The confrontation with death is one of the most transcendental and universal human experiences, and has been a subject of inquiry (philosophical, religious, and artistic) from the earliest eras of our cultural history. This confrontation is particularly potent onstage, where the transience of the art form can serve to reinforce the theme of the audience's own ephemeral nature (Calderwood 189). The current thesis examines the changes in the depictions of dying seen on the English stage from the late medieval period to Shakespeare's plays, spanning roughly the years 1400-1600. As we will see, in these two centuries a massive ideological transformation took place from a stable and known world to a world rocked by doubt and a new belief in the fundamental instability of human existence. Sea changes occurred in religious thought and political reality that affected the lives of every Englishman exposed to the theatre, necessitating a change in performance texts and practices.

¹ For easier reading, I have replaced the *thorn* (Þ) and *yogh* (ȝ) of the original Middle English (where it was maintained) with the modern *th* and *y*, respectively. In all other respects the texts are presented as identically as space allows to the editions cited in the Bibliography.

One constant that must be understood as a starting point for our discussion, however, is that throughout this time English audiences understood the confrontation with death as not only an existential, but also a fundamentally *moral* crisis. There was, in other words, a desire to die not just comfortably, but to *die well*, in the way that society deemed socially and religiously acceptable. Throughout the essay, I use the term “die well” to refer to the process of dying in accordance with the ideals held by the period under consideration. This raises another fundamental point that must be understood about the older English mindset: for the original audiences of these plays, death, particularly onstage, was a process, rather than an event. This is why I have chosen to discuss “dying well” rather than, say, “a good death.”

The moral injunction to die well arose naturally from the medieval culture’s deep-rooted Christian tradition, which viewed the manner of dying as a deciding factor in the soul’s destination in the afterlife (Spinrad 162). This understanding led to and was reinforced by what Kathrine Koller has referred to as the “how-to-die literature” of the period (383). These texts instructed in the *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, which first arose in the fifteenth century and continued through Shakespeare’s era (Koller 383-384). Throughout the period of the *ars*’s popularity, the chance for the dying subject to either affect or signal his otherworldly fate meant that “The art of dying was the art of arts, and it is safe to postulate that Shakespeare and all Elizabethans knew it by one means or another” (Koller 386).

In its details and mechanisms, though, the process of dying well changed both onstage and off. As we will see, during the Reformation a major shift occurred in the thinking of Elizabethan audiences vis-à-vis the afterlife; with a distinctly Calvinist bent to their new theology, death served as an indicator and symbol for the life led, not a chance to reflect on it. The type of behavior acceptable at death changed as well. No longer could the dying man (or, more rarely, dying woman) exhibit a fear of death and anomie; in the new order they could show only a full-bodied faith in God (Spinrad 39).

Relative religious and political stability returned to England under the reign of Elizabeth I, who presided over an era of (limited) religious reconciliation. Her reign also saw the dawn of the early seventeenth century, the historical site of Shakespeare's work. With the strict religiosity of the Reformation beginning to fade into the background, an early humanism emerged on the stage that sought as its subject the lives and deaths of extraordinary men, rather than religious allegories. These performances, however, by no means failed to consider the moral implications of particular deaths—in fact, this essay will conclude with an examination of the ways that post-Reformation concerns with dying well pervade both the structure and the language of *The Tempest*, frequently thought to be Shakespeare's most idyllic play.

My research on this subject was inspired by the work of hospice nurses Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley, who published a book in 1992 titled *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying*. This book, though highly speculative, sets forth an argument that

terminally ill patients in long-term care frequently communicate using language that is symbolic or contains multiple layers of meaning (much of the book is composed of anecdotes illustrating this argument). Two common categories of communication immediately stood out to me: metaphors of travel and leaving, and the need to communicate with people from the dying person's past who have already died or are otherwise inaccessible.

These are both topics that arise frequently in *The Tempest*, especially for Prospero, whose objectives include confronting his wrongdoers and leaving the island. Intuitively, the idea that the process of dying and *The Tempest* were connected made sense; as I began my research last year, though, I found that relatively few scholars have written about that relationship per se. Although there is a great deal of scholarship on *The Tempest* and themes of loss and reconciliation, twentieth-century scholars have generally focused (for excellent reasons) on the political and (post)colonial readings of the play. It was not until I encountered Kathrine Koller's article "Falstaff and the Art of Dying" and Phoebe Spinrad's *The Summons of Death* that I was prompted to look to the *structure* of the play's action itself for parallels; this avenue, as we will see, was most fruitful.

The Tempest, when both its language and its structure are deeply examined, contains a proto-Brechtian didactic narrative that demonstrates what it meant to die well in Shakespeare's England. To understand the ideas that support this narrative, though, we must examine the traditions that *The Tempest* both draws on and reacts to: the medieval and Reformation depictions of dying.

Medieval Drama and the Confrontation with Death

Few cultures have left behind so complex and strikingly visible a record of their beliefs on dying as medieval European culture. From the *danse macabre* tradition to the simple skull that was later to form the *memento mori*, the medieval world was home to a bewildering variety of death motifs in art, literature, and theatre. This need hardly surprise, in a culture that had only recently suffered the Black Death of 1348. People of every class were intimately familiar with death in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and this familiarity bred a vibrant religious life and correspondingly fascinating theatrical tradition.

Phoebe Spinrad, in her seminal book *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage*, discusses one of the most common death motifs of the early Middle Ages: the Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead, in which “three proud young men encounter three skeletons or corpses who warn them about the vanities of the world” (4). In the first depictions of this legend, in the late thirteenth century, the three dead were often shown as rotting bodies, mirroring the three living men who faced them and suggesting their ends. As time progressed, however, the dead became less and less recognizable as the bodies of the individuals facing death, and began to take on aspects of a depersonalized, malevolent force: the dead would “walk or run after the living, sometimes to warn, but more often (in the later depictions) to kill” them (Spinrad 5). This change in artistic conventions eventually relegated Death to a

figure external to the protagonist of the dramatic story, laying the groundwork for a confrontation at the heart of all medieval dramas of dying.

Medieval English theatre can be broadly divided into two groups: the mystery cycles (of which the Wakefield, York, Chester, and N-Town groups survive) and the morality plays (the paradigmatic example of which is *Everyman*, as we will discuss later). Mystery plays dealt with Biblical stories, and were performed by major town or city guilds on holidays. Morality plays, on the other hand, were generally a later development and considered the life and death of an individual Christian soul, and its salvation or damnation after death.

Of the two groups, the moralities are by far more revealing of the medieval audience's expectations for dying, and form the basis of the historical line traceable to *The Tempest*. There are certain instructive moments in the mysteries, however, primarily when the characters openly discuss death. For example, in the Wakefield *Lazarus* play, the lion's share of the text is in fact a long discourse by the revived (and still mummified) Lazarus on the universality of death. Echoing the *danse macabre's* theme that all classes must bow to Death, Lazarus declares that "No kyng, no knight, no Wight in wede,/ffrom dede haue maide hym seese" (115-116). Death as a figure appears only once in the mystery cycles, in the N-Town *Death of Herod* (Spinrad 51). This death, which is violent and sudden, is meant to serve as a negative example: as Spinrad has argued, Herod is portrayed as such an unequivocal villain that for him to die in the approved fashion, slowly and with the time to make a good ending, would have

been incredibly unpopular (60-61). The positive and universal models for dying were laid out in the contemporary professional plays, the moralities.

The Morality Plays: How Should We Die?

The exact organization and performance history of the morality plays of the late Middle Ages is open to debate. What is clear is that they were not controlled or performed by the town guilds as the mystery cycles were. Dorothy Wertz argues convincingly for the moralities being the purview of the Middle Ages' professional performers, who until this shift dealt mostly in circus arts, variety shows, and the like ("Mankind" 88). Since the guilds monopolized dramas of Biblical history, actors turned to dramatizing the life, death, and struggles of individual Christians, drawing on sermons as inspiration (Ibid. 83). The (relative) social mobility and changing fortunes of the masses in the late fourteenth century contributed, in Wertz's analysis, to an increased interest in the problems facing unique individuals; actors, marginalized and class-less as they were in medieval society, were the perfect candidates to explore the "universal" human (Ibid. 88-9).

The earliest (and regrettably incomplete) morality play is titled *Pride of Life*, and dates to the mid-fourteenth century (Coldewey 26). It is a fairly straightforward allegory: the King of Life, surrounded by flattering worldly attributes (Strength and Health as soldiers, and Mirth as his messenger), decides that he will challenge Death to a duel, despite the reasonable warnings of his Queen and Bishop. The result is, of course, tragic: though the manuscript of the

play is incomplete, we are told in the prologue that Death destroys Life's kingdom before killing Life himself (81-92).

Although the King of Life is a fool, he is certainly "more silly than wicked" (Spinrad 63), and the audience is led to sympathize with him and fear his destruction. We also know from the prologue that as the King of Life dies, he has a moment of redemption that convinces the Virgin Mary to pray for him, presumably securing his entrance into heaven (93-100). The missing moment from this manuscript is that between Death's blow and the sundering of Life's soul and body: the moment that later moralities declare holds the key to salvation.

The earliest complete morality play available is *The Castle of Perseverance*, probably composed circa 1405-1425 (Bevington 796). In many ways *The Castle* can be considered an archetypal morality: it is a complex allegory that traces the life, works, and death of its main character, Humanum Genus. This marks the first appearance of "humanity" as a type-character on the medieval stage (Wertz 84), and in a sweeping production the play attempts to cover his entire existence. Humanum Genus, guided by his good and bad angels, is attacked by the World, the Devil, the Flesh, and the Seven Deadly Sins, and tempted into mischief. Finally his Good Angel manages to bring Penance to him, and she wins him back from the Sins, leading him into the Castle of Perseverance. Once within, the Sins and their masters are unable to win Humanum Genus back until, when he is old, Avarice finally manages to lure him out of the castle, and back into sin.

In this condition Death, assigned to take Humanum Genus's life, finds him. Death's appearance in the play is relatively brief; the author is far more concerned with what happens during Humanum Genus's life and what happens afterwards. But on entering, Death launches into a classic lecture speech, explaining who he is and why he has come. This speech lasts sixty-four lines before Death strikes Humanum Genus with his dart and, as quickly as he has appeared, vanishes (2842).

But Humanum Genus does not immediately collapse. The touch of Death comes before the actual event, and for the first time we witness onstage the act of dying in its entirety. Humanum Genus rushes to the World to save him, but to no avail; in fact, after refusing to help him, the World declares all of Humanum's inheritance forfeit to a stranger calling himself "I wot [know] never who" (2968). Humanum Genus watches his worldly possessions and sources of pride slip away, and as he is confined to bed, he launches into a final bitter soliloquy on the briefness of worldly pleasure. Just as Death has, Humanum Genus turns to the audience with an important message: "Now, good men, take the example at me: / Do for yourself while ye have space" (2995-2996)! At the last moment, expiring, he breathes out, "I put me in Goddys mercy" (3007)!

From this point onwards Humanum Genus as a character does not appear; instead, his Soul and Body separate, and the Four Daughters of God debate the destination of his soul. Ultimately, it is sent to Heaven: though he lived badly his entire life, he did manage to avoid despair and called on Mercy at the last, and that saves him.

There are a number of remarkable aspects to this deathbed scene. First and foremost, of course, Humanum Genus is given the requisite space to reflect, repent, and make ready for the afterlife. Because of this he is able to follow the prescription laid out in the *ars moriendi* and contemporary doctrine: the basic steps of the tradition include an assault by temptations, an interrogation to establish faith and confess sins, and finally a call to God for salvation (Koller 384). A second common trope is also starkly painted here: Death appears “just as the victim has reached his worldly peak and spiritual nadir” (Spinrad 65). In fact, immediately before Death’s entrance Humanum Genus claims to be willing to damn his own soul to hell if it will mean future prosperity (2776-2777).

Most interesting of all, though, is Death’s connection with the audience. As in *The Death of Herod*, Mors addresses the audience and tells them exactly what will happen (2830). They are, then, in Death’s confidence, and Humanum Genus becomes an example of what happens to those whom Death strikes. His reflection is all, dramaturgically speaking, after the fact—once the process begins, it is seen as inevitable, and the audience is allowed to relax. It is this convention that *Everyman*, at the end of the same century, will stand on its head.

Although thoroughly orthodox in its doctrine, in its execution *Everyman* (dating from about 1495) is extraordinary (Spinrad 68). Perhaps most exciting of all is the play’s expansion of time: it begins with God sending Death to summon Everyman, and the entire action of the play takes place between this summons and Everyman’s eventual death. It is the same moment that Humanum Genus is forced to endure in the end of *The Castle of Perseverance*, but this time is

the focus of the entire drama; the barest summary of the play is literally, “Everyman dies.”

Of course, in the allegorical world the play occupies, the process is much more complex. Everyman suffers a series of “betrayals” by two sets of friends; the first are the vanities of the world, Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods. As each turns away from him, he is further “undeceived” and is “forced further and further toward acceptance of Death and reliance upon himself” (Spinrad 75). Realizing that worldly values will not serve him, he is prepared to seek grace and support himself only through God and his own qualities: his Knowledge, Good Deeds, Five Wits, Beauty, Strength, and Discretion. Having obtained absolution, he sets out on his journey to the grave. At this point, to a medieval audience (and to many contemporary ones), it seems that all will be well.

But the anonymous creator of *Everyman* has a stunning surprise in store: when the hero finally approaches his grave, his physical virtues flee, creating a second abandonment that leaves Everyman and the audience far more shaken than the first (Spinrad 82). Spinrad identifies this as the temptation to vainglory (Ibid.), excessive pride in one’s own merits. Fortunately not everyone deserts Everyman: his Good Deeds and Knowledge remain, and he and Good Deeds proceed quietly into his grave.

This is a stunning portrayal of dying well, and a self-conscious one: as Garner points out, the play is almost Brechtian in its construction, with essentially three prologues (a herald’s, God’s, and Death’s) and frequent recaps by Everyman (Garner 283). It is designed as a teaching play, and it succeeds—

and as we will see, *The Tempest* later accomplishes the same end in a radically different cultural and theological setting. Both Everyman and the audience learn over the course of the play, through Everyman's questions, how best to die (Spinrad 70). It is significant that in the first confrontation with Death, Everyman does not recognize the figure approaching him. Even when he is told what approaches, he attempts to avoid it: he questions Death's purpose, and attempts to bargain with him for smaller and smaller respites (Spinrad 72-73). It is only after he has become "spiritually naked" by his first set of abandonments that he and the audience reach the same point in the learning process, prepared to deal with the actual event of dying (Spinrad 78). In his confusion and his clarity, Everyman becomes a sympathetic character; he learns, and therefore is no longer a static allegory.

This is what is paradoxical about all of the morality plays, though *Everyman* may exemplify it best: though their protagonists are the static-sounding personifications of "humanity," they are also powerfully moving portraits of individual humans. Everyman's death, after such a long play, packs a punch: there are just three speeches after he descends into his grave. It is a heartbreaking finale calculated to leave its audience shocked, and as such prefigures the final scenes of the great Renaissance tragedies (Spinrad 84). Once in *The Castle of Perseverance* and (presumably) in *The Pride of Life*, we see the figure of a human being stripped of all its glory, friends, and power; this happens not once but twice in *Everyman*. The process solves a great paradox of the medieval theatre of dying: although the plays may be allegories of how to die

well, they recognize dramatically that death is always an isolating and individual event, and pave the way to the heroic deaths in the plays of the early Renaissance and Shakespeare.²

The English Reformation: Fundamentalism and Uncertainty

The familiar and stable Catholic world portrayed in *Everyman* and its contemporaries, though, was not to last. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on the door of the church of Wittenberg and forever changed the history of Christianity. The Protestant Reformation was slow to make its way across the continent to England, but in 1534 the dissolution of England's monasteries was begun and by mid-century a radical reinvention of church practice was underway. Mary I, the Catholic queen, reversed all of that, earning the nickname "Bloody Mary" for her persecution of Protestants. It was only after a few decades of the Protestant Elizabeth I's reign had elapsed that normality returned. Elizabeth promoted a culture that was (marginally) more tolerant and exploratory intellectually, "attempt[ing] to bind together a country torn by two successive religious revolutions" (Spinrad 106).

Despite Elizabeth's best efforts, however, the country had still been ideologically and sometimes physically ravaged by the events of the Reformation. The religious uncertainties (as Spinrad puts it, "articles of faith seemed to change every few years" 89-90), compounded with social and political upheavals (including minor rebellions) created what was undoubtedly an air of

² This reality can be difficult to conceive when only confronting the text of *Everyman*; since modern performances of moralities are relatively rare, I highly recommend the 2007 film treatment, *The Summoning of Everyman*, directed by Douglas Morse.

fear and a sense of the tenuousness of peaceful life. In part from these upheavals, then, came a new conception of death—as Spinrad describes it, “the hidden death that offers no warning at the moment of arrest” (20).

Onstage, this meant that death more and more frequently was portrayed as an event, rather than a process (Spinrad 86). The death of realistic or symbolic figures began to acquire a special significance as a single moment and the determiner of their destiny, not because it was the event that began their process of salvation, but because their existence at that moment in time determined their destination after death. Death had, to quote Spinrad, “[become] a symbol rather than an allegory” (87). Although still possessing a great deal of soteriological significance, death was the conclusion to a narrative rather than a narrative in itself.

The New Doctrine and the Theater

The new Calvinist theology included a deep double bind in the form of predestination: if souls are elect or reprobate from birth, it is difficult to argue for the importance of godly behavior as anything more than an indicator of already-present inclinations towards godliness. In practice, though, the idea that one could not repent led to a stress on the importance of leading a *constantly* godly life, rather than risking the possibility of sinning and (consequently) discovering oneself among the reprobate. As Philippe Ariès has observed, this meant that “...it is not, therefore, at the moment of death or in the presence of death that one must think about death; it is throughout one’s life... this is why there is such a close relationship between living well and dying well” (300).

Another important consequence of the predestinarian strain of Protestantism that entered England in the sixteenth century was the emergence of a belief in “signs of grace,” the evidence one could find in this world for the preordained state of one’s soul. In general they corresponded to living a good and godly life, and the obvious are such general signs as faith in God, church attendance, and so forth. In the struggle against Catholicism, however, there was a distinct attempt to tie “godliness” into a normal person’s day-to-day existence, which resulted in a secularization of the signs of grace.

One exquisite (and technically non-dramatic example) of this secularization is in Thomas Becon’s *The Sicke Mannes Salve*, published in 1561. *The Sicke Mannes Salve* is a treatise on the correct way to conduct oneself while dying, and is written as a dialogue between a dying man, Epaphroditus, and his friends Philemon, Eusebius, Theophulus, and Christopher. The four friends give him good council, which tellingly includes the writing of his will—for as Theophulus says, “...they whom the Lord hath endued with the goodes of *the* world should before their departure set a godly order and quiet stay in their temporall possessions” (97).

Why this scrutiny on seemingly profane matters? This focus was a natural part of the Protestant process of distancing itself from the Catholic Church. Reformers of all stripes were arguing for a popularization of the gospel, advocating against the sale of indulgences and for such populist endeavors as the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Tying religious goodness into the secular rituals and everyday experiences of life—writing a will, for example—

was one method whereby the new Protestant church could rob the Catholic hierarchy of its power.

In this way, we see that signs of grace began to include not just profession of faith and fear of God, but such formerly secular matters as providing for one's wife and children, justly rewarding one's servants, and keeping out of debt (Becon 98-100). Onstage, this secular rewards system soon expanded to the point that prosperity itself was in some ways seen as a sign of grace. It should come as no surprise, then, that Epaphroditus, as well as several of the figures we will discuss from the morality plays, was a wealthy man.

The theater of sixteenth-century England did not just reflect this new theology—it was a major propagandistic force in what was primarily a top-down ideological transition (White 2). As a means of educating the public to beware the evils of Catholicism, theater was a flexible and easily accessible source, wide reaching and with a long tradition of patronage that gave wealthy funders sway over the materials presented. These plays, particularly the “interludes” that inherited the structure of the morality plays from the Middle Ages, were like their predecessors deeply concerned with educating their audience in the correct way to live and (consequently) to die.

Indeed, the interludes are, if anything, even more concerned than moralities with imparting the correct knowledge to the audience. Because of human fallibility, a possible sign of grace could be easily misinterpreted; a reprobate could believe himself saved until the final, damning moment. The saved, then, frequently come into their wealth (symbolic or real) not until the

end of the plays, and much of the drama lies in the characters' attempting to *discover* whether or not they are saved—in other words, interpreting the signs of the outside world.

W. Wager's Fundamental Moralities

The fundamental values of post-Reformation England can be seen in the late sixteenth-century plays by the W. Wager, particularly the 1569 interlude *The Longer Thou Livest, the More Fool Thou Art*. Religious education is an explicit concern of the play, forming the theme of the prologue and described as “For all estates profitable” (16). The play follows the life of a young man named Moros, his name deriving from the Latin verb *moror*, “to be a fool” (Benbow 3). Moros is depicted as a young man with little care for God, his elders, or his estate; indeed, he acts more childishly than evilly (much like the King from *Pride of Life*), mimicking others' words and garbling their names into jibes (eg. 347-371, 501).

In the first part of the play, the figures of Discipline, Piety, and Exercitation work (in a state of increasing exasperation) to improve Moros's manners and education. Once he escapes them, he meets up with three new companions: Idleness, Incontinence, and Wrath, who naturally tempt him into sin. Subtly, Moros grows into adulthood over the course of the play: he grows into sexual maturity by visiting a prostitute (994-995) and returns to the stage with a beard, in the form of a young gentleman (SD 1292). Cruelty, Impiety, and Ignorance have been added to his retinue, and after defying Discipline again he exits and returns “with a grey beard,” after a damning monologue by People, portraying Moros's oppressed tenants—he has grown rich and covetous in old

age (1696-1742). It is only at this point that the threat of death appears, in the form of God's Judgment "with a terrible visure" (SD 1758).

What is fascinating in the death of Moros is that, despite Spinrad's claim, there is still a "process" of dying to be witnessed in the play: God's Judgment strikes Moros around line 1791, but Moros does not finally "die" until line 1858, first having to face the devil Confusion. The crucial difference between this interlude and the dying process in medieval moralities is that Moros has completely lost the roadmap that guided other travelers, a fact he realizes too late ("We must learn at 'Christ's cross me speed"; 1842). Not having been educated in his youth, it is too late for him to become so in his death, and the devil eventually drags him offstage.

As Moros is dying, Confusion mocks him, and this mockery reinforces the dangers of worldly shame and dishonor. Consider the following lines: "As the ears of an ass appeared in Midas,/Though it were long ere it were known,/So at length the folly of fools is openly blown" (1827-1830). This concern with worldly renown would be highly unusual in a medieval morality; the threat that follows shortly, "[Fools] leave behind them an abominable name" (1834), would be flatly unthinkable. Nor is this stress on worldly shame a tactic of the devil's to misdirect Moros's attention from its correct object. God's Judgment, presumably a secure theological source, speaks after Confusion drags Moros offstage of how "In our times we have known fools full of spite,/And in this world have seen their reward" (1869-1870, emphasis added).

Wager's other major interlude, *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, is an even clearer embodiment of Calvinist doctrine: while *The Longer Thou Livest* depicted only a man who could not be saved, *Enough* gives its audience both bad and good exempla, in the bodies of Worldly Man and Heavenly Man. Though implicitly depicted as equal foils, Worldly Man is the true protagonist of the play, having the vast majority of the text and being the focus of the story. His theological weakness is exposed in his first appearance (described in the stage direction as "stout and frolic"): "...by mine own father an example I may take./He was beloved of all men and kept a good house/Whilst riches lasted, but when that did slake,/There was no man that did set by him a louse...But I trow I will take heed of such;/They shall go, ere they drink when they come to me" (109-112, 117-118). The *hamartia* (as it were) of Worldly Man is that he takes the wrong lesson from his father's fate. It should have taught him of the vanity of worldly goods and renown, but instead he decides to play the miser, keeping his money and goods close to ensure that they do not dwindle.

As we have already seen, the incorrect interpretation of "signs of grace" such as wealth can end in damnation, and Worldly Man's mistaken interpretation of his father's fate results in him leading a godless life and being sent to hell. Other signs are present in his life as well, particularly in his deathbed scene—which, when compared to the ideal one set out in *The Sicke Mannes Salve*, is absolutely terrible. When he realizes he is dying, his first thought (as Covetous points out at line 1323) is not for his soul, but for the disposition of his wealth. His bad companions fail to give him correct instruction,

and in fact Covetous is loath to even admit that he may be dying at first (1321). Once a physician has been summoned and Worldly Man is forced to face the fact that he is dying, it is revealed that he abounds in debts, and though he may be able to pay them all, his family will be left with little, if anything (1385-1390). One final sign of damnation come as he starts to dictate his will, getting as far as “In the name of—” before falling down dead (1403). Wager plays with the same convention—the damned’s inability to pronounce holy words—that appears more famously in *Macbeth* Act 2, Scene 2, thirty-six years later.

The Trial of Treasure, attributed to Wager by White (180) but claimed as an anonymous play by others, has some of the clearest examples of a playwright exploring signs, portents, and symbols of salvation. Particularly interesting in this play are the ends (to call them “deaths” would be, perhaps, too literal) of Just and Lust, the moral and immoral figures of the drama. The last appearance of Lust lends support to Spinrad’s claim that fear, for Calvinists, portended damnation (37); his exit is not a defiant declaration but a timorous question: “Ah! Cock’s precious sides, what fortune is this!/Whither go I now, to misery or bliss” (242)?³ Just, meanwhile, remains onstage until the end, even after Lust and Treasure have been converted into dust and rust, fulfilling the ultimate sign of grace: that, “Simply stated, in these plays [Reformation interludes] the good do not die” (Spinrad 87). Not only does he survive, but Just also receives a number of rewards for his fidelity. These rewards include the companionship of worldly Pleasure, who leaves his former master Lust rather reluctantly (240), as well as a

³ Citations of *Trial of Treasure* refer to page number, since Farmer neglects to provide line numbers.

“crown of felicity” (Ibid.) which was clearly embodied in an actual crown in performance (demonstrated by Inclination’s line, “By’r lady, I would I had such a gay crown,” 244). This joy, though it “shall be made richer at the celestial place” (Ibid.) is fundamentally a joy in the world of the living: Just declares “Now praised be God for this riches of renown;/Felicity, in this world, the Just doth enjoy” (Ibid.).

Moderation and Secularization

As with so many revolutions, though, the extreme theology of the English Reformation had begun to fade even by the end of the sixteenth century. The rule of Elizabeth I (starting in 1558) brought a slow but steady return of stability, and with it, tolerance and intellectual curiosity (Spinrad 106-107). Although faith in the Anglican church was still tied to national loyalty, theologians began to question the rigid interpretation of doctrine that had marked so many of the earlier scholars. A strict predestinarian philosophy began to seem outmoded, as Spinrad observes in the example of *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, which allows its reprobate man to repent and be saved (102-103).

The stress on the importance of anti-papal stances, though, also led to some problematic (and sometimes indissoluble) situations. One such situation is dissected in Nathaniel Woodes’s 1581 play *Conflict of Conscience*, which is modeled on the historical life, apostasy, and suicide of Francesco Spira, a Protestant Italian jurist who lived from 1502-1548 (Spinrad 104-105). Philologus (Spira’s pseudonym in the play) is a good Protestant who rejects Rome’s authority despite its growing strength in his native land, until after a

long, drawn-out courtroom scene (in which he withstands the threat of torture and threats to his wife and children) he falls prey to the illusions of worldly joy provided by Sensual Suggestion.

From this point on, his damnation seems assured, and in fact his Conscience, whom he meets on the road, addresses him in the medieval style as one already dying or dead: “O cursed creature, O fraile flesh, O meat for wormes, O dust,/O blather [bladder] puffed full of winde, O vainer then these all” (4.3.1909-1910). It is only once Philologus is confronted by Horror (the messenger of God for this play) that he sees the error of his ways and sends to his friends for aid. But no matter what they say or do, they cannot convince Philologus that God will forgive him. One friend, Theologus, offers good advice, saying “[God] doth correct you in this world, that in the lyfe to come,/He might you save, for of the like, the Scripture beares recorde” (5.2.2316-2317), but Philologus cries back, “That is not God[']s intent with mee, though it be so with some” (5.2.2318). In the end he hangs himself, demonstrating for the audience the importance of following the right doctrine faithfully—despite his good life, he was predestined for hell, as evidenced by his apostasy.

There is strong evidence, though, that audiences were less receptive to strict predestinarian stances at the late date of *Conflict of Conscience*: copies of the play have been found with two distinct endings. In one, Philologus leaves the stage and, according to the epilogue, hangs himself with cord and leaves his wife and children in grief (5.3.2411-2414). In the second issue of the play, he instead “Is nowe converted unto God, with manie bitter teares...His errorrs all, he did

renounce, his blasphemies he abhorde” (5.3.2413-2415). Almost comically, there is no change in the text of the play in the second issue besides the Prologue and Epilogue, and even those changes are relatively minor poetically (for example, the first line of the Epilogue in the second issue simply replaces “joyful” for “doleful”).

Spinrad takes this change as an indication that “Woodes first wrote almost against his will for an audience that he thought still existed and was relieved to discover his miscalculation” (108). As she admits, it is impossible to know what Woodes’s own beliefs were, but clearly the first version of the play was found unacceptable by *some* audience; whether a popular one or a theologically inclined one is also impossible to know. But in either case, Woodes felt the need to revise the strict theology of the original play to conform to a more forgiving, less doctrinally concerned audience.

Accompanying this shift from strict theology to a more open and forgiving structure was a shift from concern with *pure* theology on the stage to a desire to see moral lessons depicted onstage in the lives of real people. *Conflict of Conscience*, modeled as it was on a historical character but incorporating allegorical figures and names, is one transitional play in the shift from “pure” moralities (eg. *The Trial of Treasure*, *Enough is as Good as a Feast*, etc.) to plays that were moral, but not allegorical. Another play further along the trajectory of dramatic evolution is the 1577 anonymous play *Misogonus*. Like the second issue of *Conflict of Conscience*, *Misogonus* refuses to kill its bad example, the disobedient, unscrupulous, and eponymous son. Although many of the

characters in the play have significantly tell-all names (eg. Misogonus, “bad son,” and his saintly brother, Eugonus, “good son;” Misogonus’s friends Oenophilus, “wine-lover,” and Orgalus, “passionate;” Bond 303), all of them are clearly meant to represent real people in Laurentum, Italy.

Although it loosely follows the structure of the morality play, the rewards and punishments of *Misogonus* are primarily secular. While the father in the play laments his son’s terrible conduct in terms of God’s strictures, he is also chiefly concerned with the disposition of his wealth after his death. With the arrival of Eugonus, the estate is willed to him, leaving Misogonus in (potential) poverty. Although the end of the manuscript is missing, Misogonus repents, and it seems likely that he is, at the end of the play, restored to at least part of his original fortune.

These shifts expose what could be called an ideological weakness in the English Reformation: in its attempt to tie religion into the secular rituals of life, it promoted these rituals until they (on their own terms) came to be as compelling, if not more compelling, than the religious dramas that accompanied them. Particularly in a predestinarian context, Spinrad has observed, “unmitigated goodness and surety of salvation make for singularly dull drama” (89). As society stabilized, the rewards and punishments of the moral plays became increasingly secular, and death became important increasingly as an event that ended life, rather than a process through which to obtain salvation. This secular moral outlook eventually led to the great cathartic deaths of the Elizabethan stage, prefigured in the sense of entrapment many of the predestined damned express.

The Tempest and the Drama of Dying

In the late sixteenth century, a creative swept through England, giving birth to one of the most important eras in English theatre. This golden age saw the establishment of the country's first permanent playhouses and residential theater companies, as well as the work of such luminaries as Ben Jonson, Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, and, of course, William Shakespeare. The increasingly secular and cosmopolitan spirit of the age favored what we now recognize as the beginnings of modern humanist theater, and the great plays of the era were not overt religious allegories, but the tragedies, comedies, and histories that focused on ordinary or extraordinary—but indubitably earthly—human beings.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, probably the last play for which Shakespeare was the sole author (*Complete Works* 1071), has for years been considered one of the ultimate statements of Renaissance humanism, a product of the prosperity of Elizabeth I's reign and the peaceful transition of the throne to a foreign monarch, James I. The play's plot evinces a belief in the power of humanity over its world: Prospero, the human master of the natural world thanks to his apparently benign magic, restores order to a disrupted natural hierarchy. Evildoers repent, young lovers meet and marry, crisis is averted, and those who have been wronged are able to forgive. The structure of the play is overtly concerned with this restoration of order, and is itself an almost rigidly structured set of reiterations on a central plotline (the usurpation of virtuous authority; Vaughan and Vaughan 14-15).

There is more to the play, however, than a simple fairy tale about a magician and his daughter—even a simple fairy tale penned by Shakespeare. A close examination of the play’s language and structure reveals an underlying discourse that responds (now in an almost thoroughly secular fashion) to the narratives of dying well onstage over the previous two centuries. As more layers of the text are brought to light, a work of didactic theater is revealed that seeks to both confront and reconcile older modes of performance in much the same way Prospero both confronts and reconciles with his own human condition.

Renaissance Playwrights and the Older Traditions

An important first step towards a new understanding of *The Tempest* is to determine what the play is not. Unlike the dramas of the medieval and Reformation periods, *The Tempest* is not an allegory and is not a presentational drama. Earlier plays depended on a clearly instructive framework and overtly symbolic characters with names such as “Good Works,” “Charity,” “Wrath,” and so on. There are no concrete allegories in Shakespeare’s work—although the characters are arrayed along a spectrum of morality in no uncertain terms, Stephano is a drunk, not Drunkenness. This is a play about individuals.

Even as far back as *Everyman*, however, the performance tradition instructed its audience to universal truths through the spectacle of an individual death. The performance of these plays demands such a leap of imagination from its audience—for no matter how frequently the protagonist is referred to as “Everyman” or “Humanum Genus,” the reality of the stage is that the audience watches a single human being sin, age, repent (or not), and die before their eyes.

Indeed, James Calderwood argues in *Shakespeare and the Denial of Death* that drama is, by its very form, inherently death-conscious, even when not explicitly concerned with death; the playwright dies (or, textually speaking, vanishes) and, unlike the novelist, leaves nothing but “the mortal present-tense illusions of the stage, where acts of speech and body die away the instant they come alive. How can they be retrieved? Not by drama. Drama simply sheds itself and goes on” (188). An allegorical framework may have once guided the audience to its conclusions, but ultimately it was abandoned because the crowd proved to be perfectly capable of making the imaginative leap without its help.

The best playwrights of Shakespeare’s era, then, responded to the ideas of dying well that had already been articulated using their new medium: the modern drama, particularly tragedy. They needed little encouragement to concern themselves with death when, as Spinrad has pointed out, they were the inheritors of a tradition that “pose[d] the moment of death as an understanding of life, offer[ing] the soul a last chance on earth to choose salvation or damnation, and dispatch[ing] the soul accordingly” (162). Spinrad gives her own excellent examples of Marlowe and Shakespeare’s explicit engagement with the idea of death, including *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, and *Measure for Measure*. Shakespeare’s own canon abounds with endless supplemental examples: the death of Hotspur in *Henry IV, Part One* prompts reflection on life both by Hotspur and Prince Hal (5.4.76-100); John of Gaunt in *Richard II* uses his final moments to prophesy on the state of England and chastise his king (2.1); and Henry VI finds a sudden surge of (admittedly ineffectual) vigor and outrage, despite his

characteristic weakness, when confronting the soon-to-be Richard III for the last time (*King Henry VI, Part 3* 5.6.35-60).

These deaths all carry implicit value judgments within the framework of modern humanism, but the allegorical morality play of the Reformation had not, in fact, truly died out. The “interlude” persisted in an altered and more elite form: the courtly masque. Not only were these more ornate dramas designed to embody the values of a given event for which they would be commissioned (frequently, the masques would receive only one performance), but they were also chock-full of explicit symbolism that audiences would need to interpret. Bevington and Holbrook make a compelling case for the complex, meaning-laden interpretation of the masque in their analysis of the form as an arena for competing political expressions at court (8). Such a vital part of the court’s internal dialogue would necessitate a detailed analysis by the audience of what Bevington in his own essay refers to as the court’s “extravagant and ideologically meaningful masquing” (219). Moreover, we have in writing the following argument from the famous masque composer Ben Jonson claiming the value of didactic over purely sensational theater:

It is a noble and just advantage, that the things subjected to *understanding* have of those which are objected to *sense*, that the one sort are but momentarie, and meere taking; the other impressing, and lasting...So short-liv’d are the *bodies* of all things, in comparison of their *soules* (qtd. in Lindley 5).

Among the elite at least, then, there was an audience fully accustomed to decoding the theater it watched to derive a “higher” meaning from the pure action displayed onstage.

The Tempest, the Masque, and Meta-Theatricality

Although masques were an elite court form of entertainment, it would be a mistake to assume that Shakespeare’s work belonged to an entirely proletarian audience; on the contrary, *The Tempest* shows a great deal of influence from the masque. This should not be surprising. By 1611, the first recorded performance of *The Tempest* (Vaughan and Vaughan 1), Shakespeare’s company had moved from the Globe Theater across the Thames to the Blackfriars Playhouse, an indoor hall once used by a boys’ troupe (Smith 247). The move brought the troupe into contact with a more elite clientele, and that audience had different expectations from their dramatists than the audience of the Globe. Among the new audience’s expectations of Shakespeare were: the inclusion of more music; romanticized characters in “improbable plots;” and fantastic devices such as ascents and descents from heaven (Ibid. 239). All of these stylistic embellishments can also be found in the masque tradition.

In *The Tempest* itself, one clear point of reference to masques is the masque sequence within the play, meant to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda’s betrothal (4.1.60-138). Katherine Duncan-Jones considers the play’s plot—the separation and reunion of kinsmen—another point of common ground with the masque (252). Even more compelling than these textual clues, though, is the

degree to which both masque and *Tempest* employ a meta-theatrical self-consciousness in their instruction of the audience.

The pure masque is to some degree inherently meta-theatrical thanks to its role as a celebration of an individual or event. In *The Lords' Masque*, for example, the royal couple whose marriage was being celebrated received a direct address: "Live with thy bridegroom happy, sacred bride;/How blest is he that is for love envied" (qtd. in Bevington 227). Techniques such as these serve to distance the audience emotionally from the action of the play, which aids in the decoding of the symbols presented. Music can have much the same effect, as anyone familiar with the plays of Bertolt Brecht can attest.

The Tempest, although it is not nearly so didactic as a court masque, also employs a number of techniques designed to provoke analysis and reflection, rather than emotional engagement, in its audience. The first clue, as James Walter points out, is in the title of the play: *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's single known work in which the title is a natural phenomenon, rather than directing audiences to a primary character or a state of affairs. The title of the play is so fundamentally abstract, Walter suggests, because "the metaphor has become more structural in this play and is less obvious as a rhetorical embellishment" (62). Characters will not expound the moral of the play's events for us—we will have to interpret it for ourselves.

Joan Hartwig associates *The Tempest* with three other of Shakespeare's late plays—*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*—as attempts by the playwright at what was then a just-emerging new form, the tragicomedy (3-4).

Like the masque, the tragicomedy alienates its audience through its sheer artificiality; the presence of Gower in *Pericles* is an excellent structural example of this technique. In *The Tempest*, this approach is less overt than in the other plays, but still present. The entire plot, of course, does “affirm that which we know cannot be true,” to use one of Hartwig’s markers of tragicomedy (5). However, in the original staging, Act One Scene One (1.1) of the play would have been a very bare-bones tempest (there would have been few special effects beyond a metal sheet to create thunder sounds), and this emptiness combined with Miranda’s description of the event in 1.2 serve to create an emotional distance between the audience and the shipwreck (Hartwig 139). Other moments of obvious artifice are not hard to find in the play: the banquet scene is one such (Hartwig 151), as is the masque in 4.1, and perhaps to a lesser extent the 2.1 debate over the qualities of the island (the argument over whether, for example, the ground is green or tawny, calls attention to the space, which at the time would have been a bare stage). The play’s Epilogue, which we will investigate in more depth shortly, provides another moment of critical distancing in its fusion of character, actor, and playwright (Hartwig 19).

If *The Tempest* attempts to distance its audience so that they can receive a message, what then is the message being delivered? Hartwig identifies the typical narrative of the tragicomedies as “a reunion of the realm of human action and the realm of the divine” (26); certainly the restoration of an ordered world that Prospero effects can be recognized as a movement into alignment with divine order. This trajectory is a macrocosmic evolution of the same trajectory

espoused by the *ars moriendi* from the Middle Ages through Shakespeare's day. Though each age claims a different tool for walking this path, every age affirms the need to bring the soul into alignment and harmony with God's grace before dying. Spiritually speaking, the dying individual must make a better "world" of his self before he can leave it.

Death also lurks in the mythological structure of the four plays Hartwig identifies as the tragicomedies: all four evoke cyclical or seasonal patterns and throw parents into sharp relief against their children. In *The Tempest* this cyclical pattern is particularly strong, as Jan Kott has pointed out: "The action of *The Tempest* returns to its prologue and all the characters resume their former places. History has turned full circle. Will it repeat itself once more" (294)? Although Kott's view is perhaps overly pessimistic—his question ignores that the play's ending is not merely a return, but a return with the addition of Ferdinand and Miranda—his overall analysis is correct. In that circular structure, as well as in the play's movement from the discord of 1.1 to the harmony of the Epilogue, the greatest circular structure is evoked: the circle of birth, death, and through the transformation of death, a rebirth into a higher or purer life.

The Tempest, then, is not simply a fable about forgiveness and revenge—it is intimately concerned with the process of dying and being spiritually reborn. In its concern for the audience's *understanding*, rather than simply their sense-experience, the play even (to an extent) anticipates the epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht. Consider the following qualities of epic theatre as listed in "Notes to the

opera *Aufstieg und fall der stadt mahagonny*:" the epic theatre "turns the spectator into an observer...forces him to take decisions...he is made to face something...the spectator stands outside, studies...the human being is the object of the inquiry" (449). All of these were goals of the masque and, in Hartwig's analysis, the tragicomedy. *The Tempest*, then, can be understood as a proto-Brechtian didactic work of theatre concerned with dying well. In this reading, a vast new light is shed on the events, conflicts, and characters of the text.

The New *Tempest*

In a 1945 article for *Modern Language Notes*, Kathrine Koller examines the reported death of Falstaff in *Henry V* in light of the instructions for dying laid out in *The Sicke Mannes Salve*. As a quick guide, her summary of Becon's steps of dying is useful, and I quote it below:

- I. Epaphroditus complains of illness, knows his end is near and calls his friends who urge him to consider the state of his soul...
- II. They discuss his sins, urge his repentance and assure him of Christ's mercy...
- III. He makes a will...
- IV. He advises his wife and children...
- V. They discuss the fear of death, the temptations of this world and the final temptation to despair of God's mercy...
- VI. He confesses his faith and dies...
- VII. His friends make the proper prayers and arrange for the funeral (Koller 385).

When these actions are abstracted, we see that (with the obvious exception of the final step), the structure of *The Tempest* mirrors this pattern perfectly, with Prospero cast as the dying man. In order, Prospero:

1. Gathers his old enemies and acquaintances via the tempest (1.1).
2. Explains his dukedom, betrayal, and downfall to Miranda, as well as his plan for salvation (to Ariel and the audience) (1.2).
3. Arranges Miranda's infatuation with and marriage to Ferdinand (1.2 as well as 3.1).
4. Marries Ferdinand and Miranda, as well as giving them strict instructions for their conduct and chastity, both verbally and in the form of his masque (4.1).
5. Receives and reflects upon a startling reminder of the transience and fragility of existence, confronting the threat of death on the island (the latter part of 4.1).
6. Brings the various conflicts to their conclusions (5.1), and appeals to a higher power before vanishing with the end of the play (Epilogue).

The parallel structures in the first two actions of each set are fairly obvious—the cast of characters necessary for salvation is assembled, and the past is reviewed to prepare for the future (Prospero's "sin" would in this case be negligence towards his former dukedom and his supervision of his brother). The third step requires a brief examination of Prospero's concerns about dying.

Although *The Tempest* is frequently cast as a drama of forgiveness, it would in fact be far more accurate to refer to it as a story of reconciliation. This

is an important distinction: reconciliation merely means the resolution of conflicts; forgiveness would entail a specific emotional relationship between Prospero and his enemies (it is far from clear that Prospero truly forgives everyone, particularly Antonio and Sebastian). Central to this reconciliation—indeed, it seems likely to be its chief motivator—is Prospero’s concern for Miranda’s fate, which is closely tied to Caliban’s.

Caliban serves as a foil to Prospero as well as his only true obstacle. The enmity between the two of them is far more apparent and far deeper even than the hostility between Prospero and Antonio (even if only because Prospero and Antonio have just one scene face-to-face). As Tom McAlindon has suggested, their names also suggest an inherent enmity: “Prospero,” related to “Prosper,” is a name associated with blessing, while “Caliban” may well derive from that action’s equal opposite, cursing (McAlindon 344-345). Poised in the center of this conflict is Miranda. Caliban has already attempted to rape her once, and McAlindon puts her situation in stark terms: “...her future on the island can hardly seem auspicious to [Prospero]; he can only assume that after his death her fate will be rape and motherhood to a brood of little Calibans. Hence the shipwreck and his cryptic but earnest explanation that it was all done ‘*in care of thee*’” (345).

Although there is no actual will, then, the motivation behind the entire action of the play is to get Miranda suitably wed and provide a future for the two of them off the island—where Prospero can die in peace and Caliban will no longer be a threat. 3.1 even includes a line of Prospero’s that has the feel of a

bequest: “Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between ’em” (75-76; lines in 4.1 reinforce this theme, eg. 7-11, 12-13). One act and step in Koller’s outline later, when the time comes for him to advise his daughter and son-in-law, he openly betroths them and constantly plies the couple with advice on how to comport themselves before the wedding (see, for examples, 4.1.14-23, 51-54, and possibly 59). Indeed, the masque within the play is a coded but wholly recognizable warning to the couple not to let lust break their propriety—Ceres, goddess of abundance, will not bless the couple until she is assured that Venus, goddess of lust, will not be attending the celebration (4.1.86-91).

The fifth step is in many ways the most obscure; especially because the discourse of Prospero’s dying is not overt, it is difficult to see his confrontation with despair. At the end of the masque, however, Prospero abruptly calls a halt to the celebration, realizing that Caliban and his friends are approaching with murderous intent. There is little or no logic in the famous speech that follows this realization as it is traditionally read—as homage to art.

This understanding of the “We are such stuff as dreams are made on” speech hinges primarily on one’s reading of that line (4.1.156-7), probably the most famous line in *The Tempest*. It has been read variously as mystical or inspirational—but neither of these readings seems likely to be close to the original. The original context might best be re-discovered by remembering that Prospero is approaching the most serious threat to his life on the island—Caliban’s plot to “knock a nail into his head” (3.2.59)—and by re-examining what

it means to claim that human life is a dream. Consider the following claim to the nature of dreams, made by that Renaissance man Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*:

ROMEO Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!

Thou talk'st of nothing.

MERCUTIO *True, I talk of dreams,*

Which are the children of an idle brain,

Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,

Which is as thin of substance as the air

And more inconstant than the wind... (1.4.95-100, emphasis mine).

Certainly the active, world-oriented Mercutio would not consider being “such stuff as dreams are made on” a blessing; other strong examples for this reading can be found in *Cymbeline* (5.4.145-146), *Hamlet* (2.2.261), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (5.1.422), *The Rape of Lucrece* (212), and *Richard III* (4.4.88-90). Jan Kott concurs in his evaluation of the speech: “...the point of this Shakespearean phrase seems to me remote from Calderon's [sic] mysticism. There is in it rather the great anxiety of Hamlet's soliloquies, and one more warning to the young lovers on the frailty of all human endeavours” (338). This understanding seems far more in line with the speech as a response to Caliban's approach, not to mention its claim that “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” (4.1.152-156).

Understood in this context, the climax of 4.1 parallels the fifth step in Koller's process quite neatly: Prospero confronts the possibility of death and anomie in the form of Caliban. Indeed, over the course of the play, Prospero comes closer and closer to the confrontation with his own mortality as he slowly relinquishes power, exposing himself to the other characters. As James Calderwood has illustrated, Prospero primarily uses his magic to keep at bay the two ancient human taboos: sex (whether Caliban's violent lust or Ferdinand and Miranda's passion) and death (again the threat of Caliban, as well as Antonio and Sebastian's machinations). By the end of the play, though, Prospero surrenders his magic, re-entering the world of ordinary mortals after assuring that neither illicit sex nor violence will threaten the order he has established. In so doing he comes to the same level as Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso, Miranda, and Ferdinand, and can even be read as a sort of inverted Christ figure (the superhuman who becomes a human; Calderwood 190). In this light, his descent becomes a fulfillment of his destiny as he reconciles himself to a nonviolent death "from within" (Ibid.)—hence a life in which "every third thought shall be [his] grave" (*The Tempest* 5.1.312).

The sixth and final step in Koller's progression (since we do not see Prospero literally die, the seventh step is moot) is the confession of faith and the good death of the protagonist. On a symbolic level, this takes place in *The Tempest's* Epilogue. Hartwig discusses the Epilogue as a device that identifies the audience with the playwright, thus distancing them from the action and forcing them to contemplate the union of the divine and the human that Shakespeare

strives for (19). There is another clear doubling/blurring in the Epilogue, however: Prospero and the actor playing Prospero become identified, to some degree, with each other, as well as with the author as the engineer of the story and (by extension of Hartwig's idea) the audience. This is highly unusual in Shakespeare's epilogues—generally they are delivered either in character (for example, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) or by the actor who played a role speaking as an actor (*As You Like It*). On multiple levels, then, this short speech disrupts the conventions its audience expects and calls attention to itself. It is the final didactic statement of the play, Shakespeare's thesis: having seen the enchanted isle, we must return to the real world, but carry the memory of the island with us (Hartwig 174).

In the articulation of this statement, Prospero dies. Throughout the play, as Hartwig has suggested, Prospero serves as the reconciler of opposed forces and the bringer of harmony; he brings the factious players into alignment, releasing the tension existing between them. He brings peace between Milan and Naples, male and female energies (Ferdinand and Miranda), the good king and the bad king within Alonso, (debatably) the rebel and the servant within Caliban, and the magician and the man in his own social existence. He unifies the realms of human action and divine governance (Hartwig 26). The only tension remaining at the end of the play is that between the theatrical illusion and reality.

The overall trajectory of the play, then, sees Prospero change from magician to Man, and then again from Man (the character) to a man, an

inhabitant of our own world. In this blurring of actor, role, author, and audience in the Epilogue, the death of Prospero also becomes symbolic, despite the weight of its literal presence in the play. As the role disappears, Prospero as we have known him dies, releasing the tension created by artifice and sending us back into our own world. This is a moment of brilliant synthesis for Shakespeare: Prospero disappearing “into the crowd” echoes medieval ideas of death as a universal experience, while the discussion of how to die throughout the play is utterly Protestant (if not in fact secular).

Conclusion: Tempest Fugit

As the curtain closes on this new, re-imagined *Tempest*, then, what is the audience left with? What makes this interpretation of the story so particularly important for readers and especially for viewers?

A first disclaimer, of course, is that *The Tempest* is about far more than just how to die well. In my work, both theatrically and academically, my goal has been to draw forth and examine one strand of *The Tempest*, a single piece of its multi-faceted narrative. While the play is concerned with the act of dying, it is equally concerned with a number of more quotidian (if still highly urgent) themes: succession, romance, ambition, betrayal, colonization and rebellion, the dichotomy between knowledge and wisdom, and, of course, the old standby forgiveness. Any staged *Tempest* that fails to examine all of these themes is necessarily less all-encompassing than Shakespeare’s.

Nonetheless, it is possible to clarify vision by narrowing scope. This was the goal of my own production of *The Tempest*, produced by the Wesleyan

University Theater Department in December 2012. Presented using just four actors, this *Tempest* employed masks and a severe cutting (as well as occasional restructuring) of the original text in order to re-focus the narrative purely on Prospero's need to settle Miranda and die well. In a modernizing touch, Prospero's staff became an IV stand, and many of the characters appeared as liminal figures that blurred the line between memory and dream. The core of Prospero's action—getting Miranda married—took place entirely unmasked, with Prospero, Miranda, and Ferdinand forming the center of the story. Ariel, Caliban, Gonzalo, Alonso, and Antonio appeared only in mask, as manifestations of Prospero's psyche.

This approach was not by any means wholly original. Both Gerald Freedman and Ron Daniels have attempted “psychoanalytical” stagings of the play before, generally revolving around a conception of Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban as a Freudian ego, superego, and id, respectively (Vaughan and Vaughan 114-115), similarly articulating those characters as essentially one whole. (This idea has roots in a Renaissance idea of a tripartite soul as well; see James Phillips's article.) The step farther—to conceive Gonzalo, Alonso, and Antonio as either dreams or memories of the dying Prospero—allowed us to incorporate those parts of the narrative without violating the Ariel-Prospero-Caliban whole (Caliban and Ariel are sufficiently different from the other three to claim their own space in Prospero's interior world).

As I realized going into the production, however, the history of such productions has been one of mixed success. Though information on Daniels's

production is sparse, there is a review in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* of Freedman's attempt in 1979. In the review Peter Saccio refers to the production as "an instructively flawed success" (187), primarily addressing his concerns to the central conceit. Regarding this conceit, Saccio worried: "...the notion of Caliban and Ariel as parts of Prospero creates a problem. How does one make that point *on stage*" (191)? Indeed, as we discovered in our own production, this is a major challenge for this treatment of the play. Unless all three roles were to be played by a single actor, there is a disjunction between the philosophical claim for their unity and the visceral presence of the three actors.

In fact, this disjunction is, in reverse, the same principle that we have already discussed in regards to *Everyman*: in that case, although a play's text posits Everyman as a representation of the entirety of mankind, in a performance the sensation is of watching a single man die. Similarly, as Saccio observes, "That [Caliban and Ariel] should also be *parts* of Prospero, projections of elements within him, is a plausible extension of their servitude and their opposition; but this is a *literary* interpretation, an allegorical reading" (191).

And *The Tempest* is no allegory, despite its didactic structure. Shakespeare is a storyteller first, and a teacher only secondarily; as Alfred Harbage puts it in *As They Liked It*, "Shakespeare is not an artistic moralist but a moral artist" (vi). The play is a device through which Shakespeare may be able to deliver a message, but he certainly doesn't feel it necessary, as his predecessors did, to label everything and send it into the world with a tag attached reading, "Take three times yearly with sermon."

Shakespeare, in fact, stands poised at the brink of our modern theatre. Instead of telling us the means to salvation, he shows; as Saccio observed of Freedman's production (and I observed of my own), to do too much telling without the most careful calibration can kill the magic of the evening (191). The ideal presentation of *The Tempest* might, in fact, be to let the text structure of the story expose the theme, as it was originally meant; to cast Prospero as a clearly dying man, as I did, may be to confuse the theme of the play with its content.

This does not mean, of course, that we take nothing from our new understanding of *The Tempest*. On the contrary, the play gains a new richness and relevance from the added layer of meaning exposed in our analysis. Jan Kott's vision of the play is fundamentally correct, though it is perhaps more political than mine: *The Tempest* is a play of loss, endings, and farewells, and a bittersweet melancholy pervades the marriage, the forgiveness of sins, and the final leave-taking from the island. It is also a play that offers a profound new vision, bridging the gap between Philippe Ariès's realms of universal and personal death to show us a highly personal death that brings the individual dying man into alignment with the world around him and with divine order. In this vision, too, is an invitation: having witnessed the performance, we may now leave the theater and take with us a new way of approaching our own mortality. *The Tempest* in this way is one of the first and most powerful articulations of the individuality that pervades our own culture, theatrical and otherwise, to this day. Our lives—and deaths—are ours to make harmonious as we can, until we too are finally "set free."

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