



# The Freedom to Enslave: The Tension Between Humanism and Hegemony in Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

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The Freedom to Enslave: The Tension between Humanism and Hegemony in  
Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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## Abstract

This study examines the tension between humanism and hegemony in *The Tempest* and how that tension situates Prospero's island as a microcosm for Elizabethan England. The central paradox of the play is the humanist sorcerer's decision to implement a hegemonic structure on the island mirroring the European hierarchy that betrayed him in Milan. Drawing on Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and New Historicist criticism, this study interprets the play as a series of power relations, with Prospero having absolute authority over the island inhabitants – Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban – and later, the shipwrecked Europeans. Through Prospero's relationship with his daughter, his subordination of Ariel and Caliban, and the power dynamics between the shipwrecked Italians, Shakespeare repeatedly demonstrates that human beings across social classes harbored humanist desires to shape their own identities in order to exert personal agency and strive for fulfillment – a social phenomenon epitomized by Prospero's own ascent to becoming an omnipotent sorcerer. *The Tempest*, this study argues, is ultimately a play that explores identity in relation to social power dynamics, revealing how the quest for self-actualization is both fueled and thwarted by society's dominant orthodoxies and the conventions of its reigning hegemonic structure.

## Dedication

For my parents, the first to teach me language.

And for Jacob, my “patient log-man,” to whom my heart flies at his service.

## Acknowledgements

While I am indebted to the many teachers throughout my life who instilled in me a love of learning, I am especially grateful to Dr. Gary Bouchard and Dr. Bindu Malieckal, who first conveyed the wonder, excitement, and profundity of Shakespeare to me during my years as an undergraduate at Saint Anselm College. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the faculty and staff at Harvard Extension School, especially for the opportunity to walk the hallowed passageways of Widener Library, where so many writers and scholars studied before me.

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## Foreword

*The Tempest* – a play that explores the boundaries between illusion and reality, nature and civilization, and servitude and liberty – begins with a challenge to the boundaries of social class. Ignoring orders to stay in their cabins during the storm, King Alonso and Antonio inquire about the whereabouts of the shipmaster as the Boatswain, a lowborn, skilled professional, is embroiled in efforts to control the ship. The Boatswain dismisses the queries of his social superiors, asking rhetorically, “. . . What cares these / roarers for the name of king? To cabin! Silence! / Trouble us not” (1.1.16-18), implying that the authority of nobles is meaningless in the face of the raging winds and waters. When Gonzalo chides the Boatswain to “remember whom thou hast aboard” (1.1.19), the Boatswain’s defiant response is radical for his inferior social standing: “None that I love more than myself” (1.1.20). While the Boatswain will only appear in the first and final scenes of *The Tempest*, his expression of self-sovereignty is a theme that reverberates throughout the entire play, consuming its protagonist and influencing the actions and motivations of each character ensnared in Prospero’s magical and manipulative ploy for revenge.

Scholars have long recognized Prospero as the embodiment of humanism: once a studious duke, Prospero’s dedication to his books results in his mastery of a sorcery so potent it can manipulate the elements. Prospero’s ambition is the paradoxical source of his downfall (a distraction that leaves him vulnerable to Antonio’s political coup) and his restoration (a motivating trait that propels him to absolute power and fuels his



vengeance). Although he has personally benefited from the freedom to indulge his ambition and an unrestricted pursuit of knowledge, he chooses to implement a hegemonic structure on the island that mirrors the oppressive class system of the European society that betrayed him. As Annabel Patterson articulates in *Shakespeare and the Popular Vote*, *The Tempest* is a “fantasy play of class relations reduced to the most elemental form of the master-slave dialectic” (10). Indeed, Hegel’s Master-Slave Dialectic, which argues that the history of society can be reduced to the struggle between master classes and slave classes, is relevant to each of the power-dynamics that Prospero institutes on the island. As ruler of the island, he is the master of Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban, yet each character challenges their place in the island’s hegemonic structure in an individualized way.

Under Prospero’s absolute rule, Miranda represents the island’s noble class. As the monarch’s daughter, she lives a life of relative comfort and protection, although her gender limits her knowledge and opportunity. Ariel’s social position correlates with that of the merchant class in Renaissance Europe; he enjoys an amicable relationship with the island patriarch so long as he fulfills his duties, yet he is socially inferior to Prospero no matter how companionable their relationship may seem. Caliban is relegated to the lowest caste of the island’s society, comparable to the peasant class of early modern Europe. As Prospero’s slave, he is forced into manual labor to provide for the basic needs of Prospero and Miranda, the island nobility.

However, humanism hovers within Prospero’s island hierarchy like an unseen tropical mist, revealing itself in the desires of the sorcerer’s subordinates despite his best efforts to reinforce his authority. This study defines humanism and humanist ideals as an emphasis on the agency of human beings that arose and flourished during the

Renaissance period between 1485 and 1660. From this period of cultural rebirth emerged new concepts of human experience, including romantic love, companionship, and personal liberty. These concepts led to the understanding of the self as a malleable entity that individuals could shape through a “manipulable, artful process” – a process Stephen Greenblatt refers to as “self-fashioning” (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 3). While this phenomenon resulted in increased autonomy and social mobility, it also threatened the entrenched power structures sustaining the authority of Christian doctrine and the English monarchy. To protect their power, authority figures devised techniques to discourage the pursuit of personal liberties.

In the following study I will argue that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare’s exploration of the social paradoxes that humanism engendered in Elizabethan<sup>1</sup> and Jacobean England, as individuals began striving for personal fulfillment within the confines of social hierarchy. Drawing on decades of New Historicist criticism, the following chapters will draw parallels between Prospero’s island hierarchy and the social structure of Elizabethan England. In Chapter I, I will analyze Prospero’s relationship with Miranda in light of Renaissance gender politics and family power dynamics. I will argue that Miranda’s character progression throughout the play, from dutiful daughter to emboldened lover, is influenced by her experience of romantic love, which threatens her father’s authority. In Chapter II, I examine the master-slave relationships between Prospero and the subjugated island natives, Ariel and Caliban. In addition to New Historicism, Chapter II draws on postcolonial scholarship to discuss the relationship between legitimacy and Prospero’s hegemonic structure on the island. In Chapter III, I examine the power dynamics between

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<sup>1</sup> *The Tempest* was first performed in 1611 for Jacobean audiences, but this study will heavily reference the historical context of Elizabethan England, as Queen Elizabeth I’s reign had a lasting influence on Shakespeare’s life and work.

the shipwrecked Italians, whose betrayal is the impetus of Prospero's detailed plan of vengeance. King Alonso and his courtiers exhibit the morally ambiguous political power dynamics of the European elite. In particular, Antonio and Sebastian (and their foils, Stephano and Trinculo) represent the darker side of indulging humanistic desires when their ambition leads them to attempt political insurrection. The chapter will discuss the religious and political roots of insurrection, demonstrating its prevalence in Renaissance society and how the reigning monarchy sought to prevent it.

Through Prospero's relationship with his daughter, his subordination of Ariel and Caliban, and the power dynamics between the shipwrecked Italians, Shakespeare repeatedly portrays how human beings across social classes harbor humanist desires to shape their own identities in order to exert personal agency and strive for fulfillment. *The Tempest* is ultimately a play about the exploration of self, as each character attempts to reconcile their motivations and desires within the island's hegemonic structure. In the play's final scene, humanity overcomes magic, order is restored to the future of the Italian court, and each character appears to experience fulfillment after a period on the island "when no man was his own" (5.1.213). Although this seems like a conventional happy ending for a Shakespearean romance, this study argues that Miranda and Ferdinand's well-matched marriage cannot reconcile the social complexities and power relations with which the play has grappled. The recurring tension between humanism and hegemony in *The Tempest* underscores the anxiety that characterized the changing social fabric of Renaissance Europe. Despite the reunifying qualities of *The Tempest*'s final scene, the play's Epilogue suggests that Prospero, champion of humanist ideals, continues to struggle with the ramifications of his ambition, power, and legacy.

## Chapter I

### The Early Modern Father-Daughter Power Dynamic

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is one of the most significant power dynamics in *The Tempest* because it demonstrates the sorcerer's complexity as an authority figure. In the presence of his daughter, Prospero can occasionally separate himself from the all-powerful persona he has created and fully embody his role as a father. Although he shares an intimate bond with his daughter, he is also selfishly motivated to protect her because her maidenhood is integral to his revenge plot. The power dynamic between Prospero and Miranda is therefore the first to reveal the many contradictions inherent in the sorcerer: he loves his daughter but manipulates her for personal gain; he seeks unlimited knowledge for himself but denies his daughter the same opportunity; his magical powers transcend human capability, but his restoration hinges on European convention (marriage). This chapter will discuss how Prospero's relationship with his daughter reveals his inner contradictions as a humanist and a ruler. However, it will also explore how their power dynamic reflects the changing gender politics of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England. Miranda embodies the role of dutiful daughter for most of the play, but when Ferdinand arrives on the island her own humanist urges embolden her to challenge her father's authority. Within the island's hegemonic structure, Prospero and Miranda's relationship demonstrates how humanism redefined conceptions of familial

devotion, romantic love, and femininity while the reigning authority struggled to preserve control by reinforcing ingrained social traditions.

Critics and readers have long recognized the dynamic female characters in many of Shakespeare's plays. While the women are not always virtuous, many are strong-willed, cunning, and powerful. Lady Macbeth subverts the gender politics of a conventional marriage, bemoaning her gender as an obstacle for action and urging her tentative husband to commit murder. King Lear's daughter Cordelia is confident and unafraid to speak her mind, even if her truthfulness is detrimental to her inheritance. Portia boldly cross-dresses as a man in order to display her intelligence and masterful rhetoric, ultimately sparing Antonio's life. As evident through Lady Macbeth, Cordelia, and Portia, it was not uncommon for Shakespeare's female characters to garner independence and empowerment by channeling or possessing masculine qualities. New Historicist scholars have noted the correlation between this portrayal and the perception of Queen Elizabeth I, under whose reign Shakespeare penned and performed the majority of his plays. In *Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare and Shaw*, Lagretta Tallent Lenker explains that Queen Elizabeth publicly exhibited androgynous qualities in order to maintain the respect of her subjects. Aiming to "skillfully fashion a public image of herself [that] incorporated both male and female aspects . . . Elizabeth exhibited both overt (cross-dressing) and covert (psychological) androgyny, and in doing so, greatly influenced her people" (Lenker 105). While *The Tempest* was written and performed under the rule of King James, Shakespeare continued to integrate the cultural conventions fostered under Queen Elizabeth's forty-four year reign in his plays.

Unlike the defiant Lady Macbeth, Cordelia, and Portia, Miranda embodies the early modern feminine ideal. She was raised far from the Italian court into which she was born, but as a beautiful, innocent, and deferential young woman, she possesses the qualities that the nobility revered. Miranda's characterization is also indicative of *The Tempest's* categorization as a romance play, as explained by Northrop Frye in *A Secular Scripture*. Frye asserts that romances begin with "a world associated with happiness, security, and peace . . . and the images are those of spring and summer, flowers and sunshine" (53). This setting reflects Miranda's childhood on the island, protected by her father and surrounded by a lush, beautiful landscape. Her first lines in the play emphasize her innocence when she asks her father to mollify the storm with his magic, lamenting "O, I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer – a brave vessel / (Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)" (1.2.5-6). Frye also argues that the emphasis of romance plots "is often thrown on childhood or an 'innocent' or pregenital period of youth" (*A Secular Scripture* 53), and Miranda's centrality to her father's revenge validates Frye's observation. Prospero controls all elements within his island's realm and hegemonic structure, and the timing of the shipwreck aligns with Miranda's ripening maturity. The end of Miranda's childhood is a pivotal moment for Prospero because her maidenhood will be the catalyst for his restoration as Duke of Milan.

Preserving his daughter's innocence by limiting her knowledge has therefore been essential for Prospero during their years on the island. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this strategy is the first glaring instance of Prospero's hypocrisy; while he willfully indulged his own ambition in order to master the arts, he denies the opportunity to his daughter and the other island inhabitants when he chooses to institute an island

hierarchy. Similarly, although he loves his daughter, he employs manipulative power tactics in order to ensure her compliance. Prior to explaining their origins to Miranda, Prospero reminds her, “I have done nothing but in care of thee, / Of thee, my dear one, thee my daughter, who / Art ignorant of what thou art” (1.2.16-18). Although he may be professing genuine devotion for Miranda, Prospero’s rhetoric subtly reinforces to his daughter that she is completely dependent on him – a tactic that he will repeat later in the play to secure Ariel’s submission to his authority. The lines also demonstrate that Prospero is in control of Miranda’s conception of herself – she is “ignorant” because her father has withheld information about her past that is foundational to the formation of her identity.

In order to maintain authority within the hegemonic structure that he has created, Prospero must appear infallible to his subordinates, although his role as a father allows him fleeting moments of vulnerability and connection. Alone with his daughter, Prospero asks her to “pluck my magic garment from me” (1.2.24). In her essay “Prospero: Master of Self-Knowledge,” Barbara Howard Traister argues that “while Prospero acts like a god, he maintains his humanity through his role as a father and as the jilted ruler of Milan” (125), and the removal of his magic cloak is a symbol of his temporary abdication of magic and return to his natural, human state. Without his magic, Prospero portrays himself as a caring and benevolent father, referencing the educational opportunity Miranda has received from his tutelage and crediting his daughter as the reason he possessed the will to survive after being thrust from Milan (1.2.172-74). When Miranda worries that she was a burdensome baby, his response is uncharacteristically tender: “Thou wast what did preserve me. Thou didst smile / Infused with a fortitude from

heaven . . . which raised in me / An undergoing stomach to bear up / Against what should ensue (1.2.154-58). As demonstrated through his profession of paternal love, including his decision to educate Miranda, Prospero's role as a loving father is an integral component of his identity.

However, this vulnerable part of himself challenges his identification as an omnipotent ruler, and he responds to this internal paradox by repeatedly asserting his authority as he explains their past. Prior to beginning his tale, he orders his daughter to "obey and be attentive" (1.2.38), and he spends the remainder of his explanation preoccupied with confirming that he has Miranda's attention. "Dost thou attend me?" he charges her as he explains his brother's deceit (1.2.78). Despite her assurances, he accuses her of inattention and repeatedly peppers his tale with commands that she "mark" him (1.2.67, 87-88). These self-interruptions demonstrate Prospero's need to reiterate his control over his audience and his own narrative, a rhetorical device that he will repeat in later interactions with Ferdinand and Ariel. In "*The Tempest: Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne*," Greenblatt recognizes disrupted conversation as a device that Shakespeare incorporates into several of his plays which "invariably gives way to reaffirmations of self-fashioning through story" (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 252). In addition to providing his daughter with a firmer sense of her identity, Prospero's reflections allow him to reinforce his own sense of self. He acknowledges the human faults that led to his exile, but he also reminds himself of his power and authority in order to strengthen his resolve to carry out his revenge.

Miranda's trust and obedience in her father is crucial to his revenge plot, and he therefore portrays his past self as a humble duke, undeserving of his devastating betrayal.



“Thy father was the Duke of Milan and / A prince of power” he reveals to Miranda (1.2.55-56), deliberately associating himself with power in every iteration of his life. Prospero admits that his books distracted him from his political duty, but he couches his faults in good intentions, explaining that he was “all dedicated / To closeness and the bettering of [his] mind” (1.2.90-91). He also evokes his daughter’s sympathy by asserting that his ambitions were innocently focused on his studies, rather than the pursuit of power. “Me, poor man, my library / Was dukedom large enough” he explains, positioning himself as the antithesis of his “perfidious” and power-hungry Antonio (Shakespeare (1.2.109-110, 68). Raised by her father to embody the virtues of a noblewoman, Miranda responds with venom to descriptions of her treasonous uncle and earnestly expresses concern for her father’s tribulations (“I, not rememb’ring how I cried out then, / Will cry it o’er again . . .” (1.2.132-33).

In addition to illuminating Prospero’s internal identity conflict, the sorcerer’s relationship with Miranda reflects larger cultural trends with which Shakespeare and his European contemporaries grappled. I have previously argued that the island can be interpreted as a microcosm of Elizabethan England, and Miranda’s exposure to education aligns with the rise of print-based culture in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which, as scholar Russ McDonald notes in *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, “made education more accessible, extending even to aristocratic women” (255). As literacy spread, liberating the minds of those marginalized by society including women and commoners, the ruling class developed a “powerful cultural anxiety about the potential disruption of social order” (McDonald 255). Prospero reflects this anxiety in his interactions with Miranda. While he previously boasted about providing her with a superior education that “. . .

made [her] more profit / Than other princes can that have more time / For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful” (1.2.172-74), he quickly rebukes her when she expresses independent thought. After Miranda begs her father to show Ferdinand mercy, Prospero condescendingly replies, “What, I say, / my foot my tutor?” (1.469-70), referencing his role in her education to remind Miranda of her inferior position in their power dynamic. In his book *Ambition: A History*, William Casey King explains that the spread of literacy during the Renaissance period resulted in increased communication throughout the lower classes, fueling paranoia about espionage and plots to overthrow the monarchy during Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns (46). In response, both monarchs sought to limit the circulation of knowledge, a strategy that Prospero also implements. Instead of encouraging Miranda to be inquisitive about her past, he abruptly ends their conversation with his magic: “Here cease more questions. / Thou art inclined to sleep” (1.2.183-84). Like Queen Elizabeth and her successor King James, Prospero seems aware of the correlation between knowledge and power, and he protects his absolute control of the island – and his plan for revenge – by controlling his own daughter’s perceptions.

The importance of this manipulative power tactic is revealed upon Ferdinand’s introduction in the play. Prospero has plotted for years to marry his daughter to the prince of Naples in order to secure a political alliance that will restore his position as Duke of Milan. By censoring his daughter’s knowledge of the world beyond the island, he ensures that she will be fascinated by the young prince’s appearance. Awakening at her father’s command to see Ferdinand for the first time, Miranda initially mistakes him for a god: “I might call him / A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble” (1.2.417-19). Although Ferdinand is equally enthralled by Miranda’s appearance, calling her a

“goddess” (1.2.424), her chastity is at the forefront of his mind upon meeting her. Within moments of their interaction, he inquires about her virginity: “My prime request, / Which I do last pronounce, is (O, you wonder!) / If you be maid or no?” (1.2.426-28).

Ferdinand’s lines reveal that his attraction is influenced by courtly expectation, and despite Miranda’s beauty, her chastity is of utmost value to the prince. As Frye explains in *The Secular Scripture*, “in a male-dominated society, a man often assumes that he ought to get a virgin at marriage, otherwise he may feel that he has acquired a secondhand possession” (78). This patriarchal convention has motivated Prospero to protect his daughter’s purity while raising her on the island, including his decision to enslave Caliban after the native’s attempted rape of her (1.2.346-49). When Miranda confirms that she is indeed chaste, the prince responds with relief and a pledge to marry her: “O, if a virgin, / And your affection not gone forth, I’ll make you / The Queen of Naples” (1.2.447-49). Prospero watches the couple’s attraction grow, remarking to himself “It goes on, I see / As my soul prompts it” (1.2.420-21). Even in privacy, he must reiterate his power and the success of his plan to himself (and the audience).

Prospero fully embodies his role as omnipotent sorcerer in the presence of Ferdinand. Although he is well aware of Ferdinand’s social standing in Naples, Prospero deliberately presents himself as a formidable ruler to the prince, pretending to regard Ferdinand as a suspicious stranger in order to foster a stronger desire between the lovers, “. . . lest too light winning / Make the prize light” (1.2.450-51). However, when his daughter’s defense of Ferdinand challenges Prospero’s authority, the sorcerer seems genuinely threatened. Miranda clings to her father’s robes in an effort to physically stop him from harming the prince, and Prospero’s rebuke is scathing:

Silence! One word more  
Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What,  
An advocate for an imposter? Hush.  
Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,  
Having seen but him and Caliban. Foolish wench,  
To th' most of men, this is a Caliban  
And they to him are angels. (1.2.477-82)

In his admonishment, Prospero exploits Miranda's weakness – her lack of worldliness – to intimidate her into submission, a rhetorical technique that will be further explored in Chapter II when we examine the sorcerer's relationship with Ariel and Caliban. In crafting Prospero's harsh reaction to his challenged authority, Shakespeare likely emulated the power tactics of the Elizabethan and Jacobean elite, who employed condescension "to persuade subjects to obey even corrupt authority rather than risk rebellion" (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 133). Prospero is pleased with Miranda and Ferdinand's mutual attraction, but he is not willing to relinquish control over the development of their relationship. In *Problem Fathers in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama*, Tom MacFaul asserts that in Shakespeare's plays "the representation of gender relations on the stage reflects the patriarchy's unexpressed worry about the great social changes which characterized the period" (4). This scene encapsulates the tension between humanism and hegemony within the Renaissance

father-daughter dynamic because Prospero disparages his daughter's free will when he senses that it threatens his social control.

Despite Prospero's efforts to control his daughter, Miranda's love for Ferdinand infuses her with agency, further demonstrating how humanism threatened established hierarchy. In her book *Mind, Modernity, Madness*, a sociological analysis of the connection between nationalism and modernity, Liah Greenfeld argues that the notion of romantic love arose during the early modern period as "a central expression of the sovereignty of the self – the ultimate passion . . . in the sense of its authentic and free expression, the supreme movement of the sovereign human spirit" (322). In other words, romantic love, like ambition, is a product of humanism through its connection to the pursuit of individual fulfillment. Miranda's love for Ferdinand overpowers her sense of filial duty, compelling her to confront her father and express herself freely for the first time. When Prospero relegates the prince to perform manual labor, Miranda defies her father by urging Ferdinand to rest, offering to bear his burden, and – most radically – revealing her name to him against Prospero's wishes (3.1.18-37), the latter of which encapsulates the tension between humanism and hegemony in Miranda's immediate reaction to her decision to provide her name:

FERDINAND. . . . I do beseech you –

Chiefly that I might set it in my prayers –

What is your name?

MIRANDA. Miranda – O my father,

I have broke your hest to say so!

Miranda is motivated by her own desire to introduce herself to Ferdinand, and although she experiences momentary remorse for defying her father's authority, it does not stop her from continuing to converse with Ferdinand and ultimately professing her love to him. On a broader scale, the exchange demonstrates the social change that instilled anxiety in the ruling class – Prospero's authority is merely an afterthought in Miranda's pursuit of love. The sorcerer has controlled every aspect of his daughter's experience on the island, but humanism begins to liberate her from his control. In telling Ferdinand her name, Miranda takes ownership of her identity for the first time.

This "sovereignty of self" empowers Miranda, and instead of assuming the subordinate role in her relationship, which would have been the social expectation at court, she interacts with Ferdinand as a social equal on the island. She openly expresses her desire for the prince, telling him, ". . . I would not wish / Any companion in the world but you, / Nor can imagination form a shape, / Besides yourself, to like of . . ." (3.1.52-57). As we have previously discussed, Miranda exhibits quintessential female virtues in the early scenes of the play, acting dutiful and demure in the presence of her father. However, her passion for Ferdinand evokes a boldness in Miranda that was uncharacteristic of Renaissance women; as John Roe explains in his essay *A Niggle of Doubt: Courtliness and Chastity in Shakespeare and Castiglione*, "Elizabethan decorum insists that a married woman or a woman who makes chastity a principle of her conduct, must never express or disclose feelings of desire" (40). This change in Miranda reveals that although Prospero modeled his hegemonic structure off of European hierarchy, the humanist qualities that contributed to his own rise to power also infiltrated his island society. Miranda's response to her experience of romantic love demonstrates how

unrestricted humanist pursuits and ideals had the potential to reshape social roles and encourage individual agency.

While Miranda's feelings for Ferdinand liberate her, the lovers express ironically express their affection for one another through master-slave diction. In many ways, the lovers' relationship mirrors the father-daughter power dynamic explored earlier in this chapter, though the gender roles of the dynamic are reversed, with Miranda acting as the master to her willing servant Ferdinand. Ferdinand is cognizant of his social demotion, explaining to Miranda that in Naples, manual labor "[w]ould be as heavy to me as odious, but / The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead, / And makes my labours pleasures" (3.1.5-7), implying that his love for Miranda transcends his desire for authority over her. Chapter II will examine the relevance of Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic in relation to Prospero's relationship with Ariel and Caliban, but the dialectic is also relevant to the young lovers, furthering Hegel's assertion that human existence can be distilled into the struggle for power between "master" and slave" in varying power dynamics. As Ferdinand struggles under the heavy wood he is forced to carry, he draws on diction associated with servitude to profess his love:

. . . Hear my soul speak:

The very instant that I saw you did

My heart fly to your service, there resides

To make me slave to it, and for your sake

Am I this patient log-man. (3.1.63-67)

Miranda and Ferdinand's relationship is rooted in power relations, and within Prospero's hegemonic structure, Miranda is the master of her lover.

Miranda responds to this social role by exhibiting masculine characteristics in her relationship. Docile in her early scenes with Prospero, she is assertive around Ferdinand, boldly demanding, "Do you love me?" (3.1.67). When the prince responds affirmatively, Miranda is steadfast in her commitment to him: "I am your wife, if you will marry me; / If not, I'll die your maid" (3.1.83-84). In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye explains how "the heroine's role [in romances] is primarily concerned with her relation to the man whom she, or her creator, is determined she shall marry" (78). This is true of Miranda, whose existence is first dictated by her father in preparation for her marriage and later defined by her romantic love for her future husband. However, although her relationship with the prince is preordained by her father's magic, Miranda does not remain passive in her relationship with the prince. Rather, she assumes the masculine role of European courtship by initiating the marriage proposal and she exerts agency over the shaping of her own identity when she declares to Ferdinand, "I am your wife" (3.1.83). In her analysis of father-daughter relationships in Renaissance literature, Lenker argues that "androgyny is the key to achieving a reciprocal relationships" (110). This observation is not relevant to Miranda and Prospero's relationship, but it is applicable to Miranda's romance with Ferdinand. When she enters into a romantic relationship with Ferdinand on the island, Miranda is in a position of power.

The lovers' power dynamic is arguably another element of life on the island that is orchestrated by Prospero's magic in order to enhance his intricate plan for revenge. Continuing to control the perceptions of each individual on the island, Prospero carefully



chooses how to introduce the couple to King Alonso and his courtiers after he has confronted the shipwrecked Italians and secured the restoration of his dukedom. Following Alonso's emotional lament for the son he presumes dead, Prospero reveals Ferdinand and Miranda engaged in a game of chess (5.1.171). This image is significant because it visually establishes Miranda as Ferdinand's equal before the eyes of the king. The dialogue overheard between the lovers furthers this impression:

MIRANDA. Sweet lord, you play me false.

FERDINAND. No, my dearest love,  
I would not for the world.

MIRANDA. Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,  
And I would call it fair play. (5.1.173-74)

In this exchange, Miranda establishes herself as a cunning strategic partner. She no longer possesses the innocence that defined her in the play's earlier scenes with her father. Miranda is unafraid to challenge her husband, as evident when she accuses him of cheating during the game. She also demonstrates her newfound political astuteness when she counters Ferdinand's reassurance, gently arguing that the prince would deceive her in exchange for "a score of kingdoms" as he sought greater political power (5.1.173). In learning the story of father's betrayal, Miranda's worldly innocence is supplanted by a sharp awareness of the relationship between power and politics. When Prospero introduces his daughter to Alonso and the others, he is cognizant of the scene's symbolic

presentation. He does not offer his daughter as a demure maiden, but as an authoritative and strategic co-ruler of Naples' political future.

Prospero's unveiling of the couple demonstrates why Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand was crucial to his revenge; in addition to beginning a social sequence that will return Prospero to his rightful seat in Milan, his daughter's matrimony will elevate Prospero's lineage to the utmost level of power in Naples' hierarchy. In Ferdinand's eyes, the families are already entwined before they leave the island, as evident when he introduces Prospero to Alonso as his "second father" (5.1.195). Elated to learn that his son is alive, Alonso quickly offers the couple his marriage blessing: "Give me your hands. / Let grief and sorrow still embrace his heart / That doth not wish you joy" (5.1.212-14). As Tina Packer argues in *Women of Will*, this resolution correlates with the plot progression of other father-daughter relationships across Shakespeare's canon, where "there is a massive sin or trauma . . . that takes a generation to heal, and it's the daughters who offer the way out" (269). Miranda's marriage begets Prospero's political restoration and she secures the literal "way out" on her new husband's repaired ship, transporting Prospero and his daughter from the isolated island to their rightful place in Neapolitan society. The play ends with the understanding that order has been restored, transgressions have been forgiven, and "the birth of a new society" as Frye explains has begun (*The Secular Scripture* 73).

Miranda's fate reflects the tensions between hegemony and humanism in the Renaissance father-daughter power dynamic. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Prospero's rearing of Miranda is characterized by the social contradictions of the early modern period: he educates his daughter yet limits her knowledge for his own benefit; he

initiates her romance but rebukes her when she defends her lover; he has genuine paternal love for his daughter but manipulates her to secure his own revenge and restoration. Despite the confines of her father's hegemonic structure, Miranda benefits from the social energy – generated by humanism – that pervades the island. Through romantic love, she redefines her identity, challenges her father's authority, and participates as an equal in her relationship, transforming from a docile and demure daughter to a cunning wife and future queen. As Lenker observes, "Daughters [in Shakespeare's plays] . . . become agents for interrogating such issues as gender, generational, societal, and familial positions and values." (122). Prospero's restoration is impossible without Miranda, and their father-daughter power dynamic in *The Tempest* suggests that women have more to contribute to society than their roles as passive daughters and wives, especially when Prospero purposely reveals his daughter as Ferdinand's strategic equal in the game of chess.

However, Shakespeare is prevented by Jacobean orthodoxy for which he writes and performs to imply that Miranda's empowerment will transcend the confines of the Italian patriarchy into which she is preparing to integrate, and the playwright must therefore contain Miranda's liberation and newfound free will. Miranda's social progress on the island therefore does not lead to the widespread disruption of patriarchal social order, but the restoration of it. Her education and romantic devotion temporarily challenge her father's hegemonic structure, but she ultimately conforms to it by marrying the suitor chosen by her father and solidifying her future as the Queen of Naples. Prospero's daughter is the harbinger of social rebirth, but, as Terry Eagleton has observed about daughters in Shakespeare's plays, her personal development and social

achievement contribute to “the very act of healing the patriarch” (Lenker 103). Miranda does not harness humanism and transcend the boundaries of her father’s hegemonic rule, but prepares to willingly participate in the “brave new world” of European convention that awaits her on the Italian shores (5.1.184).

## Chapter II.

### The Regime of Sycorax: The Tension Between Legitimacy and Hegemony

In detailing their origin story to Miranda, Prospero explains his responsibilities and faults as a duke, his relationship with his peers in Milan, and the courtly corruption that led to his betrayal and exile. As elucidated in the previous chapter, he portrays his past self as a humble victim of political corruption and a devoted father determined to provide for his daughter. This narrative reinforces Prospero's self-image as a wronged man justified in his vengeance and Miranda's image of her father as a strong and noble figure of authority. However, noticeably missing from Prospero's narrative is an explanation of how the former duke and his infant daughter acclimated to life on the island. Determined to portray himself as an infallible figure to Miranda, Prospero neglects to mention his forced enslavement of Ariel and Caliban and his and Miranda's dependency on them for over a decade. On the island, Prospero becomes a colonizer, subjugating the natives in order to create a hegemonic structure that gives him absolute power. Yet despite their subjugation, Ariel and Caliban both possess desires for personal fulfillment. Drawing on Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* and postcolonial scholarship, this chapter will analyze Prospero's master-slave dynamic with Ariel and Caliban. It will demonstrate that humanism infiltrated every social class during the Renaissance period, extending even to society's oppressed individuals. Analyzing the tension between humanism and hegemony in these relationships also reflects the tension

between hegemony and legitimacy that Europeans increasingly confronted during the early modern period.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, criticism of *The Tempest* focused on postcolonial interpretations of the play, which are important to consider when analyzing Prospero's relationships with Caliban and Ariel. The pioneering work of scholars including Octave Manoni and Ania Loomba argue that Shakespeare explores themes of European colonization through the play's plot, and many identify Prospero's path to power on the island as that of the archetypal European colonizer. In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as explorers began expeditions beyond Europe, England's trade economy diversified, and travel narratives emerged as a genre, Shakespeare would have been familiar with tales of colonization. As Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan explain in their Introduction to the Arden Shakespeare edition of *The Tempest*, texts describing sea voyages and encounters in the New World circulated during Elizabethan and Jacobean society, and ". . . Shakespeare, like any literate Londoner of his day, must have been familiar with those texts, and, very likely, had seen . . . one or more of the approximately 25 American natives who lived for a time in early seventeenth-century England" (44). Reports from Michel de Montaigne and Thomas Harriot about the native people they encountered in Brazil and North America may also have influenced Shakespeare's depiction of Prospero's relationship with the island natives (Vaughn and Vaughn 45). Notably, Harriot's publication *A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* (1588) described English colonizers' interactions with the Algonkian tribe and detailed how the English used their religion and advanced technology to manipulate the indigenous peoples' beliefs and coerce their subjugation (Greenblatt, *Invisible Bullets*

48). Although we cannot be certain that Shakespeare read these specific texts, his portrayal of Prospero's relationship with Caliban particularly follows the arc of colonization described in them: Prospero arrives on the island ignorant of its resources, becomes dependent on Caliban – for survival, earns the native's trust, and ultimately betrays and enslaves him.

Before examining Prospero's relationships with the natives he marginalizes, it is worth returning to Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic, which correlates with my argument that Ariel and Caliban experience humanist desires despite their oppression under the sorcerer. In *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel asserts that the history of human interaction can be distilled to the history of the struggle between masters and slaves. As Hegel asserts in Alexandre Kojève's translation, "Man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily and existentially, either Master or Slave . . . implying an element . . . of 'autonomous' existences and 'dependent' existences" (9). However, the slave is capable of introspection and realization, which Hegel terms "Self-Consciousness." The Slave struggles against the Master to transcend the Master's oppressive bounds, and it is through this struggle that autonomy is achieved and the Slave can "create a world in which he will be free" (29). *Phenomenology of the Spirit* was published nearly two centuries after *The Tempest*, but Hegel's argument elucidates our understanding of the master-slave dynamics presented in the play. Hegel's insights about class struggle also align with Ariel and Caliban's desire to harness their autonomy and break free of Prospero's hegemonic structure on the island.

Within Prospero's hegemonic structure, there are variations of the master-slave dynamic, and Ariel conforms to the role of a compliant servant for most of the play.

Returning from heeding Prospero's orders to scatter the shipwrecked Italians throughout the island, Ariel greets Prospero as his "great master" and appears to show allegiance to the sorcerer:

All hail, great master; grave sir, hail! I come  
To answer thy best pleasure, be't to fly,  
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride  
On the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding, task  
Ariel and all his quality. (1.2.189-93)

In response to Ariel's willing servitude, Prospero assumes the role of benevolent master. He addresses Ariel with patronizing endearment – "my brave spirit" (1.2.207) – to subtly imply his possession of Ariel. However, the characters' dynamic abruptly shifts in tone when Ariel challenges Prospero's allusion to additional his service: "Is there more toil? . . . / Let me remember thee what thou hast promised, / Which not yet performed me . . . My liberty" (1.2.242-45). Just as romantic love was a new concept that emerged during the Renaissance period, the notion of personal freedom was a product of humanism and the era's increased social mobility. As Greenfeld explains, "from within the social confines [of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe] one was driven to aspire and achieve individual identity" (321). Ariel breaks the social code of Prospero's hegemony when he appears to value his liberty over his service to the sorcerer.

Without Ariel's servitude, Prospero's plan for vengeance is impossible, and the sorcerer therefore responds with vitriol in an effort to intimidate the spirit into



subordination and regain social control. “Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee?” Prospero demands (1.2.247-49), and although Ariel assures the sorcerer that he does not, Prospero punishes the spirit by launching into a description his traumatic past. After calling Ariel a “malignant thing” and a “slave” (1.2.258, 270), Prospero’s diatribe culminates in a detailed description of Ariel’s prolonged imprisonment by the witch Sycorax:

. . . – she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine, within which rift  
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years, within which space she died  
And left thee there, where thou didst vent thy groans  
As fast as millwheels strike . . . (1.2.274-81)

Prospero purposely arouses the spirit’s painful memories to intimidate him into submission – a tactic that Queen Elizabeth and King James also employed during their reigns. As Greenblatt explains in *Shakespearean Negotiations*, “the ruling elite believed that a measure of insecurity and fear was a necessary, healthy element in the shaping of proper loyalties, and Elizabethan and Jacobean institutions deliberately evoked this insecurity” (136).

Prospero's reflection on Ariel's past is the second origin story shared in the play, and as in his conversation with Miranda, Prospero uses his control of narrative as a way of reinforcing his authority. During both narratives, he emphasizes the immense power of his magic, telling his daughter that his "art" spared the shipwrecked sailors and reinforcing to Ariel, ". . . it was mine art, / When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape / The pine and let thee out" (1.2.291-93). In both narratives, he grows impatient with his audience, repeatedly forcing their attention by asking questions. While he physically manipulates Miranda by charming her to sleep at his convenience, his manipulation of Ariel is psychological. The sorcerer reminds Ariel that he is indebted to Prospero, and he threatens to recreate the spirit's past torture: "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till / Thou hast howled away twelve winters" (1.2.294-96). After arousing social anxiety, Elizabethan and Jacobean authority figures sought to "transform it through pardon into gratitude, obedience, and love" (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 138). Prospero's manipulative rhetoric has this effect on Ariel, and he obediently vows that he will be "correspondent to command" from his "noble master" (1.2.298, 300).

While it is clear that Prospero and Ariel's relationship represents a master-slave dynamic, Caliban's presence in the play reinforces that the sorcerer's hegemonic structure is a multi-tiered class system, with Caliban occupying the lowest social sphere. In contrast to Prospero's introduction to Ariel as his "brave spirit" (1.2.207), the sorcerer's first reference to Caliban is as "a freckled whelp, hag-born not honoured with / a human shape" (1.2.283-84). Prospero and Miranda do not show Caliban any dignity, calling him "a villain" (1.2.310), a "poisonous slave, / got by the devil himself" (1.2.320),

a “savage” (1.2.356), and other dehumanizing terms. Despite his disgust for Caliban, Prospero is cognizant of his family’s dependence on him, explaining to Miranda, “We cannot miss him; he does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us” (1.2.312-13). As discussed earlier in this study, Prospero tailors his manipulation strategies to his subordinates, limiting his beloved daughter’s knowledge and threatening Ariel until he complies. However, the sorcerer physically torments his slave Caliban into submission, referencing the past bouts of aches and cramps he has forced upon the native. Caliban openly despises Prospero, but he acknowledges that he is powerless against the sorcerer’s magic, implying that it transcends the elemental magic of his ancestors: “I must obey; his art is of such power / It would control my dam’s god Setebos” (1.2.373-375).

A significant factor in Prospero’s motivation to oppress Caliban is that the native, as the legitimate heir to the island, is the sorcerer’s only threat to power. Caliban is steadfast in asserting his legitimacy, telling Prospero, “This island’s mine by Sycorax, my mother / Which thou take’st from me” (1.2.322-23). Ironically, Caliban is the one individual under Prospero’s rule who is in control of his own narrative. He therefore provides the audience with the details that Prospero neglected to include in the origin story he tells his daughter. Caliban describes the arrival of Prospero and Miranda from his perspective:

. . . 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. And then I loved thee  
And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle:  
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.  
Cursed be that I did so! All the charms  
Of Sycorax – toads, beetles, bats – light on you,  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me  
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me  
The rest o'th'island. (1.2.334-44)

Caliban's account exemplifies the standard power dynamic between the colonizer and the colonized described earlier in this chapter, with Prospero using Western knowledge – like astronomy and the English language – to gain Caliban's trust in order to manipulate and overpower him. As Greenblatt explains in *Invisible Bullets*, alluding to Harriot: “If we remember that all 16<sup>th</sup> century Europeans in the New World . . . were entirely dependent upon the Indians for food, we may grasp the central importance for the colonists of this dawning Indian feat of the Christian God” (47). Greenblatt uses this example to demonstrate how Europeans drew on their social orthodoxies, particularly Christianity, to

subvert and control indigenous populations. Caliban's account implies that Prospero employed a similar strategy to gain power, although instead of religion, he relied on compassion, language, and "waters with berries in't" – a possible reference to alcohol – to subdue and placate the native.

Several references to Prospero and Caliban's shared past reflect the tension between colonizers and indigenous people. When Miranda reflects on how she "pitied" Caliban and devoted her time to teaching him how to speak English instead of ". . . gabble like a thing most brutish" (1.2.356-57), she implies that the native should be grateful. Caliban's response is filled with resentment: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse" (1.2.364-65). In giving Caliban a voice, Shakespeare humanizes the Other, calling into question whether the European notion of civilization is liberating or corrupting. Ultimately, however, Caliban reveals that his natural instincts outweigh his sense of morality. When Prospero alludes to the native's attempted rape of Miranda, Caliban's only regret is that he was not successful: "Would't had been done; / . . . I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (1.2.350-52). The complexity of Caliban is another way that *The Tempest* reflects Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment. Shakespeare portrays the "savage" Caliban as an intelligent and eloquent individual, subtly calling into question the ethics of colonization. However, the native's attempted rape of Miranda ultimately justifies his oppression in the eyes of the Jacobean audience for which the play is performed.

Although Prospero considers himself a morally, intellectually, and physically superior being to Caliban, there are striking parallels between them. Both characters assume the role of teachers (Prospero educates his daughter and teaches Caliban

language, while Caliban teaches the sorcerer – and later Stephano and Trinculo – how to navigate the island), both characters are usurped by individuals that they love and trust, and, most significantly, both characters are masters of the realms they occupy: Prospero is a master of the civilized world through his knowledge of the arts, and Caliban is a master of the natural world through his knowledge of the island. In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye argues that in romances, “Man lives in two worlds, the world of nature and the world of art that he is trying to build out of nature. The world of art, of human culture and civilization, is a creative process informed by a vision” (58). *The Tempest* presents a mutation of this convention: consumed by his creative process, Prospero imposes his art and his hegemonic structure on the natural world, and his manipulative magic disrupts both nature and civilization. Through the parallels between Prospero and Caliban – particularly Prospero’s betrayal of the native after his experience with treason in Milan – *The Tempest* calls into question whether the civilized world is indeed superior to the natural one.

Another commonality that Caliban shares with Prospero is a strong foundation of his own identity, rooted in the steadfast belief of his legitimacy. While Prospero identifies as an omnipotent sorcerer, fueled by his desire for political restoration in Milan, Caliban continues to identify as the island’s legitimate heir. As Charlotte Scott observes in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Book*, “Prospero holds memory as he holds illusion, in the wings of his theatre, to manipulate and to teach” (164). We have examined how Prospero uses his memory of Milan to influence how his daughter perceives him and herself. He also uses memory as a tool of torment, evoking painful memories of Ariel’s past to force the spirit’s submission. However, Caliban has a sense of his past and

identity prior to his colonization that Prospero cannot penetrate. The native therefore possesses a sense of autonomy that Miranda only gains through romantic love and Ariel years to be granted by his oppressor. This, more than Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, is the native's greatest threat to Prospero. Caliban refuses to willingly conform to Prospero's hegemonic structure, and the sorcerer must enslave him in order to preserve his position of power.

Caliban's social progress under Prospero's rule conveys that colonization could compel a form of self-fashioning in the people it oppressed. As Patterson explains in *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, "we learn that Caliban loves music, has learned English, speaks as good poetry as the playtext has to offer, and knows something about the laws of inheritance" (155), characteristics that reflect Prospero's European influence. Loomba argues that "representations of outsiders who willingly or forcibly mold themselves in the image of the dominant culture . . . testify to the fact that the very concepts of social mobility and self-fashioning, indeed modernity itself, were profoundly shaped by encounters with outsiders, at home and abroad" (Loomba 18). Fueled by his desire for companionship, Caliban willingly conforms to the cultural norms that Prospero introduces prior to the native's attempted rape of Miranda and subsequent enslavement. Greenfeld argues that the desire for companionship was another product of humanism in the early modern period, connected to the new urge "to find meaning in one's life and seek the affirmation of self" (258). Miranda and Ariel both receive self-affirmation in the play; initially, through their complicity in Prospero's plan for revenge and later through romantic love and liberation, respectively. However, following his enslavement, Caliban must seek companionship and self-affirmation outside of the sorcerer's sphere.

Caliban's combined desire for self-affirming companionship and acknowledged legitimacy results in his formation of an ill-fated alliance with Stephano and Trinculo that reinforces the play's allegorical connections to colonization. Despite Caliban's intelligence, Stephano and Trinculo reduce the native to his otherness and continually dehumanize him. Upon his first glimpse of Caliban, Trinculo is confused by his appearance: "What have we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish, a very ancient and fish-like smell . . . A strange fish!" (2.2.24-27). His descriptions reflect classism and colonialism because during the early modern period "those whom Europeans colonized were portrayed in terms that had already been applied to poor people – rude, uncultured, dirty, unrefined and unintelligent" (Loomba 38). Stephano and Trinculo further dehumanize Caliban by perceiving him as a spectacle. Prior to engaging with the native, they think about the monetary value he could provide if they publicly displayed him on the European streets – an historical reference to the occasional display of Native Americans in England during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Vaughn and Vaughn 209). Prospero represents the archetypal colonizer in his act of enslaving the island native to assume control of his new land. However, Stephano and Trinculo represent the gaze of the colonizer because the Europeans assume that Caliban's exotic appearance signifies his inherent social and intellectual inferiority.

Despite their degrading treatment of him, Caliban is quickly willing to devote himself to Stephano and Trinculo. Eager to recruit allies for a revolt against Prospero, Caliban only knows one way to connect with them – by serving them. Undeterred by Prospero's betrayal, he offers the same services to Stephano as he did to the sorcerer long ago:



I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries;

I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.

A plague upon the tyrant that I serve!

I'll bear him no more sticks but follow thee

Thou wondrous man. (2.2.157-61)

Similar to Miranda's awestruck perception of Ferdinand, Caliban considers Stephano "wondrous" because his appearance on the island represents opportunity. For Caliban, opportunity lies in enlisting the strangers to help him reclaim his legitimacy. Within moments of meeting them and drinking their liquor, he explains his predicament:

"As I told thee before, I am subject to a tyrant, / A sorcerer, that by his cunning hath /

Cheated me of the island" (3.2.40-43). Ironically, Caliban uses his servitude as leverage

for helping overthrow Prospero, promising Stephano, "If thy greatness will / Revenge it on him – for I know thou dar'st, / . . . Though shalt be lord of it and I shall serve thee" (3.2.50-55).

Postcolonial scholars regard Caliban's pledge as an accurate portrayal of the psychological damage inflicted on the oppressed. Mannoni asserts that colonized people suffer from a dependency complex, "which is to say that they need the firm hand of the ruler to keep them from insanity" (Loomba 163).

Although Caliban's memory connects him to his legitimacy, over a decade of oppression by Prospero's hegemonic structure has influenced his conception of self, leaving him to define himself by whom he serves. In the scenes following his introduction to Stephano and Trinculo, Caliban plots their plan to overthrow the sorcerer, musing on the many ways he could be killed: ". . . brain him, / . . . or with a log, / Batter

his skull, or paunch him with a stake, / Or cut his wezand with thy knife” (3.2.88-91). Far more cunning and experienced than the bumbling jester and butler, he emphasizes that they must destroy Prospero’s source of his power: “. . . Remember / First to possess his books” . . . “. . . Burn but his books” (3.2.91-92, 95). Some critics have pointed to Caliban’s calculated conspiracy as an indication of his true villainy and “natural propensity to evil” (Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, 110). However, this study maintains that Caliban is as complex a figure as Prospero, and his hatred for the sorcerer is fueled by his desire for companionship and autonomy. Although Stephano and Trinculo continue to degrade the native throughout the play, they provide Caliban with the hope of escaping Prospero’s rule and reclaiming his legitimacy. This hope, along with the brief companionship he experiences with them, seem to provide him with fleeting happiness, as evident when he breaks into song after pledging his loyalty to them:

No more dams I’ll make for fish,  
Nor fetch in firing at requiring,  
Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish.  
Ban’ ban’ Ca-caliban  
Has a new master, get a new man.  
Freedom, high-day; high-day freedom; freedom high-  
Day, freedom. (2.2.176-82)

It seems ironic that Caliban equates “freedom” with serving another master, but – as is evident through his proclamation of his name, an assertion of his identity – his decision to

serve Stephano allows him to express the personal agency that has been stifled by his subjugation under Prospero.

The hopefulness that his alliance with Stephano and Trinculo instills in Caliban is short-lived, as the omniscient Prospero monitors their movements and prevents their treason. In the final scene of the play, when each character's true identity is restored (as will be discussed in the following chapter), Stephano and Trinculo are portrayed as drunken fools and Caliban remains a "misshapen knave" and "demi-devil" (5.1.268, 270), physically and morally, in the eyes of the Europeans. Again, Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment elucidates the play's resolution in its early modern social context. As King explains in *Ambition: A History*, summarizing Greenblatt, "[in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama], threats to social order are acted out and neutralized on stage as lessons to those who might dare such things outside the drama. Sin could be acted out, order could be disrupted, but by the end of the play, sinners are punished and order is restored" (54). Shakespeare humanizes the Other and examines the ethics of colonization in *The Tempest*, but ultimately, through Prospero's control of the island and all of its inhabitants, the play's resolution endorses the superiority of European society and culture.

However, this study argues that Caliban's fate is more ambiguous than his assumed return to oppression following his exposure by Prospero. Chapter III will examine Prospero's impending transformation from sorcerer to mortal in greater detail, though it is worth mentioning here that as his plan for revenge succeeds, his obsession with power ebbs, and the delineations of his hegemonic structure begin to fade. As Prospero prepares to return to his role as the Duke of Milan, his subsequent loss of power

– politically and magically – instills compassion in Prospero that influences how he interacts with his subordinates.

Before discussing how Prospero’s transformation relates to Caliban’s fate, we will examine Ariel’s fate, which coheres with *The Tempest*’s happy ending because his freedom does not threaten the structure of European hierarchy. Rather, Ariel’s freedom is a reward for his dutiful compliance in carrying out all of Prospero’s commands. The spirit does not challenge Prospero’s authority after the initial transgression previously discussed, and he continues to perpetuate his subordinate role in their master-slave dynamic by seeking affirmation from Prospero. “Do you love me, master?” Ariel asks as he prepares the magical masque for Ferdinand and Miranda (4.1.48), to which Prospero gladly responds as benevolent master, “Dearly, my delicate Ariel” (4.1.49). However, as previously mentioned, the closer Prospero’s revenge looms, the more he embodies his human identity over his identity as an all-powerful sorcerer. In the final scene of the play, Prospero’s affection for Ariel shifts from a manipulative strategy to true affection, and he is willing to learn empathy from the spirit:

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

PROSPERO.       Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL.           Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROSPERO.      And mine shall.                           (5.1.17-20)

The conversation indicates that Prospero respects the spirit's insight – a radical departure from his previous portrayal as a tyrannical master of unquestionable authority to all of his subordinates. As Tina Packer observes, “Ariel is Prospero’s creative force that allowed him to work all his magic [on the island]” (291), and the sorcerer is aware of this as his revenge plot comes to a close. Prospero’s final act of the play is fulfilling his promise to Ariel by granting the spirit the freedom he has desperately yearned for: “My Ariel, chick, / That is thy charge. Then to the elements / Be free, and fare thou well!” (5.1.317-19). Like Miranda, who connects with her sense of self through romantic love, Ariel attains self-actualization and autonomy when he is finally granted his liberty.

In seeking advice about compassion from Ariel, Prospero acknowledges an emotional bond with the spirit that he has previously ignored in order to retain absolute authority. In the final scene of the play, Prospero must also indicate his connection to Caliban. Motioning to the native as he stands before the reunited Europeans, the restored duke solemnly admits, “. . . this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-76). Shakespearean scholars have discussed how Prospero’s statement can be interpreted as mere ownership of Caliban as his slave or, on a deeper level, his partial responsibility for Caliban’s insurrection. In “Learning to Curse: Linguistic Colonialism in *The Tempest*,” Greenblatt argues that “Prospero’s words are ambiguous . . . they acknowledge a deep, if entirely unsentimental, bond. By no means is Caliban accepted into the family of man” (68). Greenblatt elaborates on this point by recounting the fate of the other characters in the play (Prospero’s restoration, Miranda and Ferdinand’s marriage, and Ariel’s freedom), maintaining that “Caliban’s fate is naggingly unclear” (68).

However, in a play that examines the ethics of colonization, gives an eloquent and intelligent voice to the Other, and implies that civilization is a corrupting force in nature, I argue that the native's ambiguous future could in fact indicate a happy ending for Caliban as well. Like the shipwrecked Europeans, who (as Chapter III will explain) acknowledge their past transgressions and seek forgiveness when Prospero confronts them in his charmed circle, Caliban seems to have experienced a personal awakening. When he addresses Prospero in the final scene, gone is his venomous tone and blatant hatred for the sorcerer. Instead, Caliban expresses regret for his actions and exhibits a desire to change within Prospero's hegemonic structure, rather than resist it: ". . . I'll be wise hereafter / And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass / was I to take this drunkard for a god, / And worship this dull fool!" (5.1.295-98).

Caliban's fate, like Miranda's, is a complex balance of humanist achievement and, as Greenblatt articulates in *Invisible Bullets*, "containment of a subversive force by the authority that created that force in the first place" depending on where the audience imagines Shakespeare's sympathies to lie (53). On the one hand, Caliban's admission of wrongdoing and promise to "seek for grace" represents his conformity to Prospero's hegemonic structure at long last, demonstrating to Jacobean audiences that European culture will prevail against threats of insurrection led by inferior cultures. Through the European gaze, Caliban's reference to religion and his desire for forgiveness from his colonizer imply a European superiority that supports Greenblatt's theory of containment. On the other hand, it is worth returning to the similarities between Prospero and Caliban outlined earlier in this chapter, which allow us to conjecture about the native's untold fate. By *The Tempest's* final scene, Prospero is reconnecting with his human identity through

forgiveness and fading from his role as a power-hungry sorcerer. Perhaps Prospero forgives Caliban of his past transgressions as he does those of his brother, Sebastian, and the King Alonso. Perhaps the social order restored to the civilized world also encompasses the natural one, with usurpers punished and scorned rulers returned to their rightful seats of power. If Prospero vacates the island for Milan, it could mean that he leaves Caliban to claim his legitimacy on the island after over a decade of the native's oppression. Caliban's fate may be "naggingly unclear," but this ambiguity may also mask what Shakespeare cannot explicitly convey: that the Other is deserving of autonomy and the chance to fulfill his humanist desires.

This chapter has explored the power dynamics between Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban, drawing parallels between Prospero's hegemonic structure and the social hierarchy of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England. It has examined how humanistic drives influenced the individuals in every social class, regardless of the level of their subjugation. Despite his forced servitude, Ariel never loses his desire for liberty, and even in the face of extreme oppression, Caliban yearns to assert his autonomy by regaining control of the island. Both characters, marginalized by Prospero's hegemonic structure, engage in the process of self-fashioning, whether by conforming to the sorcerer's hegemony or defying it, in an effort to assert their identity. Finally, this chapter has drawn on postcolonial scholarship to demonstrate the allegorical parallels between Prospero's rule and colonization, illuminating the tension between hegemony and legitimacy on the island. Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic asserts that "as long as the Master lives, he himself is always enslaved by the world in which he is Master. . . only the Slave can transform the world that forms him . . . and create a world in which he will

be free” (29). Ariel and Caliban suffer under Prospero’s reign, but in the end, they both arguably achieve the autonomy for which they have hungered. Ariel’s fate closely correlates with Hegel’s dialectic, as he is freed by his Master from the hegemonic structure that transformed him into a slave in the first place. Although Caliban’s freedom is not explicitly stated, it is clear that he has experienced some form of renewal, and the ambiguity of his fate makes it possible that he will regain his legitimacy when his former oppressor returns to Milan. Paradoxically, at the end of the play, when Prospero’s “charms are all o’erthrown,” sins are forgiven, and order is restored, it indeed the play’s quintessential Master who is left pining for release (Epilogue 9.1).



### Chapter III

#### The Neapolitan Charmed Circle

I have been considering the tensions that arise in *The Tempest* between humanism and hegemony as they are exposed within the hierarchy that Prospero has instituted on the island. The desires that Prospero's subordinates possess – Miranda's romantic love, Ariel's hope for freedom, and Caliban's quest for autonomy, companionship, and legitimacy – challenge the boundaries of the sorcerer's hegemonic structure. Prospero's strategies for preserving his authority, whether by limiting his daughter's worldview, evoking anxiety in Ariel to better control him, or enslaving Caliban to prevent him from reclaiming his legitimacy, reflect the ruling strategies of the Elizabethan and Jacobean monarchies, who sought to retain power and exert their authority in the midst of unprecedented social change.

In addition to illuminating the tension between humanism and hegemony, *The Tempest* explores the tension between nature and civilization. As we have previously discussed, Prospero's decision to model his island society off of the power structure that betrayed him taints the Edenic quality of the island and disrupts its natural order. As Thomas Kullman explains in his essay "Dramatic Appropriations of Italian Courtliness," "The Court of Milan . . . is not just a place where courtly excellence can unfold but also . . . a place of despotism, egotism, lies, and intrigues" (65). This becomes apparent when the shipwrecked Europeans arrive on the island and begin their journey, through

Prospero's magical manipulations, to confront their past transgressions. Shakespeare's thought experiment is to remove the king and his advisers from their civilized courts and isolate them in the natural world to reveal their true natures. Even in this environment, not surprisingly, their preoccupation with politics, power, and entitlement is not easily shed. This chapter will analyze how ambition, perhaps humanism's biggest contribution to the impulses it engendered during the early modern period, manifests in the power relations of the Europeans. It will examine historical and theological representations of ambition and how Prospero's hegemony reflects the Elizabethan and Jacobean political efforts to discourage subjects from fostering the trait. Ultimately, the Europeans confront their ambitious transgressions and their true natures in Prospero's charmed circle, where a new era for the Neapolitan kingdom is forged through the marriage bond of Miranda and Ferdinand.

As described in this study's Foreword, the exchange between the Boatswain and the Italian nobles in *The Tempest's* first scene demonstrates the social deference that the nobility expected to be shown by lower classes. When the Boatswain refuses to conform to the reigning social etiquette, the nobles are enraged. Gonzalo advises him to remember his place in society, while Antonio and Sebastian respond with insults and threats: "A pox o' your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog / . . . / Hang, cur! Hang, you whoreson, insolent noise-maker! We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art" (1.1.55-57). The extreme reaction reflects the class relations that pervaded 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England, which Greenblatt explains in *Will in the World*: "the social elite lived in a world of carefully calibrated gestures of respect. They demanded constant, endlessly reiterated signs of deference from those below them" (76). Similar to Prospero's

manipulation of Ariel, when the Boatswain challenges his superiors' authority, Antonio and Sebastian attempt to intimidate him into submission.

Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, and Sebastian lose their authority once they arrive on the island's shores, yet they remain preoccupied with power. Alonso is bereft without Ferdinand, and Gonzalo attempts to distract the king from his grief by reminding him of the successful union of his daughter, Claribel, and the King of Tunis. Sebastian reflects, "'Twas a sweet marriage, and we prosper well in our return" (2.1.73-74), underscoring that prosperous political alliances were the focus of marital unions during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The conversation ultimately devolves into a dispute about whether Queen Dido hailed from Carthage or Tunis (2.1.77-100), a significant allusion because it emphasizes how politics overshadow empathy for the nobles, and it references two historically important city-states – a nod from the playwright about civilization's newfound preoccupation with identities on individual and national levels. As Greenfeld explains, the formation of city-states fostered a sense of nationalism during the Renaissance, which ultimately fueled "a new concept of the human being as an autonomous agent" (311-316). Shakespeare subtly invokes these emerging social and political ideas by having the Italians quibble over the history of major city-states despite having just survived a harrowing shipwreck.

Shipwrecks were a motif that Shakespeare utilized to jolt his characters into self-exploration in several of his plays, including *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Tempest*. By stripping away the familiarities of the court, Greenblatt explains, "[the] catastrophe is often epitomized by the deliberate alteration or disappearance of the name, and with it, the alteration or disappearance of social status" (*Will in the World* 85). While

the nobles continue to define themselves by their roles in court, their dominant characteristics are put into sharp relief against the island's natural setting. King Alonso, the figure with the most authority on the island, sheds his dignified decorum in the wake of losing his son. He expresses regret over the political alliance in Tunis that resulted in the "loss" of both of his children haunts (2.1.107-113), and his grief suggests that his paternal bond matters more to him than his position of power, as evident when he proclaims in 5.1, "Irreparable is the loss, and patience / Says it is past her cure" (5.1.140-141)." Although Prospero's recollection of the events leading to his exile suggests that Alonso was complicit in Antonio's betrayal, Shakespeare portrays the king as a multifaceted and sympathetic character. Alonso is respected by his subjects, displays deep paternal love for his children, and is capable of acknowledging his own mistakes and faults. Although he was persuaded by the lust of power to condone dishonorable behavior, he is capable of change and redemption — at least within Prospero's hegemonic structure.

Shakespeare depicts more simplistic characterizations of human nature through the identities of Gonzalo, who is virtuous, and Antonio, who is vicious. Gonzalo's virtuous qualities are foreshadowed in Prospero's origin narrative to Miranda, during which he describes the councilor as a "noble" man possessing "charity" and "gentleness" (1.2.161-65). In addition to food, water, and linens, Gonzalo provides Prospero with the sustenance most vital to the sorcerer's sense of self – his books: ". . . volumes that / I prize above my dukedom" (1.2.166-68). Gonzalo is the play's moral compass, and he possesses an enduring empathy for others that sets him apart from his peers, as

demonstrated when he urges his fellow survivors to be grateful for their lives after they survive the shipwreck:

Beseech you, sir, be merry. You have cause  
(So have we all) of joy, for our escape  
Is much beyond our loss. Our hint of woe  
Is common: Every day some sailor's wife,  
The masters of some merchant, and the merchant  
Have just our theme of woe. But for the miracle,  
I mean our preservation, few in millions  
Can speak like us. Then wisely, good sir, weigh  
Our sorrow with our comfort. (2.1.1-9)

Gonzalo's empathy with lower classes defies conventional class relations of Renaissance Europe – a society that was “intensely, pervasively, visibly hierarchical: men above women, adults above children, the old above the young, the rich above the poor, the wellborn above the vulgar” (Greenblatt, *Will in the World* 76). Shakespeare further develops Gonzalo's virtue when the councilor shares his vision of an ideal society:

All things in common nature should produce  
Without sweat or endeavor; treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine  
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth

Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people. ( 2.1.160-165)

Although he interjects humor in his vision, joking that his utopian inhabitants would be idle (2.1.155), Gonzalo's ideal society is one without betrayal or violence, where all inhabitants are innocent and have access to abundance – a vision that contrasts with the hegemony that Prospero has implemented on the island.

Gonzalo's moral antithesis is Antonio, Prospero's "perfidious" brother (1.2.68). While Prospero's ambition is morally ambiguous in the play, Antonio's ambition is synonymous with "an evil nature" that leads him to enact what Prospero describes as "a falsehood in its contrary as great / as my trust, which had indeed no limit" (1.2.92, 94-95). The negative characteristics associated with Antonio's ambition have theological roots. As Christopher Haigh explains in *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven*, Shakespeare's contemporaries "were bound by state law to attend their parish church on Sundays . . . to go to services on Holy Days, to receive communion three times a year, and to send their children and servants to be taught the Christian faith on Sunday afternoons" (5). During these services, individuals would have developed a deep familiarity with the Geneva Bible's Book of Genesis and the Tudor *Homilie against Disobedience and Wylfull Rebellion*, published in 1570. Since English monarchs were the head of Church and State in the Renaissance period, religion was used as a tool for maintaining order. Associating ambition with negative connotations was therefore essential to reducing the threat of rebellion, and religious literature was "intended for the common and middling sort [and] composed of simple language and clear directive" (King

40). The *Homilie against Disobedience and Wylfull Rebellion*, regularly quoted from 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century pulpits, defines ambition as “the unlawful and restless desire in men to be of higher estate then God hath geven or appointed unto them, condemning men and women clyming up of theyr owne accorde to dominion” (King 40). Ambition is an integral characteristic of each European noble in the play – including Prospero – and the varying ways in which the men engage with the impulse reflects the core of their morality.

Shakespeare’s audience would have recognized the similarities between Cain in the Book of Genesis and the scheming Antonio, who betrays his brother and encourages Sebastian to do the same when they arrive on the island. As Barbara Mowat describes in *Shakespeare Reads the Geneva Bible*, several of Shakespeare’s plays incorporate allusions to the parable of Cain and Abel, “the first sibling rivalry and fratricide in the context of inheritance” to underscore themes of “brother striving with brother for ‘the dignity of the firstborn’” (30). Antonio convinces Sebastian to take advantage of Alonso’s grief-stricken weakened state, persuading the king’s brother to violently and immorally create an opportunity for social mobility. This deviance comes naturally to Antonio, as evident when he proclaims to Sebastian as the king rests beside them, “O that you bore / The mind that I do! What a sleep were this / For your advancement! Do you understand me?” (2.1.267-69).

The island’s natural setting reinforces the true nature of each nobleman, reinforcing, as Greenblatt explains, that “all men are *not* alike; strip away the adornments of culture and you will *not* reach a single human essence” (*Learning to Curse* 66). Antonio’s essence is as malevolent as his betrayal of Prospero suggests, and he remains unrepentant, boasting about the results of his usurpation: “My brother’s servants / Were

then my fellows; now they are my men” (2.1.272-75). When Sebastian inquires about Antonio’s conscience, he claims to be unaffected by guilt. As King explains in his book, “[In Elizabethan England,] ambition was identified as one of the major causes of rebellion, and associated with Satan, madness, damnation, and sin” (46). Antonio’s satanic associations are solidified through his use of rhetoric to persuade Sebastian, whom he successfully convinces to murder the king. Sebastian credits Antonio as his inspiration: “Thy case, dear friend / Shall by my precedent. / As thou got’st Milan, I’ll come by Naples” (2.1.291-94). Through this exchange, Shakespeare depicts ambition as a catalyst for betrayal, murder, and political insurrection – a portrayal that aligned with the monarchy’s attitude toward individuals who desired to achieve more than their birth rite allotted them.

The negative portrayal of ambition is furthered through the farce of Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano’s attempted insurrection, mentioned in the previous chapter. It is worth briefly examining how their alliance reflects a satirical representation of European power dynamics. When Caliban pledges to serve the courtiers, Stephano seals the allegiance by offering his cask to the native with the words, “Here, kiss the book” (2.2.127). The gesture is an allusion to Queen Elizabeth’s pre-coronation procession, during which she kissed a Bible to “represent and reaffirm an order of absolutes, wherein the book stills the spectacle of pageant to celebrate Elizabeth as both defender of the faith and governor of the Church” (Scott 167). Caliban’s willing worship of alcohol mocks this formal display and emphasizes that his devotion to Stephano and Trinculo is misplaced. The men worship the bottle instead of their king, and their efforts at insurrection are therefore doomed.



Analyzing the ambition that drives Antonio, Sebastian, Stephano, and Trinculo is significant because it reveals that no matter how their perceptions are warped by Prospero's charms and the island's mysteries, they remain preoccupied with self-promotion and power. Prospero's vengeance is ultimately a forced reckoning, and in the final scenes of the play, he uses his magic to awaken the noblemen's consciences. Sent to prepare the Europeans to face Prospero, Ariel appears before them as a harpy to remind the "three men of sin" – Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian – of their wrongdoing (3.3.53):

"...But remember / . . . that you three / From Milan did supplant good Prospero, / Exposed unto the sea, which hath requit it, / Him and his innocent child" (3.3.68-70). The confused men unsheathe their swords to defend themselves, but, echoing the Boatswain's claims in the first scene, Ariel asserts that their efforts are powerless against the elements. As Scott explains, "Ariel's performance as a harpy reinvokes the storm, guiding the sinners through their sins. Ariel's role . . . forces [the men] to visually confront a semblance of conscience long buried by their ambitions and achievements" (177). In contrast to Prospero's ambition, which has propelled him to a position of power where he can enact social restoration, the Europeans' ambition has clouded their morality and driven them to commit sinful crimes.

Antonio and Sebastian lose their humanity by indulging their ambition and channeling it to carry out treasonous acts. At times throughout the play, Prospero's ambition also overshadows his humanity, as demonstrated through his tyrannical protection of his authority in his role as master over Ariel and Caliban. However, in the final scene of the play, Prospero reconnects to his humanity by renouncing his magic, and subsequently, his ambition. As analyzed in Chapter II, his tender exchange with Ariel

prompts him to value his “nobler reason” over his desire for revenge (5.1.26), admitting: “The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (5.1.27-28). Despite defining himself through his superiority within every power relationship we have examined in the play, Prospero is willing to renounce his magic in preparation for his return to Milan. Preparing for his final act of sorcery, he traces a circle in the fertile ground of the island where he will confront the Neapolitans, his brother, and the other Italians and grant their redemption. As he prepares for this moment, he invokes the elements a final time, reflecting on his enormous power:

. . . I have bedimmed  
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,  
And ’twixt the green sea and the azured vault  
Set roaring war; to the dread-rattling thunder  
Have I given fire and rifted Jove’s stout oak  
With his own bolt: the strong-based promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up  
The pine and cedar; graves at my command  
Have waked their sleepers, ope’d and let ‘em forth  
By my so potent art. . . (5.1.41-50)

His reflections convey an acknowledgement of how his art has disrupted the natural order of the world, and, with his revenge secured, he is ready to renounce his magic in order to enact a widespread restoration of order. Preparing to embody his role as a sorcerer before

the men who betrayed him, he declares that the charmed circle will be his final act of power, after which, “this rough magic / I here abjure” (5.1.50-51). In her essay *Prospero: Master of Self-Knowledge*, Traister argues that Prospero’s renunciation reflects his awareness of his limitations. Rather than continuing to indulge his ambition and face the inevitable corrupted fate of his brother and Sebastian, Prospero “is successful primarily because he knows his limitations and works productively within them” (120). Standing in the charmed circle before Ariel delivers the others, Prospero makes a promise to himself: “. . . I’ll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I’ll drown my book” (5.1.54-57). This decision also adheres to Greenblatt’s argument of containment – Prospero indulges ambition, but he does not succumb to it. He exerts self-control and willingly chooses to renounce his magic and embody the human version of himself as the Duke of Milan. This portrayal of ambition would have been acceptable to King James and Jacobean audiences because Prospero’s fate does not endorse the pursuit of unlimited knowledge that threatened the monarchy’s authority.

Over a decade of Prospero’s dedication, careful planning, and magical mastery culminate inside the circle that he draws, where those who betrayed him stand charmed before him. As the island’s omniscient ruler, Prospero is aware of every man’s motivations and transgressions. Enclosed in a sphere where their true natures are revealed, he publicly addresses the misdeeds of them all. However, although the men are vulnerable before him and although he has devoted years to plotting his revenge, he chooses to forgive his peers. His compassion extends even to the treasonous members of the group: Sebastian, whom he refers to as “unnatural” for his willingness to betray his

king (5.1.79), and Antonio, whom Prospero addresses with disgust: “For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, / I do forgive / Thy rankest fault – all of them” (5.1.130-32). By choosing forgiveness over the exertion of power, Prospero avoids the fate of the tragic hero, to which many of Shakespeare’s protagonists succumb. As King explains, “these tragic figures endeavor to manufacture selves of higher estate, but these, ultimately, cannot be sustained. Their heroic transformation is a paradox, one in which a tragic character is both made and unmade. In grasping at all, they lose themselves . . . in their desire, they endeavor to subvert the natural order (78). While ambition is the driving force behind Prospero’s pursuit of revenge, forgiveness is the catalyst through which order is restored within the European power structure – a social harmony that will be transferred to Milan and Naples.

Prospero has played many roles on the island, ranging from affectionate father, to tormenting tyrant, to omniscient sorcerer. However, by confronting the men who betrayed him in his past, he is able to reconnect with the role that he has sought for over a decade: the Duke of Milan. After addressing each member of his charmed circle and restoring their senses, he chooses to align himself with his human identity:

. . . – But howsoe’er you have  
Been jostled from your senses, know for certain  
That I am Prospero and that very duke  
Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely  
Upon this shore where you were wrecked, was landed  
To be lord on’t . . . (5.1.159-62)

Throughout this study, we have explored how humanist ideals propel each character to fashion their chosen identity. As Traister argues, Prospero has ultimately chosen the identity that reconnects him to his mortality: “Prospero’s choice – to return to Milan, to resume his worldly position, and to abjure magic – is a choice to remain human, despite all the weakness and danger human beings are subject to” (126).

Although 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England experienced religious upheaval, Christianity still maintained a firm influence on culture and on the early modern sense of morality. “Christianity brought a growing suspicion of man’s power to shape identity” because of the connection to autonomy and rebellion (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 3). Bound to appease the dominant ideology of the early modern period, this is one explanation as to why *The Tempest* ends in forgiveness, a Christian virtue, rather than further quests for power. It is through forgiveness that each European experiences salvation or retribution: Alonso reunites with his beloved son, Ferdinand and Miranda’s marriage is legitimized by the king, Antonio and Sebastian’s sins are exposed, and Prospero is restored to Duke of Milan. Gonzalo summarizes the widespread restoration of order within the Neapolitan charmed circle:

. . . O, rejoice

Beyond a common joy, and set it down

With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage

Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis;

And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife

Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom

In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves

Where no man was his own. (5.1.206-13)

Gonzalo's remarks reflect Frye's assertion in *The Secular Scripture* that "reality for romance is an order of existence most readily associated with the word identity . . . Most romances end happily, with a return to the state of identity, and begin with a departure from it" (55). When the ship's crew reunites with the Italian nobles, even the Boatswain, who brazenly challenged authority in the play's opening scene, is satisfied with the restoration of order, expressing the deference to authority that he previously refused: "The best news is that we have safely found / Our King and company" (5.1.221-22).

Although the charmed circle will be Prospero's final act of sorcery, he preserves political power for himself when he brings Ferdinand and Miranda's into the circle that symbolizes the future of Naples and Milan. After their game of chess is disrupted, Ferdinand kneels before Alonso, proclaiming Miranda as his future wife and Prospero as his second father (5.1.193-96). Gonzalo invokes the gods to "drop a blessed crown" on the lovers (5.1.202), indicating that their bond represents a conduit for forgiveness and restoration, and Alonso gives legitimacy to the union by grasping their hands and formally recognizing their marriage bond (Shakespeare 5.1.212-14). Prospero abjures his magic, but not before using it in a final act of influence over European power relations by transferring political power to his daughter, the future Queen of Naples. Through the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, "a new society is crystallized" and Prospero is the architect behind it (Frye, *A Natural Perspective* 73).

We have discussed how the play concludes with happy resolutions for each of its characters, extending even – ambiguously but possibly – to its most hated and marginalized character, Caliban. The revelations within the charmed circle represent the culmination of over a decade of Prospero’s careful planning and mastery of magic. He has avenged his betrayal, arranged a prosperous marriage for his daughter, and secured his rightful seat as Duke of Milan. In the process, he reconnects with his humanity by honoring his human identity over his sorcery. Yet, in the play’s epilogue, he expresses anxieties that conflict with the harmony presumed by the restoration of social order. Prospero has liberated his enemies through forgiveness and released his island subordinates through his abdication of power, but despite the success of his revenge and his compassionate gestures, he does not experience personal freedom. Like those previously oppressed by his power, he yearns to be released:

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. . . . (Epilogue 1-5)

Through his final soliloquy, it appears that Prospero’s abjuration of magic correlates with his loss of control. He begs for release from his unnamed audience, claiming, “. . . my ending is despair, / Unless I be relieved by prayer” (15-16).

Throughout the play, Prospero has carefully protected his image as an infallible sorcerer, but his abjuration of magic returns him to a vulnerable human state. The Epilogue therefore reinforces Shakespeare's ambivalent portrayal of humanism in *The Tempest*. The play depicts the wonders of humanism through Prospero's mastery of the elements and successful vengeance. However, whether he is on the island or in Milan, he must reconcile his achievements within the dominant social power structure. His ambition and his magic cannot set him free because his liberation is dependent on forgiveness. While the emphasis of salvation-through-forgiveness could be interpreted as a Christian resolution to the play, I argue that it is a final example of the tension between humanism and hegemony during the early modern period, which relates to Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic. Hegel contends that in the continual struggle between class relations, "as long as the master lives, he himself is always enslaved by the world in which he master . . . and if this world perishes, he will perish with it" (29). Prospero disbands the hegemonic structure over which he presided as absolute ruler, even granting liberation to those he oppressed. However, there is no one to grant him the same release. His mastery of magic and manipulation result in his political restoration, but his identity remains enslaved within the hegemony he created.



## Afterword

The similarities between Prospero and his playwright have been the subject of intrigue and debate for decades. Both men harness the social energy of their generation to foster their ambition and fashion their identity into a social role transcending the one they were born into. For Shakespeare, this meant turning away from his father's trade as a glover and leaving his native village for London to pursue his artistic passion through acting, and later, and playwriting. The majority Prospero's self-fashioning from scorned duke to an all-powerful sorcerer is in reaction to his betrayal in Milan, but like Shakespeare he is fueled by ambition and self-motivation to become a master of his art. *The Tempest* was the final play that Shakespeare fully authored before leaving his career in London and returning to his family home in Stratford. As New Historicist scholars have pointed out, it is likely that Shakespeare was nostalgically considering his career and his mortality as he wrote the play. Preparing for retirement to the country, Prospero's character might have presented an opportunity for the playwright to "grapple with the question of whether he or anyone else could possess aesthetic autonomy" (Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* 81).

The parallels between Shakespeare and Prospero further this study's argument that *The Tempest* presents an ambivalent portrayal of humanism. Some have interpreted the play's protagonist as a champion of humanist achievements while others have argued that Prospero's decision to abjure his magic serves as a moral guide to resist being

consumed by ambition and the desire for power. That the play's ending can put forth opposing views of humanism reflects Shakespeare's deft ability to capture the genuine complexity of human experience – even in a play that incorporates magical powers and supernatural elements.

Sixteenth and 17<sup>th</sup> century England was a period of unprecedented social change, and its resulting advancements and opportunities had to be reconciled within the power structure of the Elizabethan and Jacobean monarchies. Shakespeare uses Prospero's island, an untainted environment far from civilization, to explore the tension between humanism and hegemony, power-relations and identity, and nature and civilization. Analyzing each power dynamic within Prospero's hegemonic structure reveals contradictions about the ruler and the culture he has created: he loves his daughter and provides her with education, yet he limits her knowledge and reduces her value to her virginity; he values and depends upon Ariel's service, yet he treats the spirit cruelly when his authority is challenged; he is a victim of usurpation, yet he enslaves and dehumanizes the legitimate heir to the island that he colonizes. Paradoxically, each of the individuals oppressed by Prospero's rule harbor some variation of humanist desires: Miranda through her romantic love of Ferdinand, Ariel through his desire for freedom, and Caliban desire for autonomy and legitimacy. Each of these power-dynamics reflect the widespread tensions that humanism evoked within Renaissance society, and Prospero's manipulative strategies for maintaining absolute authority reflect the Elizabethan and Jacobean response to increased social mobility during their reigns. When Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio and the other shipwrecked Italians arrive on the island's shores, they demonstrate the European behaviors and values that influenced the Prospero's hegemonic

structure on the island. Their power relations, especially Antonio and Sebastian's attempted conspiracy, shed light on the dangers of ambition and demonstrate how it was a threat to established order. In each of the power dynamics presented in the play, each character – no matter their position in the social hierarchy – demonstrates an intrinsic desire to shape their identity and express self-sovereignty.

As discussed throughout this study, Hegel's Master-Slave Dialectic and Greenblatt's theory of subversion and containment are essential to supporting my analysis. In each of the power dynamics in the play, I argue that Shakespeare portrays the humanistic drives of the subjugated class and the ruling authority's efforts to repress such urges in order to maintain social control. Humanism manifested in individuals in myriad ways, including the desires for knowledge, love, liberty, and autonomy, with each manifestation connecting to an individual's pursuit of understanding and asserting their individuality. We see this in Miranda's empowerment as Ferdinand's lover, Ariel's willingness to challenge his captor in order to secure freedom, and Caliban's refusal to forget his past and allow his legitimacy to fade. *The Tempest* depicts each character's struggle for self-fulfillment within the hegemonic structure to which they must adhere, and their attainment of self-actualization is only possible when their ruler's vengeance is complete, restoring order to the civilized and natural world that his magic has disrupted. Although Prospero's island hegemony disbands, his subjects' self-actualization remains contained by European convention: Miranda's love is solidified through a prosperous marriage to a prince, Ariel receives freedom only after he has served his master adequately, and Caliban's return to legitimacy is a mere possibility following the departure of his oppressor. Following the success of his revenge plot, a plan that has

consumed him for over a decade, it seems that Prospero would be the closest to experiencing personal fulfillment. Yet despite his achievement, *The Tempest's* Epilogue reveals a vulnerable and discontented man, far different from the confident and authoritative sorcerer depicted in previous acts.

This study is entitled “The Freedom to Enslave” in reference to Prospero’s hypocritical decision to institute an oppressive hegemonic structure on the island mirroring the one that betrayed him in Milan. However, it also reflects Prospero’s personal journey and his melancholic tone in the Epilogue. Despite his immense power and his selfless decision to give up that power and forgive his enemies, Prospero ultimately becomes a slave to himself – the “Master” that Hegel identifies as unable to detach from the world that he has created. Prospero chooses to embrace his humanity, but his identity remains entrenched in his achievements as a sorcerer; by losing his magic, he loses a part of himself. Each character in *The Tempest* grapples to fashion their identity amidst the cultural forces that foster self-exploration and the conventional power structure that seeks to stifle it. At the end of a play that explores the complexity of power relations, the pursuit of identity, and the paradoxes of human experience, the former sorcerer expresses a vulnerability that has resonated with audiences for centuries. No matter the magnitude of his power and success, Prospero – and perhaps his playwright – must reconcile his ambitions and anxieties, his wishes and regrets, and the social roles he has performed over the course of his life. He holds a mirror up to the complexity of the human condition as he struggles to prove himself, yearns for acceptance, and desires to be free.

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