XLVIII

NATURAL SUPERNATURALISM IN THE TEMPEST

"Poets are always entitled to a royalty on whatever we find in their works." James Russell Lowell, himself a poet of sorts, was perhaps not entirely disinterested in making this observation. But a host of critics and students have accepted it at face value and have busied themselves in a hunt for the treasures which Shakespeare buried in *The Tempest*. The tools with which they work are mysterious and inexact; so, often, are their findings. Nothing daunted, they have advanced beyond the field of mere facts and sources in a search for treasures of another class—those which can be dug out of *The Tempest*, and which are of a metal and minting that Shakespeare himself might scarcely recognize.

One of the most promising areas in which to prospect is that distinguished by the presence of a supernatural element. Many of the inquiries in this direction fall into two classes: attempts to derive specific allegories from the supernatural machinery, and analyses of the technique that built up a plausible and appealing play out of the fantastic caprices of a poet’s imagination. For instance, one critic has found in Caliban, Syco-rax, and Ariel symbols of water, cloud, and lightning, and in the tempest that combines them a prophetic vision of modern culture, based on natural science, with electricity playing the major part.¹ The other class of criticism is well exemplified by an article indicating how the poet forces us to submit to the spell of his supernatural beings, by means of his realistic art.²

There seem, however, to be fundamental objections to both of these approaches. Mere common sense balks at the picture of an aging, renowned, and successful dramatic poet writing fairy tales prophetic of vacuum cleaners and the radio, or indulging in feats of technical gymnastics to make those fairy tales seem true. Such inquiries, moreover, fail to realize the dramatic and philosophical implications of the supernatural, its effect upon human conduct and human consciousness. And they ignore the fact that there are two reasons for combining naturalism and supernaturalism: not only to make the miraculous seem commonplace, but also to make the commonplace seem miraculous. It is well to remember that another poet, who set himself to procure for his "shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith," had a collaborator who strove "to give the

¹ Konrad Meier, “Über Shakespeares Sturm,” in *Die Neueren Sprachen*, (Marburg 1907–1908); xv, 335 f.
charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness and the wonders of the world before us.”

Let us assume, then, that Shakespeare’s last play is not primarily valuable as a guess at the future of natural science or as an effective fairy story; let us admit that it stimulates our own musings regarding man’s sense of wonder; and let us examine it from the point of view of a Wordsworth as well as of a Coleridge. What evidence have we that The Tempest, though perhaps not one of the “things of every day,” alas, is at least a dramatic representation true to human and external nature, a slice of life which the seventeenth century audience could swallow glibly, and which even our enfeebled imaginations can assimilate without overmuch straining? And if the story of Prospero’s enchanted island does prove to be a plausible one, what does it reveal to us of the “wonders of the world before us?”

The main outlines of the story are as natural as any story can be. (By “natural” I mean “characteristic of the operations of the physical world, . . . in line with normal or ordinary experience”; I do not think one can cavil at these phrases of Webster, or at his definition of supernatural: “beyond or exceeding the powers or laws—i.e., observed sequences—of nature.”) A deposed duke, Prospero, accompanied by his infant daughter, Miranda, has been set adrift upon the sea in a “rotten carcass” of a boat, stocked with necessary supplies, and has found a haven on an uninhabited isle, temperate and fruitful. Twelve years later his enemies, believing him dead, take refuge from a storm upon the same island. Distracted by their mortal danger, and by the supposed death of their king’s son, Ferdinand, who has been separated from them in the storm, they are first subjected to the unaccustomed influences of the wilderness, and are then reminded of their crime against Prospero, for which their own sufferings seem a fit punishment. In the meantime the young prince, who believes himself sole survivor, has been entertained by the island-dwellers, the deposed duke and his beautiful daughter. Miranda, unfamiliar with the world, is fascinated by the polished and handsome Ferdinand; while he in turn, his palate jaded by a too-unremitting diet of Neapolitan court ladies, succumbs to her noble birth and breeding, her unsophisticated charm. When he learns she has suffered from the cruel oppression of his own father, his sense of duty is involved; his gratitude, too, responds to her admiration, and the two exchange vows.

At the very moment when the other castaways are distracted by grief,

\[3\] S. T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chapter xiv.
fear, and remorse, the deposed duke presents himself as their benevolent savior; in addition, he restores Ferdinand to them, and reveals the engagement between the prince and his own daughter. The parties are reconciled, and, the storm having abated and their ship proving still seaworthy, they all sail away.

So far, at any rate, there is no violation of the laws of nature. It is only when we turn to the minor circumstances and incidents of this story that we find the supernatural playing a part. And that part may be smaller and less significant than we at first suppose. The play begins by introducing us to the island whereon the action is to take place; and we, with most of the characters, first reach it by means of an accident only too familiar to Shakespeare’s contemporaries and to readers of Hakluyt—a devastating storm at sea, with all the accompaniment of lightning, billows, St. Elmo’s fire, and general noise, confusion, and panic.

About the island itself there is very little of the supernatural. To be sure, strange creatures inhabit it, and strange things occur—or things that seem strange to the distracted courtiers. Poor, benighted Caliban, a deformed monster dwelling on the island, says that he hears in it “sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not,” and voices that make him sleep and dream:

The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I wak’d,
I cried to dream again.

But the island is just such a one as any of us might hope to find, washed by the sun-spangled waters of some tropical sea. Deserted it seems to be, and almost inaccessible; uninhabitable, too, in the opinion of the effete courtiers. But the temperature is subtle, tender, and delicate. “The air breathes upon us here most sweetly ... Here is everything advantageous to life.” And grass, lush, lusty, and green, cushions the weary feet of the voyagers. The exact location of this enchanting spot has remained a mystery; Bermuda and Lampedusa have been suggested, and even the island of Cuttyhunk, off the coast of Massachusetts, has had its advocates. Personally I fancy that Prospero’s domain lies eastward in the Mediterranean, among the isles of Greece; perhaps it is that very “... isle under Ionian skies Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise,” to which an Ariel wiser and more true than Shakespeare’s own once winged his unerring flight. Be that as it may, the island itself is natural in the fullest sense of the word; external nature flowers there in the utmost luxuriance.

But when we meet the inhabitants of this blest abode, we come into immediate contact with the supernatural. First among them is the deposed duke, Prospero; and he, we are constantly reminded, wields a
miraculous control over spirits and the physical elements. He is, to be sure, a real flesh and blood man, subject to some at least of man's infirmities—when his old brain is troubled, he walks a turn or two to still his beating mind—and endowed with man's supreme gift of love. But he has by study and meditation acquired the powers of an enchanter. A close analysis of Prospero's magical properties reveals, however, few significant violations of the code of nature. In making this analysis we must be careful to examine primarily the things that Prospero actually does in the play, and not merely the comments that he and his observers make upon his actions. The patter of a sleight-of-hand artist and the applause of his audience have little value as evidence. For example, Prospero claims the credit for staging the much-admired tempest that opens the play, but the storm itself is a purely natural affair, and we hesitate to condemn the philosophical opportunist who makes the most of it, even if he pretends to have produced it by his own so potent art.

Prospero's supernatural gifts are exhibited in three or four different ways. He has power over spirits, over his own visibility, and over human consciousness and conduct. Ariel and a host of other sprites, meaner ministers whom Ariel directs, obey the master's commands, fetching and carrying, running minor errands and pestering the castaways. Occasionally they spread a banquet, appear in a masque, or turn themselves into hunting dogs. But these supernatural displays are not in the least essential to the action; and the play sometimes hints that they are mere symbols, projections of mental images. The masque vanishes when Prospero's attention is distracted by the recollection of the drunkards' conspiracy. Ariel is summoned with a thought and cleaves to his master's thoughts; Prospero, who loves him dearly and will miss him when he is dismissed, seems only to be gesturing when he threatens physical punishment and an oak tree prison.

There is considerable doubt as to whether our enchanter possesses the power of invisibility. In two or three scenes he is present yet remains unobserved; perhaps he is merely hiding. This power, like the foresight which he sometimes seems to display, and which may be explained as shrewdness or pretense, is hardly important enough to deserve mention. It is in the control that he exercises over his fellow-men that Prospero's supernatural skill is most evident. He can induce sleep, remorse, and possibly love; he is able to paralyze Ferdinand's sword-arm, to hold the castaways motionless, and to torment the drunkards with pinches and pains. All these circumstances might be explained as evidences of hypnotic power; in this connection it is worth noting that Prospero suggests to Miranda that she is sleepy, before she actually yields to slumber; that Ariel suggests suicide to Alonso before the distracted king departs to
Natural Supernaturalism in “The Tempest”

drown himself; and that in the last act the enchanter warns the courtiers that they must stand motionless because they are “spell-stopp’d.”

Of course the magician pretends to infinitely stranger arts than any of these, and his audience obligingly seconds him. In the raising of the tempest, in the awakening of love between Miranda and Ferdinand, he would have us see his hand. But there is a very peculiar fact regarding all the claims of supernatural power made by Prospero or in his behalf. The pretended spells are almost always wrought through the agency of familiar forms of external nature, and are almost always described in terms of everyday physical experience. Caliban is stied in a hard rock, and plagued with spirits in the form of apes, hedgehogs, and adders; Ariel is threatened with the oak tree; Ferdinand is dieted with sea water, mussels, roots, and acorn husks, and set to log-carrying; pinches, cramps, and a mud-bath are the punishment of the drunkards, who are finally hunted down by a troop of sprites disguised as hounds and answering to the very realistic names of Mountain, Fury, Silver, and Tyrant. Finally, in Prospero’s great abjuration speech of hail and farewell, his magic powers are celebrated as the powers of nature, and every one of the acts they have helped him perform seems a natural one, save the last.

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid,
Weak masters though ye be, I have bedimm’d
The noontide sun, call’d forth the mutinous winds,
And ’twixt the green sea and the azur’d 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-bas’d promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck’d up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have wak’d their sleepers, op’d, and let ’em forth
By my so potent art.

As significant as the realistic achievements of which Prospero boasts is his omission of a number of outlandish feats listed in the source of this speech. The passage from Medea’s prayer in Golding’s Ovid begins like Prospero’s salutation to his art. But after the reference to the waking of the dead, Medea goes on to mention several lurid bits of sorcery which

are hardly appropriate to Prospero, and which he wisely abstains from claiming:

I call up dead men from their graves, and thee, O lightsome moon,
I darken oft, though beaten brass abate thy peril soon;
Our sorcery dims the morning fair, and darks the sun at noon.
The flaming breath of fiery bulls ye quenched for my sake,
And caused their unwieldy necks the bended yoke to take.
Among the earth-bred brothers you a mortal war did set,
And brought asleep the dragon fell whose eyes were never shet.

The naturalness of Prospero's magic becomes even more striking when we remember the fantastic treatments of the supernatural that were common in Elizabethan days and even in Shakespeare's earlier plays. In the opinions of the dramatist's contemporaries, all sorcery was the work of the powers of darkness, not to be accomplished save with the devil's aid, and at the awful price of man's eternal jewel; Marlowe's Faust has power to control the elements, but he himself is hell's own slave, and his every act is lighted by the glare of infernal fires. Fairies, even when their demonic ancestry was slurred over, were likely to interfere cruelly and capriciously in human affairs, as in A Midsummer-Night's Dream, where the selfish pranks of Oberon and Titania form the very core of the action, and no mortal sway or sense of moral responsibility restrains the riotous play of supernatural powers.

What a contrast to all this grotesque or fantastic supernaturalism is The Tempest! Here there is no secret, black, and midnight art; here there are no squeaking ghosts, no foul witches, no Satanic revels or fairy intrigues; all Prospero's works are performed in the full light of the sun, with the harmonious coöperation of the forces of nature, and they are the works not of devils and fays but of a benevolent philosopher, a man.

To be sure, our enchanter is not above making occasional use of the traditional paraphernalia of the black art; he has his airy charms and magic circles, his wand and his magic robe; solemn musics (which really must be supernatural) accompany some of his feats, and his audience is enjoined to preserve silence; he himself must court the influence of the stars. But the chief source of his power lies in his books. Before his deposition Prospero had devoted himself to the liberal arts (which assuredly did not include the black), and; "transported and rapt in secret studies," had dedicated himself to the bettering of his mind. When he was driven from Milan, a friendly counselor, Gonzalo, the last person in the world to connive in any sorceries, provided him with the most prized volumes in the ducal library. By solitary meditation over these volumes Prospero has at last learned to work in harmony with the forces of human and external nature; these books are the sole sources of his power. We cannot
but regret that Prospero left us no catalogue of his library; we are tempted to guess at some of the titles, to wonder if Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism were not well represented, and to imagine that dog-eared copies of the Bible, Plato's Dialogues, and perhaps one or two of Shakespeare's own Quartos, were included among these treasures. So much, then, for the chief inhabitant of Prospero's island; he is as mortal a man as ever breathed, and his rare power, in its sources, its methods, its qualities, and its effects, depends primarily on the observance rather than the violation of the laws of nature.

When we turn to his prime minister, Ariel, we at last find ourselves face to face with a really supernatural being. It is hinted that he is Prospero's thought-executing minister; if this be true, he is merely a symbol of the operations of his master's mind, he ceases to exist as a supernatural entity. Admitting, however, that he really is what he appears to be, an individual, objective being, we note first of all that no stigma of the black art falls upon him. His very name is that of a prince of angels who, according to the Hebrew Cabala, ruled the waters; his function is to carry out the benevolent projects of Prospero.

In performing his duties, this tricksy sprite constantly gives evidence of supernatural qualities. He can produce miraculous music, render himself invisible, and even change his shape into that of water-nymph or harpy. He works with incredible speed, weaving and breaking spells, forcing men to follow him, putting them to sleep and waking them; he excites love and despair in obedience to his master's commands. Yet his conduct is always subject to human control, and his natural attributes, like Prospero's, are constantly emphasized. Ariel can experience pain, and he has at least "a touch, a feeling," of human sympathy; his service is enforced; he yields it grudgingly and craves liberty. It is in the four elements, fire, air, water, and the frozen earth (and especially in the first two), that Ariel works, and to them he is released in the end; he appears in a brilliant pyrotechnic display of St. Elmo's fire in the storm at sea; his natural lair is among flowers, and he sports with bees, owls, and bats.

The majority of his offices have a distinctly practical flavor about them. Such tasks as repairing the ship, keeping the castaways' clothing intact, reporting conspiracies, and imprisoning, waking, and summoning mortal men, fall to his lot. And even when his doings are more miraculous, he maintains his close contact with the physical world—fetching dew from the still-vex'd Bermoothes, engineering tempests, and at the last providing calm seas and auspicious gales for the departing ship. Supernatural spirit though he is, Ariel is the servant of man; ere Prospero's coming he was powerless. Many of his deeds are in harmony with natural law, and his violations of that law are mere outbreaks of sportive
Nelson Sherwin Bushnell

fancy, contributing to the atmosphere of wonder that hovers over the play, but never weakening the profound realities that form the substance of the action. No other important inhabitants of the island possess any miraculous qualities or powers. There was, to be sure, a witch Sycorax who could control the moon and tides, imprison Ariel in a cloven pine, and brush dew with raven’s feather from unwholesome fen. But she had died before Prospero’s arrival.

Her son Caliban, though sired by a devil, inherited no supernatural gifts. He is an ugly, misshapen monster, half man, half beast, to whom Prospero has given the rudiments of an education, and from whom he exacts the performance of menial tasks. Caliban seems allied to the baser physical elements, earth and water; when angered, he calls down upon his master “infections . . . from bogs, fens, and flats,” and curses of wicked dews and blistering winds. Yet he has dim glimmerings of finer perceptions; the beauty of the island pleases him, and his dreams are fair. Brute though he is, he does not in his drunkenness sink so low as the degraded civilized clowns, Stephano and Trinculo; he offers them natural service, and promises to lead them to fertile soil and the best springs, and to gather nuts for them.

A host of minor spirits, underlings of Ariel, occasionally assist in carrying out Prospero’s commands. They share in Ariel’s marvelous attributes, and like him they usually do their work through the forms of external nature. Yet even when they appear as strange, monstrous shapes in the banquet scene, they are:

... more gentle, kind,
Than of our human generation you shall find
Many, nay, almost any

—in marked contrast to some of the castaways who are described as “worse than devils.”

Miranda, the last of the island-dwellers, is mortal woman, pure and unadulterated. She possesses no strange power or insight, and is in fact far more normal than one would expect her to be, considering the unusual circumstances of her upbringing. The castaways from the storm-tossed ship are likewise mere mortals, and no glimmer of the marvelous appears about any of them. Among all the characters in the play, then, Ariel and the attendant spirits are the only supernatural beings, and Prospero is the only man who possesses any supernatural power. And in Prospero and his spirits, as we have seen, the supernatural element is of minor importance, and when it does appear, usually works through natural agencies.

Turning our attention from the scene and the characters of The Tem-
To the incidents, we discover that here too the supernatural is far from being the predominant element. Many of the occurrences are strictly realistic, and appear so to the characters themselves—for instance, the wreck, the conference of the courtiers, the plotting of Sebastian and Antonio, the drinking scene, the wanderings of the castaways, the chess game, and the reconciliation. Other incidents seem to the participants to be miraculous, but really result from combinations of natural causes; consider, for example, the sleep of Miranda and of the courtiers, the love between Ferdinand and Miranda, the unexpected appearance of Prospero, and the arrival of the mariners and of the drunkards. Even the glittering raiment with which Ariel tempts the drunkards, was, we remember, included in the equipment which Gonzalo provided when Prospero was first cast adrift upon the sea.

The actual supernatural events often look like manifestations of natural forces; when Ariel accuses the courtiers of Prospero’s death, the accusation seems to them to be voiced by billows, winds, and thunder. The betrothal masque, despite its supernatural machinery, is in fact a glorification of the bounties of nature, expressed in natural imagery. The scene is no gaudy palace on Mount Olympus but a simple grass-plot, “a short-grass’d green” where “peacocks fly amain.” The goddesses veil their divinity under the forms of nature; Iris is the watery arch, the many-colored heavenly bow, bringing rain for flowers, Juno queen of the sky, and Ceres mistress of flowers, of bosky acres and unshrubb’d down. Iris addresses Ceres in phrases so richly descriptive of earth that Keats might have envied them; Juno and Ceres in turn call down upon the betrothed couple blessings of the most practical and natural sort. The masque closes with a dance wherein some very realistic reapers disport themselves with nymphs of the winding brooks. When Prospero likens the great globe, “and all which it inherit,” to this insubstantial pageant, he is incidentally exalting his masque to a height of reality so breath-taking that many of us would hesitate to follow.

The miraculous happenings in The Tempest are rarely such as to strain the credulity of any audience, or to tax the resources of a stage manager. Here are no uncanny transformations upon the stage, no displays of marvelous forces or tricks of legerdemain. With the exception of the banquet and the betrothal masque, the staging of The Tempest does not involve the violation of a single law of physical nature. And surely there is nothing in the whole play less essential to its basic fabric than those two exceptions. Even if we include in our examination occurrences that are reported as taking place offstage, as Ferdinand’s swim ashore, or before the action commences, as the expulsion of Prospero or the wedding of Claribel, we find that nature still prevails.
The Tempest is not, then, a supernatural play, in plot, in setting, in
dramatis personae, or in incident. Why are the characters so vividly
aware of the supernatural; why must Prospero pose as an enchanter,
surrounded by spirit ministers; what is the significance of the marvelous
glamor that invests every scene of the play? In answering these ques-
tions we may hope to attain some conception of man's attitude toward
the supernatural, and to catch some glimpses of those wonders of the
world before us that Wordsworth strove to reveal.

One primary effect of The Tempest is this; the realism and the charm
of its incidental marvelous machinery serve to reconcile the observer to
supernaturalism and to induce in him a widening of his perceptions that
may include it. The supernatural is seen to be neither shocking nor un-
pleasant, but a valid and valuable factor in man's experience, an essential
part in the scheme of things. This point of view is basically the one that
Coleridge was aiming to establish in his readers when he tried to procure
the suspension of their disbelief. It is also a point of view that Carlyle
defends in his discussion of Natural Supernaturalism.6 According to
Professor Teufelsdröckh, many things that appear supernatural are in
fact natural. They merely seem to us to violate the laws of nature be-
cause our observation of those laws is incomplete. We do not yet know
what the rules of the game are, and we would do well to draw new con-
clusions based on all the evidence, including the exceptions to our present
imperfect rules.

System of Nature! To the wisest man, wide as is his vision, Nature remains of
quite infinite depth, of quite infinite expansion; and all Experience thereof limits
itself to some few computed centuries, and measured square-miles. The course
of Nature's phases, on this our little fraction of a Planet, is partially known to
us: but who knows what deeper courses these depend on; what infinitely larger
Cycle (of causes) our little Epicycle revolves on? To the Minnow every cranny
and pebble, and quality and accident, of its little native Creek may have become
familiar: but does the Minnow understand the Ocean Tides and periodic Cur-
rents, the Trade-winds, and Monsoons, and Moon's Eclipses—by all which the
condition of its little Creek is regulated, and may, from time to time (unnmiracu-
ously enough), be quite overset and reversed? Such a minnow is Man; his Creek
this Planet Earth; his Ocean the immeasurable All; his Monsoons and periodic
Currents the mysterious Course of Providence through Aeons of Aeons.

We speak of the Volume of Nature: and truly a Volume it is,—whose Author
and Writer is God. To read it! Dost thou, does man, so much as well know the
Alphabet thereof?

But the attainment of this point of view is only the first step in our

6 Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, Book III, Chapter 8. It was Carlyle's phrase that
originally provided the title of this essay. He himself must have had The Tempest in mind,
for he closes his chapter by quoting Prospero.
interpretation of *The Tempest*. The supernatural, presented naturally, has persuaded us to recognize its own validity—and at this spot most attempts to analyze it come to an end. But another and greater step remains to be taken; *The Tempest* is, we must remember, a natural play, and our newly achieved acquiescence in the supernatural helps to reveal to us the wonders, the miracles of nature, that hover over every scene.

Here too Carlyle has led the way; the Professor ascends from his defense of the supernatural to a revelation of the miraculous qualities of the natural.

In a word, he has looked fixedly on Existence, till, one after the other, its earthly hulls and garnitures have all melted away; and now, to his rapt vision, the interior celestial Holy of Holies lies disclosed.

The "Thought-forms, Space and Time," are the two chief impediments hindering our vision of the miracle that underlies reality.

That they should . . . usurp such sway over pure spiritual Meditation, and blind us to the wonder everywhere lying close on us, seems nowise [fit, just, or unavoidable]. Admit Space and Time to their due rank as Forms of Thought; nay, even, if thou wilt, to their quite undue rank of Realities: and consider, then, with thyself how their thin disguises hide from us the brightest God-effulgences!

Strangely enough, *The Tempest* is the one play of Shakespeare's in which the Thought-forms, Space and Time, are annihilated. Space and Time are relative concepts; in single units they cannot exist. The point and the moment are as guiltless of Space and Time as are the endless reaches of the aether, or the infinite procession of the years. And *The Tempest* takes place at a point, in a moment. By serving the Unities of Place and Time, Shakespeare's play has achieved perfect freedom.

*The Tempest*, showing us life unclouded by the relative considerations of time and space, is peculiarly able to reveal to us something at least of essential Existence, something of the wonders of the world before us. To the island-dwellers these wonders are constantly apparent; Miranda and Prospero have learned to look on their world as a harmonious composition of natural and supernatural elements, and to live in peaceful accord with the varied forces at work about them. Miranda serenely accepts her father's marvelous art as part of the scheme of things, and sees in the everyday men of the outer world a strangeness and beauty that are almost divine:

O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

Yet her sense of the marvelous as well as the real, her awareness of two
worlds, have not made her a silly and credulous child; instead they have nourished her womanly soul until she is perfect and peerless, “created of every creature’s best!”

Prospero, too, has achieved true greatness of soul through his life on the island. For twelve years he has breathed its transparent atmosphere, retaining his contact with reality through his own memories and through Miranda, laying hold on sky and earth through Ariel and Caliban, and constantly deepening his own perceptions by meditation over his precious volumes. This discipline has increased his power and his wisdom tenfold, but it has increased his goodness too. His potent art is never exerted capriciously or selfishly; he is animated throughout by “nobler reason.” His first words in the play are spoken to give comfort to another:

There’s no harm done . . .
I have done nothing but in care of thee,
Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter.

The castaways who take refuge upon the island are made vividly aware of the strangeness of their natural surroundings. They are, as a matter of fact, going through an intensely real experience, but every circumstance conspires to reveal its miraculous qualities. The “subtleties o’ the isle” will not let them “believe things certain,” and even after Prospero’s breaking charms accustom them to the miraculous, Alonso, the man of affairs, feels that

These are not natural events; they strengthen
From stranger to stranger.

But Prospero reassures him:

... At pick’d leisure,
Which shall be shortly, single I’ll resolve you,
Which to you shall seem probable, of every
These happen’d accidents.

The richest fruit of this renascence of wonder in the courtiers is the moral regeneration which it accomplishes. In this doubly-blessed island, things that seemed foul in the workaday world are revealed as fair—as Prospero’s own misfortune, which bore him great happiness. At the same time, hidden foulness is laid bare; conduct that seemed expedient to Alonso in Naples now shocks him by its baseness. His newly quickened perceptions inform him that he has been at odds with all of nature: “the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,” have been incensed against his peace, and only remorse and a change in conduct can save him.

Not all the erring and vicious characters experience this regeneration. Sebastian and Antonio, skeptics from the first, have hardened their hearts against the loveliness and the marvels of the isle; blind to wonder,
they experience no moral enlightenment, and are left discomfited and without hope at the end of the play. Stephano and Trinculo, too bestial, too perverse to yield to the sweet influences of Prospero’s domain, suffer the same fate. The enchanted island reserves its benefits for those who are capable of appreciating them, who are eager to accept the new conditions on which they may have life more abundantly.

You of any well that springs
May unfold the heaven of things;
Have it homely and within,
And thereof its likeness win,
Will you so in soul’s desire.

Meredith has celebrated the triumph of those who fitly enter the glamorous realm which he calls the Woods of Westermain. And he paints, more blackly than Shakespeare even, the fate of the unfit, the doubters and the mischief-makers who remain obdurate:

... Should you distrust a tone
Then beware...
Are you of the stiff, the dry,
Cursing the not understood...
You are lost in Westemain.
... You ask where you may be,
   · In what reek of a lair
Given to bones and ogre broods:
   And they yell you Where.
Enter these enchanted woods,
   You who dare.

Caliban we are glad to remember, has enough of the poet in him to see the light at the last, and shares in the general amnesty. For him and for the majority of the characters, the final outcome of their experience on Prospero’s island is so splendid that it seems as if the gods must have brought it to pass.

Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue
Should become Kings of Naples? 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
When no man was his own.

But the story is not yet ended, for the reconciled parties are to leave the island and return to the world. They are, after all, mortal men, and
they can neither hope nor wish to remain forever isolated from their fellows, pinnacled in the rarefied atmosphere of transcendent vision. Miranda's joy at the sight of Ferdinand and the courtiers is a hint as to where her lot is cast; and Prospero is, in spite of his sad experience of men, "one of their kind," relishing "all as sharply Passion as they." If he renounces his magic, breaking and burying his staff and drowning his book, it is because they have done their work and enabled him to return to life among beings little lower than the angels. As he descends from his mystic heights, where he was perforce solitary, his human sympathy grows ever stronger, until he embraces Alonso and Gonzalo, and forgives even the wicked Antonio.

It has been suggested that Shakespeare in his last plays is remote "from the common joys and sorrows of the world" and has little more than a philosophic sympathy for men engaged in them. Prospero's "Poor worm, thou art infected," and

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

seem to substantiate this point of view. But if we remember his love for mankind, and his readiness to return to his dukedom, we must admit that The Tempest at least preaches no permanent detachment from human affairs. The wonderful island, having revealed the vision of a new life, has done its work, and the islanders and visitors return to the familiar world, taking their vision with them. Prospero's last words are a plea to the audience that he may not 'be left to "dwell In this bare island."

Nor are the characters in the play the only men who experience the reawakening of wonder, followed, by moral conversion and a vitalized return to real life. The audience and the reader go through the same process; first reconciled to the supernatural by its naturalness and beauty, we learn to perceive the miraculous nature of the real events and characters in the play, and we ourselves feel the scales drop from our moral vision. When the curtain falls or the book closes, we face the world refreshed. And we are, at the last, more fortunate than the actors in The Tempest, for when our vision fails, the book lies ready to restore us to that healing retreat where all things work together for good. Poor Prospero is not so lucky; in the epilogue his grip upon life is already slipping:

... Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair.

* Edward Dowden, Shakspeare, His Mind and Art, Chapter VIII.
Natural Supernaturalism in "The Tempest"

And when he is plunged into the busy affairs of his dukedom, even though his every third thought be of the grave, the celestial gleam will fade in the common light of day. God pity Prospero if he can not find his way again to the enchanted island, in his hour of need!

The Tempest is not to us today merely a plausible fairy tale or a supernatural allegory. It is a profound revelation of the marvels of existence, and of the moral enlightenment to be derived from the perception of those marvels. Whether the author intended any such revelation is problematical; the wisest men are equally wary of ascribing definite intentions to Shakespeare and of denying them. But we can at least be assured that there is nothing in our understanding of the play inconsistent with the attitude of the aging dramatist. The man who had written Hamlet can not have descended at the last to an interest in the supernatural merely for its own sake; such an interest, moreover, is likely to die young in a poet, as it did in Coleridge. Nor can the penetrating prophetic instinct which chanted the psalm in praise of life in the last scene of The Winter's Tale have lapsed completely in The Tempest, leaving us only a superficial narrative of objective events. Shakespeare can not have written his last play in the mere attempt to send cold chills down the backs of chimney-corner grand-dames, or to give a realistic picture of shipwreck on an uninhabited island. No, The Tempest is rather his ultimate achievement in presenting the natural world and the supernatural side by side, in stressing the essential validity of each, and in echoing the the ineffable sphere-musics that arise from their harmonious interplay.

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