

THE PATTERN OF SIN, SUFFERING, REPENTANCE, AND REDEMPTION IN THE TEMPEST

Dr. Mohammed Shahid Kamal

Applied College, Khamis Mushait, King Khalid University, K.S.A.

ABSTRACT

There is a pattern of sin, suffering, repentance, and redemption in The Tempest. The central character Prospero commits the sin of negligence. The negligence leads to deposition by his brother, Antonio. Prospero suffers 12 years miserably. His suffering leads to repentance. And repentance then leads to redemption. In order to be redeemed, he however, manages to control the "spirits" who help in working out a benevolent pattern in the play. He gets the ability to resurrect the dead through his magical human powers. His benevolent awakening after suffering and repentance set the stage for redemption.

Key Words: Prospero, Antonio, Sin, suffering, repentance, redemption.

1. INTRODUCTION

The usurpation of Prospero's dukedom by his brother Antonio is one of the play's concerns. Prospero is absorbed in his study of "cultivation of the mind" and neglects state affairs. He leaves the state affairs to his brother Antonio and puts too much trust in him, eventually encouraging his ambition to treason. Prospero commits a double offense. First, he forgets the balance between action and meditation. Second, he makes a mistake in trusting the wrong person, which a ruler should never make. Prospero's sin is the sin of negligence.

Antonio's sin is the deposition of Prospero from his dukedom and a murder attempt, both of Prospero and his innocent child Miranda. His crime is against humanity. Prospero trusts his brother in the affairs of the state and devotes his time to enriching his mind, and his brother, in communion with Alonso, dethrones him and becomes the duke of Milan. Prospero says:

*This King of Naples being an enemy
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit;
Which was, that he in lieu o'th' premises,
Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,
Should presently extirpate me and mine
Out of the dukedom...*

(I.ii.121-126)

They not only dethroned him but attempted slaughter of the innocents:

*In few, they hurried us a-board bark,
Bore us some leagues to sea, where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
Instinctively have quit it: There they hoist us
To cry to the sea, that roar'd to us...*

(I.ii.144-149)

Prospero belongs to both worlds, having been thrust from Christendom in the "dark backward and abysm of time." (I.ii.50), and now seemingly embracing the paganism of the isle. Strachey thinks, "Prospero is the central figure of *The Tempest*; and it has often been wildly asserted that he is a portrait of the author, and embodiment of that spirit of wise benevolence which is supposed to have thrown a halo over Shakespeare's later life."¹ . In Harold Bloom's words, "Prospero would be a far apter title than *The Tempest*."² . In his introduction to *The Tempest*, Stephen Orgel says, "Prospero is a complex, erratic, and even contradictory figure." Prospero and his daughter's survival on the sea, their arrival at the island, their meetings with Ariel and Caliban as two helping hands seem to be the workings of supernatural power. His expertise in white magic, creating tempest in the sea, controlling his enemies without any physical harm reflects a god-like potential in him. Wilson Knight, therefore, says, "Prospero is a close replica of Christ, with similar miraculous powers."³ . A theater review published in the *New York Times* reveals, "Prospero is a man of contemplative sadness and ultimate benevolence."⁴ Wilson Knight compares Prospero to Cerimon. According to him, "Prospero is also a recreation of Cerimon in *Pericles*."⁵ He puts Prospero and Cerimon side by side:

*Cer. I hold it ever,
Virtue and cunning were endowments greater*

Lytton Strachey, "Shakespeare's Final Period," 1922; reprinted ¹
in *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of "The Tempest,"* ed.
Hallett Smith, 1969

² Shakespeare: *The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998, 667.

³ G. Wilson Knight. *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays*. Methuen, 1948. p. 253

⁴ Theater Review: *The Tempest*. July 9, 1995
<http://theater2.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview/htm>

Knight, op.cit., p. 207⁵

Than nobleness or riches; careless heirs

May the two latter darken and expend,

But immortality attends the former,

Making a man-god.

(Pericles, III.ii.26-31)

Pro. *I thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated*

To closeness and the bettering of my mind

With that which, but by being so retir'd,

O'erpriz'd all popular rate...

(I.ii.89-92)

By comparing Prospero to Cerimon, Knight considers them religious recluses on the brink of magical power. He further says that they may be compared with those earlier religious persons, Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, whose magic arts control the action, and Friar Francis in *Much Ado About Nothing*, who negotiates Hero's death and reappearance. These are people of spiritual rather than practical efficiency.

Prospero waits for twelve years to heal his enemies. He wants his brother and king Alonso to suffer for dethroning him and casting him and his daughter adrift. Their suffering would redeem them for their crime against him and his daughter. For twelve years, he has waited for this moment to come. At last, he learns of their visit to Tunis for the marriage of the King's daughter. How he learned about their arrival is not clear, but he tells Miranda:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,

(Now my dear lady) hath mine enemies

Brought to this shore; and by my prescience

I find my zenith doth depend upon

A most auspicious star, whose influence

If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes

Will ever after droop.

(I.ii.179-185)

Francis Neilson explains that Prospero comes to know about their journey, "By some form of telepathy he has learned of the return voyage, and, magically, has intercepted the King's ship and created, with the aid of Ariel, a raging storm which has driven the vessel ashore."⁶ Now that he has cast a spell upon them, and Ariel is carrying out his plan of making them realize their bitter plight, the chief problem of the play comes to light.

Prospero's talisman is compared to the sheer helplessness of the people in the boat. The boatswain mocks at Gonzalo's calm at the outset of the storm: "if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority" (I.i.22-24). The irony implied is that Prospero can command these elements and has, as Miranda suspects: "If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (I.ii.1-2). Her subsequent statement that if she were "any god of power" (I.ii.10), she would have saved them is realized in Prospero's plenipotentiary powers. Miranda is so concerned that she implores Prospero, his mercy towards these sufferers and their ship. And Prospero "reassures her, somewhat as Christ."⁷ not to fear the waves:

Be collected:

No more amazement: tell your piteous heart

There's no harm done. (I.ii.11-13)

They are safe. Even their garments are fresh:

Not a hair perish'd;

On their sustaining garments not a blemish,

But fresher than before.

(I.ii.217-219)

Shakespeare re-enacts the original crime in *The Tempest*. Here, with Sebastian's help, Antonio tries to murder Alonso. Antonio and Sebastian standing with a sword over Gonzalo, re-enact what Alonso did with Prospero in the beginning. Here Alonso is the victim of the cruel mind. Prospero does not want to avenge his enemy; he, therefore, sends Ariel to awaken Gonzalo. Ariel enters Gonzalo along with and says :

My master through his art foresees the danger

That you (his friend) are in...

(II.i.293-294)

Francis Neilson, op.cit, p.82⁶
Knight, op.cit., p.231.⁷

Prospero controls the entire re-enactment scene, evident from how he frustrates Sebastian and Antonio's evil design. Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo's plot to murder Prospero is a comic analog to Alonso's original crime and Antonio's and Sebastian's frustrated attempt to repeat it. From parody, we now move on to serious action. Ariel informs Alonso about the loss of his son. Like Leontes, he is punished. 'For Alonso, the loss of Ferdinand seems to be a punishment without a crime.'⁸Whereas Leontes' death of the child revealed and confirmed the father's guilt. Act III, Scene iii opens with Alonso's announcement of his despair:

Even here I will put off my hope, and keep it

No longer for my flatterer: he is drown'd

Whom thus we stray to find; and the sea mocks

Our frustrate search on land. Well, let him go.

(III.iii. 7--10)

Alonso is in a state of "inward sorrow and grief."⁹ It now remains for Prospero to force him to recognize the connection between his suffering and his "natural un-cleanliness and the enormity of [his] sinful life."¹⁰ Some spirits bring in a table with food upon it, but when 'men of sin' attempt to 'stand to and feed,' Ariel, in the form of a harpy, prevents them and causes the table and the contents to disappear. Northop Frye believes that "the vision of the disappearing banquet" is "symbolic of deceitful desires."¹¹ And Kermode suggests that this illusory banquet "is conceivably related to allegorical interpretations of scripture. Eve was tempted with an apple, and Christ with an illusory banquet; the former temptation was successful, as with the 'men of sin', the latter a failure, as with pure Gonzalo...Banquets represent the voluptuous attractions of sense which (as in Marvell's Dialogue) the resolved soul must resist."¹² Prospero's banquet is not Satan's temptation but the commonest of all a symbolic banquet: The Communion Table. This is the supper from which the notorious and unrepentant sinners are traditionally excluded.

The sea is an agent of redemption, too. It is hostile in appearance but benevolent in effect. The restoration of order which this song heralds is made more explicit by the wonderful image of the 'Sea-change' (I.ii.403) in the next, referring specifically to Alonso, whose remains are to be transformed 'Into something rich, & strange' (I.ii.404) - that is, his life is to be converted from its sinful, rebellious state into one more ordered and harmonious, and the agent producing this change

Robert Grams Hunter. *Shakespeare and the Comedy of* ⁸
Forgiveness. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. p. 232

Griffiths, p.573⁹

Ibid.¹⁰

¹¹ Frye, Northrop. *Introduction to The Tempest*. New York: Penguin Books, 1959.

Frank Kermode, ed. *The Tempest*. London: Methuen & Co p.85. ¹²

is the sea, hostile in appearance but benevolent in effect, proved by the fact that no harm is done to those who are marooned, even to the extent that their clothes retain 'their freshness and glosses' (II.i.61-62) despite being immersed in the sea. That the sea is an agent of redemption is apparent when Alonso first becomes aware of his guilt and expresses his remorse:

*O, it is monstrous: monstrous:
Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it,
The winds did sing it to me: and the Thunder
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd
The name of Prosper: it did bass my Trespass,
Therefore my son i'th' ooze is bedded; and
I'll seek him deeper than e're plummet sounded,
And with him there lie mudded.*

(III.iii.95-102)

Alonso's reaction to Ariel's accusation is different from that of Antonio and Sebastian. As Gonzalo tells us:

*All three of them are desperate: their great guilt
Like poison given to work a great time after,
Now 'gins to bite the spirits.*

(III.iii.104-106)

He is depressed to the extent that he wants to commit suicide:

*Seb. But one fiend at a time,
I'll fight their legions o'r.
Ant. I'll be thy second.*

(III.iii.103-105)

First, through the mouth of Ariel, disguised as a harpy, Prospero tries to arouse penitence in the three men of sin:

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

(III.iii.53-58)

After allowing them to suffer for a brief period, Prospero releases his enemies:

Go, release them Ariel:

My Charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,

And they shall be themselves.

(V.i.30-32)

Here, Prospero acts as a benevolent magician. He finally appears to the shipwrecked travelers in the recognition scene, which, because it reunites those who have been separated and often presumed dead, carries within its very structure the possibility of resurrection. Shakespeare exploits the moment for its potential as Prospero reintroduces himself to Alonso:

Behold, sir King,

The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero:

For more assurance that a living Prince

Does now speak to thee, I embrace thy body;

And to thee and thy company I bid

A hearty welcome.

(V.i.107-112)

Prospero confirms to Alonso that he is alive. The effect on Alonso, who believes he is seeing a dead man before him, is a mixture of wonder and repentance:

We're thou be'st he or no,

Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me,

As late I have been, I do not know. Thy pulse

Beats as of flesh and blood; and, since I saw thee,

Th' affliction of my mind amends ...

Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat

Thou pardon me my wrongs.

(V.i.111-19)

Alonso's life without Ferdinand will be hell. He must suffer and repent if he wants God to forgive him and return his son. The just vengeance of God is what Ariel invokes as the reason for the treatment of Prospero's enemies. Ariel reveals Alonso the real cause of his suffering and despair at the beginning of the scene. The seeming death of Ferdinand has avenged the crime against

Prospero. Alonso's life without his son will be a torment to him unless he can achieve 'contrition of the heart' and 'an amendment of life.'¹³ the first and last parts of repentance.

Hunter believes that Ariel's announcement of Alonso's first effect derives him not from penance and salvation but desperate self-destruction.¹⁴ He quotes Nowell saying, "The conscience of heinous offences, and the force of repentance, maybe great, that the mind of man, on each side compassed with fear, maybe possessed with the despair of salvation."¹⁵

Prospero plays the part of Providence, and he is the protagonist of the action he has himself willed. Shakespeare created Hamlet--but Hamlet made Shakespeare. The audience is not merely spectators but actors on the stage of life. The drama itself is an image of life--but life is a dream in the mind of God:

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

(IV.i.148-158)

The spirit of the Final Plays also finds its perfect home in the last series. Here, Miranda repeats the child theme, cast adrift with her father on the stormy seas. The lost son of Alonso is recovered, alive and well, and the very ship that was wrecked is found to be miraculously 'tight and yare, and bravely rigg'd (V.i.224) as when it 'first put out to sea.' (V. i. 225).

The ideal Shakespeare is represented by Florizel and Perdita, by Ferdinand and Miranda. Marina, Imogen, Perdita, and Miranda are entirely civilized, though entirely without sophistication. What Shakespeare understood by creative freedom is displayed in the dialog are between Ferdinand and Miranda. Ferdinand, bearing logs for Prospero, finds his labor a pleasure because he loves Miranda; and when he confesses his love to her, he uses the related ideas of freedom and bondage:

*Full many a lady
I have ey'd with best regard, and many a time
The harmony of their tongues hath into bondage

Brought my too diligent ear. . . .*

Griffiths, p.573, 579.¹³

Robert Grams Hunter. *Shakespeare and the Comedy of* ¹⁴
Forgiveness. New York: Columbia University Press, 1965. p. 232

Nowell, p.177¹⁵

(III.i.39-42)

He continues his romantic mood:

*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.*

(III.i.64-67)

Miranda echoes the same idea:

*To be your fellow
You may deny me, but I'll be your servant
Whether you will or no.*

(III.ii.84-86)

Ferdinand replies:

*My mistress, dearest;
And I thus humble ever.*

(III.ii.87-88)

Miranda asks: "My husband, then?" and Ferdinand replies:

*Ay, with a heart as willing
As bondage e'er of freedom. (III.ii.90-91)*

Both the lovers find liberty in bondage to each other because they realize that "Love's service is perfect freedom." Henry James argued that in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare could write as he wished for the first and only time, giving the public what he wanted. Such a masterpiece puts before me the very act of the momentous conjunction taking place for the poet, at a given hour, between his charged inspiration and his clarifying experience. Wilson Knight considers Ferdinand and Miranda as symbols of innocence. He says, "Ferdinand and Miranda are representatives of beautiful and virtuous youth as drawn in former plays (Marina, Florizel and Perdita, Guiderius and Arviragus). [They] illustrate humility, innocence, faith, and purity"¹⁶

Prospero's "discovery" of Ferdinand and Miranda "playing at Chess" is a moment of "miracle" that is seen to be the unvarying climax of the comedy of forgiveness. Alonso discovers that the sin of which he has believed himself guilty—the death of Prospero and Miranda—has not occurred and that his punishment – the death of Ferdinand has been spared in reality. The love of his son and Prospero's daughter will ratify the reconciliation of their fathers, though Alonso must first request the pardon of Miranda:

But O, how oddly will it sound, that I

Just ask my child forgiveness!

(V.i.198-199)

Ferdinand acknowledges providential blessings. In response to Alonso's query as to whether Miranda is a (pagan) "goddess that hath severed us, / And brought us thus together?" Ferdinand explains, "Sir, she is mortal; / But by immortal Providence she's mine" (V.i.189-91) He also remembers to thank Prospero for his quasi-resurrective role: "She / Is daughter to this famous Duke of Milan" "of whom I have / Received a second life [...]" V.i.193-94,196-97). Prospero has indeed waked sleepers from their graves, but his joining of these two is a far more benign use of his "so potent art." He, too, recalls that his temporal powers pale before those of God. Asked by Miranda how they were saved from destruction many years ago, he prefaces his comments with the pious, "By Providence divine"(I.ii.160).

Prospero interferes saying the time for torments of conscience is gone:

There, sir, stop:

Let us not burthen our remembrance' with

A heaviness that's gone.

(V.i.200-202)

Alonso confesses his sin and repents and gives back his dukedom to Prospero:

The dukedom I resign, and do entreat

Thou pardon me my wrongs.

(V.i.118-119)

Antonio and Sebastian, however, have not changed. Prospero can only control them, as he has controlled Caliban, through the power of his knowledge of their evil:

Welcome, my friends all,

But you may brace of lords, were I so minded

I here could pluck his Highness' frown upon you

And justify you traitors: at this time

I will tell no tales.

(V.i.125-129)

Antonio is unrepentant throughout the reunion scene. Antonio's remaining taciturn and unrepentant throughout the reunion with his "flesh and blood" brother is one possible exception to this final concord. Prospero forgives him, too, but qualifies the terms of his mercy:

My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know

Thou must restore.

(V.i.133-134)

Kermode, however, believes "Prospero's forgiveness of his enemies certainly lacks that generosity"¹⁷ which is exhibited to some extent in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother

Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive

Thy rankest fault.

(V.i.130-132)

There remains the last movement of recognition and forgiveness. First, Prospero, having used his art for the last time and brought his great experiment to a head, abjures magic in a great speech drawn from Ovid:

But this rough magic

I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd

Some heavenly music—which even now I do—

To work mine end upon their senses, that

This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,

Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,

And deeper than did ever plummet sound

I'll drown my book.

(V.i.50-57)

Ultimately, the characters turn to prayer for divine aid. As *The Tempest's* opening is carefully based on divine prayer, "All lost, to prayers, to prayers! All lost!" (1.1.52), so is the closing, "And my ending is despair, / Unless I be reliev'd by prayer" (Epilogue 15-16), a refrain echoed in Ariel's injunction to Alonso that his only hope to escape the "Ling'ring perdition" of divine judgment "is nothing but heart's sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" (III.iii.77, 81-82). This

¹⁷ Frank Kermode. *Shakespeare's Romances* Harold Bloom, ed. Chelsea House, 2000. p.245

is a formula for nothing less than contrition and repentance. Thus, prayer is the only way out of punishment and perdition. Prospero uses his Tempest- magic to draw his enemies to the island but renders them harmless. According to Wilson Knight Prospero, "wrecks and saves, teaches through disaster, entices and leads by music, getting them utterly under his power, redeeming and finally forgiving."¹⁸

For Ariel the moment of his freedom is at hand. Prospero charges him to arrange for calm seas, and then "to the elements be free, and fare you well."The epilogue spoken by Prospero is a renunciation of the magician's art. His charms are all overthrown, and now he can rely only upon his native strength. However, for the future, he has a wish of an ideal condition for men, which resides in the heart of the true philosopher:

Now I want

Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;

And my ending is despair,

Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,

Which pierces so, that it assaults

Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardoned be,

Let your indulgence set me free.

(Epilogue 13-20)

The joys of earth's blessings are to be showered upon the lovers. A Golden Age of riches will come to them, with children who honor their parents.

The political state, as it was known to Prospero, is forgotten. The strivings for power, the quarrels of royal aspirants, the rise and fall of dynasties have no place in the future of Ferdinand and Miranda. There is no hint that the heir to Naples will take the throne. Royalty would die for want of pomp and tribute where "sunburn'd sicklemen, of August weary" dance in joyous mirth. "Let me live here ever," Ferdinand proclaims. "This short-grass'd green" has become a paradise. To him it has been a vision of the conditions prevailing in the Isles of the Blest, but to the intellectual, philosophical Prospero a mere dream broken by actuality.

. . . . Let me not,

Since I have my dukedom got,

And pardoned the deceiver, dwell

In this bare island. . . .

(Epilogue, 5-8)

He prays in the epilogue. That is the saddest note of all, for forgiveness and redemption are delicate virtues and often have a short life, and no one knows this fact as well as he does. For him, divested of his magical power, even though he should resume his "secret studies," life in Milan would be an uncertain business after the rule of Antonio.

His brother, Antonio, is silent. He speaks no word of repentance. And Sebastian reveals no sign of sorrow for his sin. Redemption, then, concerns only Alonso and Caliban. The King confesses his fault before he learns that Ferdinand is alive. He says to Prospero:

*Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs. . . .*

Her remorse is shown and confession made prior to the grant of pardon. This is according to the way it is expressed in the Lord's Prayer. Contrition and forgiveness are inseparably bound. Redemption is then a fulfillment and the grant of pardon justified. However, Forgiveness is only justified when good is in firm position. Hunter feels that forgiving unregenerate evil is safe only when the good are infirm and undeceived control. *The Tempest* insists upon indestructibility of evil. Only a rigid and unceasing control of the sort that Prospero has exercised over Caliban will, we assume, exercise over Antonio and keep good in its natural ascendancy. The relaxation of such vigilance inevitably spreads sin, hatred, and disorder. Evil cannot, however, be finally and completely destroyed. Antonio, in some form, will always exist and only be forgiven for existing. We are not required to believe in the redemption of Antonio and Sebastian. The world remains as it is, rich with darkness and light and mainly populated by zombies. But light is natural, the possibility of awakening exists, and that is enough.

The play's ending highlights the restoration of a human world. The sinners who marred the peaceful world are repentant except Antonio, but he is not now in a position to harm anyone. Ferdinand gets Miranda providentially. Alonso repents and seeks Miranda and Prospero's pardon. Ariel gets its desired freedom. Caliban gets back his "bare island" with additional knowledge he acquired from Prospero. The entire members of the court are reunited. They sail to Milan to re-start a new life where "all can be controlled by a benevolent will"¹⁹.

Alonso's ship sailing towards Naples is carrying the future of the two nations now in the union. The ship was once a "ship of fools" and is now a ship of two royal families redeemed from sinful strife. The "sea-change" has brought a rebirth of the repentant people, and their ship after the purgatorial *Tempest* is something like the ark after the Flood. The ship of death in which Prospero and Miranda came to the island twelve years ago is now a ship of rebirth. Prospero's

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David Daiches. *A Critical History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1969. p. 304

awakening is in two stages. First, he becomes more benevolent. Second, all thoughts of revenge dissipate.

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