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Restoration and Renewal in “As You Like It” and “The Tempest”

The Tempest is the most concise of Shakespeare’s plays, observing as it does the unities so closely, whereas the action of *As You Like It* is more diffuse, weaving more strands into its plot, and covering, according to Shakespeare’s usual custom, an undefined span of time; thus it may at first sight seem odd to pair them. Even in a thematic discussion of restoration and renewal it may seem more obvious to link *The Tempest* with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, both plays involving confusion of appearance with reality, sleeping with waking, and using nymphs or fairies as agents through which complications are unravelled. Indeed, many similarities can be found between these two plays as Hallett Smith and George Hibbard among others have pointed out¹. *As You Like It* is closely derived from *Lodge’s Rosalynde*, a pastoral romance in the popular euphuistic style of Lyly, and *The Tempest* has looser ties with a variety of sources, including travel literature, Montaigne’s essays, and the *commedia dell’arte*. Nevertheless both plays use similar plot devices, closely related natural settings, and associated motives, their differences being largely ones of structure and of the complexity of the vision of life offered.

Superficially, the motive force behind the plots of both *As You* and *The Tempest* is the same, namely, the usurpation of a dukedom by a younger brother and the subsequent banishment of the elder one (material, in another context, for revenge tragedy). The similarity between the two stories can be easily seen if, for a moment, one draws on a once postulated theory that preceding *the Tempest* in its present structure was another play in a more conventional form, and if one uses this theory to construct a hypothetical plot outline for the purely suppositional play. Act I would show the overthrow and banishment of the lawful Duke, Act II his arrival on the island and the circumstances of his habitation there In Act III, fortune might bring his enemies to the shore and the

love theme might be introduced. Acts IV and V would allow sufficient time to bring sinners to repentance and love to its fulfillment (even if some complication were arranged). The result would be a rather thin version of *As You Like It*, lacking the multiplicity and diversity of relationships which are much of the richness of the romantic comedy and completely destroying the power of the compression in *The Tempest*. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the comparison of such a chronological structure is with *As You Like It*, and not with *The Winter's Tale* as the New Cambridge edition of *The Tempest* advocates².

Though it is a commonplace of pastoral that court and country be contrasted and that nature be seen to have restorative effects, the power of nature to heal (or as the appropriate setting in which healing can occur) is examined at greater length in *As You Like It* and *The Tempest* than in the other plays and in greater depth than is customary in the romance tradition. In these two, conversion takes place *within* the natural setting. For this everyone (sinners and lovers) has had to forsake the court for an environment as free as possible of the trammels of civilization. This is in contrast to the other late plays. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes works his way through to repentance without ever leaving the court; Hermione does go into a kind of exile (scarcely a golden world) to wait until she can safely be discovered at the end of the play; and, although Perdita does sojourn among the shepherds, she must return to the court before her difficulties can be resolved. In *Cymbeline* too, conversion and reconciliation happen *after* the return to court. The rough terrain of Wales may be beneficial to the souls of those who inhabit or visit there, and it provides a locality (like Dover in *King Lear* or Olivia's garden in *Twelfth Night*) where all the characters can be conveniently gathered together, but reformation does not occur there.

As You Like It and *The Tempest* both, in their entirety, involve an interplay, between a corrupt society, made so by the quality of the human nature which inhabits it, and a benevolent natural world which co-operates in the correction, reformation, and restoration of human nature and thus in the rehabilitation of society. The contrast is not one of black and white; Shakespeare is not arguing the merits of the country over those of the city. The potential for righteousness already exists within society in the generosity, affection, loyalty,

and courage of Gonzalo, Celia, Rosalind, Adam, and Orlando. Wickedness, it is comforting to realize, is not hereditary, for Frederick and Alonzo have virtuous children in Celia and Ferdinand. Nevertheless, justice cannot be accomplished in the society where the injustice was perpetrated and not apart from the influence of nature.

Shakespeare devotes the whole first act of *As You Like It* to a demonstration of the wickedness of human nature in society, reinforcing the initial reported violation of nature in the mistreatment of brother by brother (the Duke by Frederick) with the abuse of Orlando by his elder brother and guardian Oliver, and by the cruelty of an uncle to his niece (Frederick's banishment of Rosalind). This represents a considerable and deliberate reinforcement of the theme of wickedness found in *Lodge*, where the usurper (Torismond) and the banished Duke (Gerismond) have no familial ties. Though in *The Tempest* causal wickedness is only reported in Prospero's long expository speech to Miranda, it is not less effective, but a masterly example of dramatic compression and focus, the method of reinforcement here being not parallelism but a bearing down on the central incident. Hence, the primary instance of banishment is made more cruel than the corresponding one in *As You Like It* (since Antonio would have committed his brother to an almost certain death at sea in a rotten bark without rigging, without even provision had it not been for the generosity of Gonzalo and of Fortune). The magnitude of the crime is stressed through the participation in it of the highest temporal authority, the King of Naples. We believe the report because wickedness to equal it manifests itself before our eyes afterwards. Neither Oliver's efforts to bring harm to his brother through false testimony to Charles the wrestler (1. 1. 135-156), nor Frederic's harsh dismissal of Rosalind for no more reason than her parentage (1. 3. 39-41, 54), chills us like Antonio's calculated temptation of Sebastian to participate in cold-blooded murder of the sleeping Alonzo and Gonzalo.

Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon,
If he were that which now he's like, that's dead;
Whom I, with this obedient steel, three inches of it,
Can lay to bed for ever; whiles you, doing thus,

To the perpetual wink for aye might put
This ancient morsel, this Sir Prudence, who
Should not upbraid our course. For all the rest,
They'll take suggestion as a cat laps mild;
They'll tell the clock to any business that
We say befits the hour. (2. 1. 275-285)³

Shakespeare does not, as E.M.W. Tillyard thinks, relegate the theme of destruction to the background in *The Tempest*⁴, but rather, in a deviation from his usual chronological method, develops it simultaneously with the theme of regeneration.

That Shakespeare meant the discussion of nature in *As You Like It* to be functionally important in the pattern of evolution from evil to good is clear from the fact that large sections of the play (2.1.5.8; 4. 2), all dealing with habitation in the forest, have no correspondence in Lodge—as neither do Touchstone and Jacques, the characters who introduce the equivocal and negative aspects into the debate. A more conventional *Tempest* structure (such as that outlined above) would have room for formal and leisurely discussion of the natural world in which regeneration can take place, but this would blunt the effect of what happens in that play. Within the canon Shakespeare does not duplicate; rather he develops hints from himself, often working variations on a theme. In *The Tempest*, he is looking at that element of the story he passed over more lightly in the earlier comedy; he is coming at the problem from the other end, concentrating now on the steps to conversion. Consequently, following the same non-linear technique he uses to expose wickedness, he includes presentation of nature's aspects compactly within the dramatic action.

In *the Tempest*, an image of a theoretical ideal in nature is presented through Gonzalo's speech in 2. 1. 143 ff and through the marriage masque. This is summarized in the song of Juno and Ceres which promises the “blest lovers” the same sort of Utopian plenty dreamt of by Gonzalo:

Juno Honour, riches, marriage-blessing,
Long continuance, and increasing,
Hourly joys be still upon you!
Juno sings her blessings on you

Ceres Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust'ring bunches bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you;
Ceres' blessing so is on you. (4. 1. 106-117)

And yet, nature approximates rather more closely to this perfection in *As You Like It* than in *the Tempest*. The corresponding note is struck at the first mention of the Duke's enforced sojourn in the forest:

They say he is already in the Forest of Arden, and
a many merry men with him; and there they live
like the old Robin Hood of England. They say
many young gentlemen flock to him every day,
and fleet the time carelessly as they did in the
golden world. (1. 1.114-119)

Life in Arden, the Duke says, is “more sweet/ Than that of painted pomp” (2. 1. 2-3). There one finds “Sermons in stones and good in everything” (2. 1. 17). Amiens' song acts as reinforcement, extolling a Gonzalian paradise of idleness in the sun. Certainly Prospero's island is capable of supplying human need; for it is fertile enough with fish, berries, crabapples, filberts, marmosets, and scamels to have supported him and Miranda in health for twelve years. Indeed, Arden has imperfections in its discomforts (winter), its dangers (snakes and lions), its petty quarrels (those of Silvio and Phebe), but the hazards of the island are even more unpleasant: a “filthy-mantled pool”, “tooth'd briers, sharp furzes, pricking gorse, and thorns” (4. 1. 180-183). The characters perceive the attributes of the natural world both objectively and subjectively and are affected according to the expectations grounded in their personality. Thus, to Touchstone, who can be content anywhere, “in respect of itself, [life in Arden] is a good life, but in respect that it is a shepherd's life, it is naught” (3. 1. 13f.), to Jacques, who believes that “the foul body of th'infected world” needs cleansing (2. 7. 60), a man is “an ass” to leave “his wealth and ease” for the forest into which he comes as an

The dukedom I resign, and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs (5. 1. 188 ff.)

And Caliban, fearing he will be “pinch'd to death”, vows to “be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace” (276-294 f.). Antonio only speaks to remark rudely on Caliban's fishlike characteristics and Sebastian, though slightly more loquacious, avoids any acknowledgement of sin. Neither fortune nor nature nor art can move the heart to repentance if a person desires not to be reformed.

The latter vision is more realistic, if less optimistic than the earlier one. “A world without Antonio”, argues Kermode, “is a world without freedom”⁵. At least a world *with* an Antonio is one in which freedom is *seen* to be exercised. Though *The Tempest* is the play that emphasizes the path to redemption, it fails to realize a complete salvation. Nevertheless, the speed and completeness of the conversions near the closure of *As You Like It* need not be understood to imply that the theme of repentance is insignificant there. In Lodge, Torismond does not repent, and Gerismond is required to slay him in battle before he can earn the opportunity to return to court. Shakespeare, in having Frederick repent at the “skirts” of the “wild wood”, even though this occurs offstage, is reinforcing a theme which is scarcely present in his source. Theodore Spencer's assessment of *The Tempest* can more appropriately be applied to *As You Like It's* total vision of hope: “There is a re-birth, a return to life, a heightened, almost symbolic awareness of the beauty of normal humanity after it has been purged of evil—a blessed reality under the evil appearance”⁶.

A reconciling force in both plays is, of course, romantic love. Though no love relationship is developed with any degree of psychological subtlety, one is not disturbed by the lack of verisimilitude characteristic of the romance tradition. The love-at-first-sight experienced by Ferdinand and Miranda is neither more nor less incredulous than either Rosalind and Orlando's or Celia and Oliver's instantaneous response to each other as beloved. Shakespeare had already achieved compression and focus in the transition from Lodge to *As You Like It* that made the Rosalind-Orlando relationship central, and the much more sparsely developed relationship of Ferdinand and Miranda is another image of that one though, unlike it, politically motivated dramatically.

of *The Tempest* may not herald the beginning of “a brave new world” as the ending of *As You Like It* does.

¹*Hallet Smith*. Shakespeare's Romances: A Study of Some Ways of the Imagination. San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1972, pp 121-144. *George Hibbard*. “Adumbrations of 'The Tempest' in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'”. Shakespeare Survey 31 (1980), pp. 77-83.

²Edited by *Arthur Quiller-Couch* and *J. Dover Wilson*. Cambridge University P, 1961, p. 80.

³Quotations from *As You Like It* are from the Arden Edition, edited by *Agnes Latham*. London: Methuen, 1975. Quotations from *The Tempest* are from the Arden Edition, edited by *Frank Kermode*. London: Methuen, 1954.

⁴Shakespeare's Last Plays. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964, p. 48 (first published 1938).

⁵Introduction to his Arden edition, p. lxii.

⁶Shakespeare and the Nature of Man. New York: Macmillan, 1942, p. 195.

⁷Shakespeare 's Romances, p. 81.