



# Inhuman Persuasion in *The Tempest*

by Daniel R. Gibbons

*Shakespeare's The Tempest presents the spectacle of a magician-prince who manipulates inhuman powers to regain his usurped dukedom and secure a marriage for his daughter that promises to make his descendants kings. The fantasy elements of the story, the play's incisive interrogation of political power, and its seemingly scandalous (to modern audiences) representations of colonial and patriarchal power have attracted a good deal of interest from readers and scholars in recent decades. However, most also recognize that the play is almost entirely devoid of plot or dramatic tension, in the usual sense. Because Prospero is so firmly in control of events on the island for nearly the entire play, there is little serious doubt that he will prevail in the end. Thus, if the play is to be taken on its own terms rather than refashioned into something that better fits current expectations, we must find the play's dramatic life somewhere other than in its action. I argue that that the dramatic heart of the play may be found in the fertile confluence of ethics, rhetoric, aesthetics, and metaphysics that shapes its reflection upon justice in a postlapsarian world. The climax is not a matter of exterior action, but a crisis of will and of ethical persuasion. What matters is not whether the wrathful Prospero will prevail over his enemies in the end, but whether he will prevail over himself. Does the exertion of power inevitably turn humans into monsters? Within the play, this question hinges upon a breathless moment of persuasion which is best understood through the lens of Augustinian moral ontology. Shakespeare revises Augustine's equation of being with goodness, and nonbeing with evil to offer tempered hope for ethical aesthetics in Ariel's inhuman persuasion.*

*A noise of hunters heard. Enter diverse Sprits in shape of dogs and hounds, hunting them about, Prospero and Ariel setting them on.*

*Prosp.: Hey, Mountain, hey!*

*Ariel: Silver! There it goes, Silver!*

*Prosp.: Fury, Fury! There, Tyrant, there! Hark, hark!*

[*The Spirits chase Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo off stage.*]

Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints  
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews  
With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them  
Than pard or cat o' mountain.

*Ariel:* Hark, they roar!

*Prosp.:* Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour  
Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.  
Shortly shall all my labours end, and thou  
Shalt have the air at freedom. For a little,  
Follow and do me service.

(4.1.255–66)<sup>1</sup>

At the end of act 4 of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero lets slip the literal dogs of vengeance upon Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, ensuring that all his enemies lie entirely at his mercy at last. He has not merely outwitted his foes but has bound them in intense and unrelieved mental and physical agony. Is Prospero's ascendancy a triumph of justice in the island principality? The tragic fall of a once-oppressed man into the role of oppressor? No matter how we understand this moment, by the end of the play we see the torturer relent, even granting clemency to the unrepentant knaves Sebastian and Antonio. Even if the play's final act leaves some readers unsettled because of the unresolved political and social tensions bound up in the fabric of the play, it would be difficult to argue that Prospero's apparent movement from wrathful punisher to magnanimous restorer is worse than the likely alternatives, even if his words and actions in the wake of this movement present serious problems.<sup>2</sup>

However, even if we agree that his change of heart is a good thing on the whole, a critical gap remains in our understanding of what we might call Prospero's ethical conversion at the beginning of the play's

<sup>1</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from *The Tempest* are taken from the Arden Edition, third series, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); references will be cited parenthetically within the text by act, scene, and line.

<sup>2</sup> On the unsettling potential even of Prospero's mercy for some modern readers, see, e.g., A. D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare the Thinker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 369–72. Seneca's advice on clemency to his former pupil, the notorious tyrant Nero, illuminates the uncertainty that Prospero's clemency might have provoked in the seventeenth century (*De Clementia*, ed. and trans. Susanna Braund [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009]). It is also a fascinating example of carefully crafted admonitory rhetoric from a social inferior to a tyrant that exerted a strong influence on medieval and early modern political literature, like the English *Mirror for Magistrates* (*De Clementia* 77–79).

final act.<sup>3</sup> That Prospero thinks he chooses what he calls “virtue” over “vengeance” is clear, but how that choice becomes *possible* for him at all remains obscure. How could a ruler hell-bent on vengeance change so quickly into one who wants to forgive? Is it possible to cause such a drastic conversion of the will without using the kinds of deception and compulsive force that modern readers find so troubling in Prospero’s dealings with the other characters on the island? Any answer to these questions about the possibility of ethical persuasion will depend on how we understand the human will and the nature of evil. Shakespeare’s treatment of persuasion in *The Tempest* is informed by an Augustinian moral ontology, but the rhetorical ideas presented in the play go beyond anything in Augustine’s classical rhetorical theory. Here, at the end of a playwriting career that continually probed the impotence of humane rhetoric in the face of vice, Shakespeare presents a surprising glimmer of hope that begins with inhuman persuasion.

With the phrase “inhuman persuasion,” I mean to indicate a collection of ideas that are intertwined with one another in *The Tempest*. First, it is obvious enough that the nonhuman Ariel somehow bridges the crucial gap between Prospero’s utter subjugation of his enemies and his relinquishment of magical coercion. I see this moment as the only act of entirely undeceptive, uncoercive persuasion of a human being by a non-

<sup>3</sup> Admittedly, not all readers would agree that there is a genuine change of heart in this scene. Readers who place greatest weight on the play’s allegorical meanings or Prospero’s stoical self-mastery tend not to observe much of a change in Prospero. Those who place greater weight on the affliction of Prospero’s mind, the fragility of his self-control, and the wrathful severity of his punishments throughout the play tend to see greater dramatic tension and moral urgency in the opening of the final act. One can see the contours of the disagreement in a survey of modern editorial commentaries. David Bevington portrays him as a wise humanist, burdened by responsibility, but not at all vicious (*The Complete Works of Shakespeare: Revised Edition*, ed. David Bevington and Hardin Craig [Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1973], 1247–48). Northrop Frye regards Prospero as a thoroughly admirable model of self-control (*William Shakespeare: The Complete Works. The Penguin Text Revised*, gen. ed. Alfred Harbage [New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1977], 1370–71). In the Riverside introduction to the play, Hallett Smith is silent about Prospero’s character, asserting that the play lacks dramatic tension (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen. ed. G. Blakemore Evans [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997], 1659). Stephen Greenblatt gives greater attention to the ambiguities of Prospero’s character and the dramatic importance of the beginning of act 5 (see n. 4 for reference). Barbara Mowat describes Prospero as “one of Shakespeare’s most complex creations,” pointing out the seemingly villainous, unstable, and tyrannical side of his behavior, while also acknowledging his vulnerability and final benevolence (Folger Shakespeare Library Edition, ed. Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine [New York: Washington Square Press, 2004], xiv; 195–98). Similarly, in the introduction to the Third Series Arden edition, the editors examine Prospero’s dark side, arguing that his moral character, along with his will and his plans, is ambiguous throughout, despite the fact that he “construes his own magic as benign” (5; 25–26).

human in Shakespeare's works.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Ariel is not human is important for understanding what is distinctive about his way of persuading but has not received adequate attention. Second, Ariel implies that as a nonhuman, he is incapable of the sort of sincere compassion that seeing the suffering of the captives ought to provoke. According to the most influential classical rhetorical theories, this fact should disqualify Ariel from being a successful persuader. As far as I can tell, we still lack a satisfactory explanation for how, in the context of seventeenth-century thinking, a rhetor without human passions could plausibly accomplish one of the most memorable ethical persuasions in Shakespeare's works. Third, we will see that the particular way in which Ariel undertakes to persuade Prospero seems to dehumanize the captives. This seemingly inhumane rhetorical approach has not, to my knowledge, ever been accounted for. Fourth, while the fact that Ariel subtly calls attention to Prospero's own potential inhumanity in the course of his persuasion is evident to any careful reader, the full rhetorical force of his unspoken question takes on a new intensity when enmeshed with the first three inflections that I intend by the phrase "inhuman persuasion." The goal of this essay, then, will be to give an accounting for how Ariel's inhuman persuasion accomplishes its surprisingly effective ethical work on Prospero's will, in spite of the fact that it appears to violate the standards of traditional rhetorical theories.

In Shakespeare's time, a standard way to approach questions of persuasion was to frame them in rhetorical terms that would have been familiar to anyone who had attended grammar schools like the one in Shakespeare's Stratford.<sup>5</sup> The ostensible purpose of humanistic rhetorical education was to make students into skillful persuaders, and thus to make them more effective moral and political agents.<sup>6</sup> However, Shake-

<sup>4</sup> Even Titania's seduction of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* carries with it the threat of coercive force: "Out of this wood do not desire to go. / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no" (3.1.134–35). All citations of Shakespeare's plays other than *The Tempest* are drawn from the Oxford edition as presented in the Norton Shakespeare, 2nd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W. W. Norton Company, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Baldwin's *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944) describes in meticulous detail through two thick volumes the development and curricula of such schools.

<sup>6</sup> For a rich discussion of the moral and political investments of early modern humanistic schools, see the entirety of Baldwin's *William Shakspeare's Petty School* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1943) and *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke*, 578–616. For a more recent examination of the potentially negative unintended consequences of the actual practices of these schools, see Lynn Enterline, *Shakespeare's Schoolroom: Rhetoric, Discipline, Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

spere's representations of verbal persuasion in his plays and poems tend to question the moral status of rhetoric. In his plays, even the effectiveness of ethical rhetoric generally requires not only a skilled and virtuous rhetor but also an audience already disposed to virtue.<sup>7</sup> It is not at all clear in most of Shakespeare's plays that ethical rhetoric can be expected reliably to overcome strong passions or reform malevolent monarchs. The practical importance of this problem, especially in a political order where the passions of the prince could lead to swift and terrible consequences for her subjects, cannot be overstated.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of Shakespeare's generally ambivalent representations of ethical rhetoric's power to affect the recalcitrant wills of rulers, Ariel's unconventionally reserved means of persuasion are even more remarkable. While the mainstream rhetorical theories of the early humanists (following classical rhetorical treatises like Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*) celebrated the coercive power of rhetoric, Ariel's rhetoric in the final act of the play is delicately uncoercive.<sup>9</sup> As we shall see, Ariel's persuasive speech is fabricated out of negatives

<sup>7</sup> Scott F. Crider demonstrates Shakespeare's nuanced representation of rhetoric as an ethical art in *With What Persuasion: An Essay on Shakespeare and the Ethics of Rhetoric* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009). In almost every case he finds that ethical rhetoric requires an ethical, or at least already-penitent (in the case of Leontes), audience to be successful. There is little hope in his analysis that rhetoric can overcome a defective will or vicious passions. Benjamin Beier argues that Shakespeare's later plays engage in deliberate reflection upon the positive and negative potential of rhetoric ("The Art of Persuasion and Shakespeare's Two Iagos," *Studies in Philology* 111 [2014]: 34–64). I do not wish to dispute these arguments but to qualify them by examining *The Tempest's* seeming incongruity with the rhetorical and ethical thinking that they find in Shakespeare's other plays.

<sup>8</sup> In *Rhetoric, Prudence, and Skepticism in the Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985) Victoria Kahn presents three points crucial for understanding rhetoric in Shakespeare: 1. Early modern theorists and teachers tended to conflate rhetoric and poetics (38); 2. Rhetoric and prudence were also generally approached as a single subject, at least by early humanists influenced by Quintilian and Cicero (29–40); 3. Later writers like Desiderius Erasmus, Michel de Montaigne, and Thomas Hobbes, under the influence of the Augustinianism that tended to accompany a humanistic turn away from scholasticism, encountered an epistemological crisis that undermined the earlier humanistic confidence in the ethical and political usefulness of classical rhetoric (48–54). Shakespeare's negative representations of rhetoric resemble the skepticism which Kahn identifies in Montaigne (115–51).

<sup>9</sup> In *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), Wayne Rebhorn confirms the first of Kahn's points but argues that the central concern of early modern rhetorical theory was not prudence or ethics but power: "the power [rhetoric] puts into the hands of the orator to control the will and desire of the audience. [Cicero, Quintilian, and their English adherents] conceive rhetoric as a political instrument, to be sure, but not one whose main purpose is to enable free political debate and discussion. Rather, they celebrate rhetoric for giving its possessor the ability to subjugate others, to place the world beneath his feet" (15).

and conditionals, and, as I asserted above, part of its ethical appeal lies in its very inhumanity—the absence of solidarity, passion, and presence in Ariel’s language—rather than in the passionate sincerity and humane authority that Cicero and Quintilian argue is essential to effective persuasion.<sup>10</sup> In political terms, the obliquity of Ariel’s approach is easy to understand, since he addresses Prospero decorously as servant to master,<sup>11</sup> but his particular rhetorical choices are still strangely counter-intuitive, violating classical prescriptions for persuasion to sympathy in a way that is not adequately accounted for by the social dynamic between them.

A better way to understand Ariel’s strange method of inhuman persuasion, and why it works so well in this play, is to view it not merely as a representation of a historically typical master/servant relationship, nor as a conventional embodiment of early modern rhetorical theory, but rather as a most unconventional response to profound difficulties presented to early modern rhetorical theory and practice by the confluence of increasing skepticism with the resurgent Augustinian understanding of the will. I will begin with a closer examination of the ethical and rhetorical dilemma that draws to a point in the final acts of *The Tempest* and then show how Shakespeare’s engagement with Augustinian moral ontology can make better sense of the fact that the final act of ethical persuasion in Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* is an inhuman persuasion.

### I. THE ETHICAL SITUATION

In the dilated moment of Prospero’s victory over his enemies, an indeterminate period spanning the gap between the end of act 4 and the beginning of act 5, the audience is left to reflect upon the names of the spirit-hounds with which Prospero terrorizes and subdues Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo: “Mountain,” “Silver,” “Fury,” and “Tyrant,” names that could be taken to suggest power, wealth, wrath, and unjust rule. Although an audience member in any straightforward production

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Cicero, *Orator*, xxvii.128–33 and Quintilian, *Institutio*, VI.ii.3–26. Citations from Cicero’s *Orator* will come from Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Orator*, trans. G. L. Hendrickson, the Loeb Classical Library, No. 342 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939); and those from Quintilian’s *Institutio* will come from Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler, the Loeb Classical Library, No. 124 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Rivlin perceptively notes the tension between decorum and emulation in this scene, in *The Aesthetics of Service in Early Modern England* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 158–59.





pero's arch reply call into question the duke of Milan's very humanity. Ariel approaches Prospero like a courtly councilor seeking to moderate the wrath of his prince by showing him the severity of his captives' suffering without provoking in him a defensiveness that could lead to retrenchment. Comparison of this moment with similar instances of attempts at courtly persuasion in Shakespeare's plays, such as Kent's failure to moderate his king's wrath (*King Lear* 1.1.120–88);<sup>12</sup> Escalus and Isabella's unsuccessful pleas to Angelo for clemency in his judgments (*Measure for Measure* 2.1.1–40; 2.2.26–191); and the failure of Antigonus, Paulina, and the Lords to effectively moderate Leontes's jealous rage up to the point of his son's death (*The Winter's Tale* 2.1.128–99), makes evident Shakespeare's persistent concern about the possibility of and proper procedure for the suasion of princes by their social inferiors. In all of these cases, there is a profound rhetorical problem even for virtuous speakers: no matter how virtuous the orator, if he attempts to persuade a vicious audience, his ethical speaking does more harm than good. Such a concern about the limits of rhetoric was not, of course, exclusive to Shakespeare but was a fairly common topic in humanistic literature.

Perhaps the most famous examination, outside of Shakespeare, of the potential of the courtly councilor to effect positive change through the persuasion of a prince is in the first part of Thomas More's *Utopia*. The dialogue between Hythloday and More brings into clear contrast the best and worst possibilities of a state dependent upon the good judgment and self-restraint of a single prince for its prosperity. On the one hand, Hythloday complains that rulers are all intractable and selfish because they are thoroughly immersed in worldly affairs.<sup>13</sup> Giving them good advice is useless because "the most part of all Princes haue more delight in warlike matters, and feates of chivalrie . . . then in the good feates of peace: and imploy much more studie, how by right or by wrong to enlarge their dominions, then how well, and peaceably to rule, and govern that they have already" (D1).<sup>14</sup> In Hythloday's view,

<sup>12</sup> For *King Lear*, I use the Norton edition's 'Conflated Text.'

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that Prospero failed his duties as duke of Milan not because he was a worldly man but because he was a philosopher-prince insufficiently interested in worldly affairs. Shakespeare's portrayal of social disorder caused by a prince lacking worldly concerns not only resonates with *Utopia*'s ironic portrayal of Hythloday but also echoes More's later writing about the practical diligence necessary for good statesmen (Gerard Wegemer, *Thomas More on Statesmanship* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998], 212–13).

<sup>14</sup> This and all subsequent quotations of More's *Utopia* are from the 1597 printing of Ralph Robinson's translation from c. 1551, *A most pleasant, fruitfull, and vviittie vvorcke, of*

a good councilor will only meet ridicule if he offers good advice: "If I should propose to any king wholesome decrees, doing my endeavor to pluck out of his mind the pernicious original causes of vice and naughtiness, think you not that I should forthwith either be driven away, or else made a laughingstock?" (F3).

On the other hand, the character More suggests that not all rulers are so thoroughly corrupt that there is no hope of persuading them to do more good (or less evil) than they otherwise would have done. He argues that the problem is as much in Hythloday's uncompromising approach as it is in the concupiscent princes they are imagining. Princes are too busy with important practical matters to spend their time discussing impractical theoretical solutions to the problems they face. Hythloday objects:

That is it which I ment (quoth he) when I said Philosophie had no place among kings. Indeede (quoth I) this schoole Philosophie hath not: which thinketh all things meet for every place. But there is another philosophy more ciuile, which knoweth, as ye would say, her owne stage, and thereafter ordering and behaving her selfe in the playe that she hath in hand, playeth her part accordingly with comelinesse, uttering nothing out of due order and fashion. And this is the Philosophie that you must use. (G2v–G3)

Here More is describing a rhetorical 'philosophy,' a philosophy of artful persuasion. This philosophy must modify its mode of articulation to suit the time, place, and human weaknesses of the prince and courtiers who are at the center of the political drama in which the good councilor is a player. He intensifies his point with a famous nautical metaphor:

If euil opinions and naughtie perswasions cannot be utterly and quite plucked out of their hearts, if you cannot euen as you would remedy vices, which use and custome hath confirmed: yet for this cause you must not leaue and forsake the commonwealth; you must not forsake the ship in a tempest, because you cannot rule and keepe downe the windes. (G3)

Like the mariners who strive to keep the ship afloat in the opening scene of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, More's courtly councilor sticks with the work of government even in the midst of dangerous and changeable political weather. More goes on to argue that rendering good out of a corrupt situation is not impossible, just difficult:

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*the best state of a publique weale, and of the new yle called Vtopia*, trans. Raphe Robinson (London, 1597), STC (2nd ed.) 18096; references will be cited parenthetically within the text by signature. I have silently modernized some typographical features like the long s but retained most of the original spelling.

No, nor you must not labour to drive into their heads new and straunge informations, which you knowe well shalbe nothing regarded with them that be of cleane contrarie mindes. But you must with a craftie wile and a subtill trayne studie and endeauour your selfe, as much as in you lyeth, to handle the matter wittilie and handsomelye for the purpose, and that which you cannot turne to good, so to order it that it bee not uerie bad. For it is not possible for all things to be well, unlesse all men were good. Which I thinke will not bee yet these good many yeers. (G3-3v)

When a prince and his advisors are imperfect people, and when the course of events would make straightforward philosophical argument both impractical and ineffectual, an art of indirection is necessary. A similar understanding seems to guide Shakespeare's representations of courtly persuasion. For example, Cordelia, in spite of her good intentions, provokes the wrath that will doom her to exile by attempting to drive into the mind of the contrary king "new and strange informations" which she knows will be "nothing regarded." Similarly, in spite of his good intentions and the fact that he is right, Kent is equally ineffectual because his approach is too direct. He begins with a rhetorical appeal to his history of loyalty, but as soon as he meets resistance from Lear, he immediately chooses to confront the king publicly—"be Kent unmannerly, / When Lear is mad" (*King Lear* 1.1.145-46)—rather than find a "handsome" indirect means of persuading him.

Cordelia and Kent's failures are only human, and they reflect some of our very best weaknesses. It takes a special kind of tragic heroism to doom oneself and one's kingdom for a point of principle. We tend to sympathize with both Kent and Cordelia because their positions are morally upright and their characters are winsome, even if their methods are clearly counterproductive. Kent chooses exile over silence in the face of injustice. Cordelia chooses laconic literalism over falsely hyperbolic professions of exclusive love for her father. Hythlodan argues that Christ did not approve of dissimulation<sup>15</sup> and chooses to leave public life rather than compromise his ideals. Two decades after he wrote *Utopia*, Thomas More himself eventually found reticence and exile from public life to be the only possible response when required to violate his conscience. He had reached the limits of verbal persuasion.

How could we not sympathize? Still, our sympathy ought not to prevent us from reflecting upon the problems that More raised in 1516 and Shakespeare wrestled with in many of his later plays: can good

<sup>15</sup> More, *Utopia*, G3v.

be coaxed out of the tangled web of passions that tends to bind human freedom to base motives? How can a good councilor move a flawed prince to right action? The literary texts under consideration here seem to agree that plain and forceful speech is often not the answer, because the recalcitrance of a defective will and the force of overwhelming passions are simply too strong for straightforward rhetoric to overcome them.<sup>16</sup> Attractive as it might sound to “speak what we feel, not what we ought to say,” such an approach only makes matters worse in Shakespeare’s literary worlds. A different philosophy is needed to bring good out of ill, the *sine qua non* of comedy.

Like More and Hythloday, like Kent and Cordelia, Ariel faces a flawed prince who is unlikely to respond favorably to impertinent speech from his social inferiors, much less his servant. Like a courtly councilor, Ariel is in need of an art of indirection. However, the terms of his indirection are strange. Ariel’s description of the captives dehumanizes them grammatically and metaphorically. His response to Prospero’s question (“Say, my spirit, / How fares the King and’s followers?”) contains neither subject nor main verb but instead uses a participial (“confined”) to describe their passive state and indicates their presence only with the objective pronoun “them.” This odd grammatical structure utterly evacuates the captives of any agency, making them merely the passive objects of Prospero’s activity (5.1.6–8). Even when Ariel uses a subjective pronoun for them (“They cannot budge till your release”), their only predicate is an incapacity, rather than an action or even a positive state of being (5.1.11). They are finally awarded individual designations and a positive verb in the following sentence (“The King, / His brother, and yours abide all three distracted”), but even here their designations are titles of relation, rather than proper names.<sup>17</sup> Their verb is intransitive and denotes passivity modified by the participial “distracted,” which again makes the quality of their fragmented abiding completely dependent upon Prospero’s agency as dis-tractor, etymologically the one who

<sup>16</sup> Granted, Hythloday’s own story undermines his skepticism because Cardinal Morton, a prince of the Church, demonstrates exactly the sort of tolerant equanimity, openness to good advice, and political prudence that Hythloday claims all princes lack. A virtuous audience can do much to moderate well-intentioned but intemperate oratory. Still, the political point retains its force because both More and Hythloday seem to agree that, in general, princes are as vulnerable to vice as anyone else while enjoying greater power to exert their ill will.

<sup>17</sup> We might initially think that calling Alonso “King” would assert his social superiority to Prospero, but I would find such a reading unpersuasive in light of the Boatswain’s scandalous evacuation of the force of that word at the beginning of the play: “What cares these roarers for the name of king?” (1.1.16–17).

disintegrates and deranges them (*OED* "distract" v. 1–6). The force of Ariel's negative grammar thoroughly empties out the individuality and subjectivity of the nobles, placing Prospero in the position of supreme subject relative to their state as passive objects. In Ariel's representation, Prospero determines the captives' very being by his agency. This does inject the situation with ethical intensity, but there is little, if any, sympathetic force in Ariel's dehumanizing rhetoric.

Following classical rhetorical theories, we might expect a rhetor attempting to provoke his prince's sympathy for a group of captives to describe the captives in terms that would play upon the prince's self-interested passions, drawing forth sympathy by making resemblances between the captives and people the prince already loves, including himself. The notion that sympathy can result from resemblance is common enough in Shakespeare's plays. For example, Lady Macbeth is arrested with sympathy, which prevents her from stabbing Duncan when she notices that the king resembles her father (*Macbeth* 2.2.12–13). Similarly, Isabella attempts to stir up Angelo's sympathy for her brother by imagining their positions reversed ("If he had been as you and you as he" [*Measure for Measure* 2.2.67]) in an attempt to redirect Angelo's self-love onto her brother. Either of these approaches would have seemed natural to an early modern human rhetor, but they play no part in Ariel's inhuman persuasion.

Perhaps Ariel sees no reason or possibility of sympathy for the powerful and unrepentant nobles guilty of Prospero's exile, and so he prudently refrains from trying to portray them sympathetically. But what of "the remainder"? Ariel speaks in much richer language when he describes Gonzalo and the other Italians who have suffered collateral damage from Prospero's stern justice. Granted, describing the tears of a good man seems at first like a typical appeal to *pathos*. However, Ariel's description still does not make use of the powerful possibilities of sympathetic resemblance that would give his description a more obvious appeal. Shakespeare easily could have made Ariel compare Gonzalo with Prospero's father<sup>18</sup> and could just as easily have had him try to make Prospero imagine himself in the position of his captives. Instead of drawing upon the fundamental human loves of kin and self to describe Gonzalo's suffering, Ariel uses a conceit that empties out

<sup>18</sup> Such an approach would resemble Priam's famously moving persuasion of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*, of which Quintilian writes approvingly: "And as for perorations, what can ever be equal to the prayers which Priam addresses to Achilles when he comes to beg for the body of his son?" (10.1.50).

Gonzalo's humanity and neutralizes his tears. He compares him to a house in a winter rain shower. Ariel could plausibly have appealed directly for mercy for the captives, but he does not. Instead, he speaks in conditionals and counterfactuals: "if you now beheld them"; "were I human" (5.1.16–19). There is an unexpected emptiness in his language here, an inhumanity to his rhetoric, and yet it mysteriously succeeds in provoking Prospero to be merciful.

Although, as far as I can tell, the rhetorical approach of Ariel's inhuman persuasion is unique to Shakespeare, it is deeply inflected by his religious context—and especially the resurgent Augustinianism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In order to understand why Ariel's strange rhetoric is able to bring good out of ill, to recover the possibility of comedy from the looming threat of tragedy, we will need to understand better Shakespeare's conception of evil, which is best described as Augustinian even though it diverges from Augustine in at least one profoundly important way.

## II. THE AUGUSTINIAN CONTEXT

It is often extremely difficult to distinguish the direct influence upon Shakespeare of St. Augustine the writer from the pervasive general spirit of 'Augustinianism' that saturates most of the religious writing of the period.<sup>19</sup> Roy Battenhouse has discussed a variety of Augustinian echoes and analogies, including the importance of *The City of God* to Shakespeare's vision of providence.<sup>20</sup> Lisa Freinkel's *Reading Shakespeare's Will* attempts to develop a plausible lineage of distinctively Augustinian modes of thought in the *Sonnets*—tracking certain notions

<sup>19</sup> Augustine has, of course, always been an important source for understanding early modern religious ideas as they play out in Shakespeare, and there have been a few more focused explorations of Augustinian language and influence in Shakespeare's plays. See, e.g., Beier, "Shakespeare's Two Iagos"; Julia Staykova, "The Augustinian Soliloquies of an Early Modern Reader: A Stylistic Relation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," *Literature and Theology* 23 (2009): 121–41; Roy Battenhouse, "Augustinian Roots in Shakespeare's Sense of Tragedy," *The Upstart Crow: A Shakespeare Journal* 6 (1986): 1–7; and James Walter, "From Tempest to Epilogue: Augustine's Allegory in Shakespeare's Drama," *PMLA* 98 (1983): 60–76. Two recent longer studies, Arnoud S. Q. Visser's *Reading Augustine in the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Katrin Ettenhuber's *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), help to point the way forward for a more comprehensive study of Shakespeare's complex engagement with Augustinian thought. Mitchell Munroe Harris's unpublished dissertation, "'Rise to Thought': Augustinian Ethics in Donne, Shakespeare, and Milton" (University of Texas at Austin, 2009) also offers some promising insights.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension: An Anthology of Commentary*, ed. Roy Battenhouse (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), esp. 5–7 and 44–50.

of figuration and will from Augustine through Francesco Petrarca and Martin Luther to Shakespeare. Her approach is creative but applies better to the sonnets than the plays.<sup>21</sup> Much more remains to be said about the importance of Augustine's moral ontology for Shakespeare's dramatic vision. In this brief essay, I will have to limit myself to a few observations most relevant to the argument at hand.

Augustine was the single most important patristic influence upon the theology of the Reformation era, and at least some of his major works were also widely available in London in both Latin and English editions. Shakespeare could very well have read Augustine directly, engaging as creatively with Augustine as he did with various other ancient Latin authors like Ovid and Plutarch.

Augustine's understanding of the nature of evil is well known: evil is not a thing in itself, but an absence or privation in something that is.<sup>22</sup> As he puts it in the *Confessions*,

And I considered the other things below you, and I saw that neither can they be said absolutely to be or absolutely not to be. They are because they come from you. But they are not because they are not what you are . . . It was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted. If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted . . . Therefore, either corruption does not harm, which cannot be the case, or (which is wholly certain) all things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all . . . Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance, for if it were a substance, it would be good. (124–25)<sup>23</sup>

There is much to be said about Shakespeare's engagement with Augustine's understanding of evil throughout his works. For the purpose of the present argument, however, I would merely suggest that the persis-

<sup>21</sup> Freinkel, *Reading Shakespeare's Will: The Theology of Figure from Augustine to the Sonnets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller discussion of Augustine's theology of evil, see G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> All citations from Augustine's *Confessions* are from Henry Chadwick's translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). While such articulations of Augustine's moral ontology may be found throughout his works, I cite the *Confessions* here because of its familiarity to modern readers, in spite of the fact that the earliest full translation of it in English was not printed until 1620 (*The confessions of the incomparable doctour S. Augustine, translated into English*, trans. Tobie Matthew [London, 1620], STC [2nd ed.] 910). I do not mean to engage here the question of Shakespeare's Latin reading. Augustine's moral ontology and vexed play with forms of 'nothing' was readily available in the many English translations of Augustinian and pseudo-Augustinian compilations, such as, selected almost at random, *Certain select prayers* (London, 1577 [STC (2nd ed.) 926]), B1–B8v.

tent insufficiency of virtuous persuasion to overcome the destructive passions of Shakespeare's princes is a result of the dependency of traditional rhetoric upon the putative force of positive persuasion. If evil truly is a nothing, however, then it would be reasonable to see traditional positive rhetorical techniques as strong hands grasping at shadows. Such is the case in Shakespeare's plays: appeals to reason bolstered by the rhetor's humane sincerity and good character are often simply swallowed up by the black holes carved out of the hearts of princes like Lear and Leontes by their ill wills. Ariel's persuasion, however, succeeds in spite of the fact that he makes no logical argument, uses dehumanizing diction and metaphors, and denies his own ability to feel the very compassion that he aims to evoke in Prospero. Understanding the success of Ariel's inhuman persuasion will require a deeper examination of the Augustinian understanding of evil as privation.

That evil is an absence of good tells us nothing about how to bring good out of evil. How can something come from nothing? Augustine's notion of evil as privation is not without its difficulties. For example, if evil is absence, then how could such absence first have come to 'be'? Even if God is not directly responsible for the privations chosen by his free creatures, how could he not be responsible for creating the wicked being who tempted Eve? Where did the evil of the Devil come from? Was Lucifer created to be evil, and if not, then how could he have had the inclination to choose evil in the first place? Did God make him want to do evil? If so, then wouldn't that make God the creator of an evil desire and thus the true origin of the first evil thing: Lucifer's original malevolence? If God did not create him with an evil will, how could a good will turn into an evil one? This progression of questions provoked by Augustine's moral ontology moves us from the metaphysical question of what evil 'is' to the causal question of how evil came to 'be' in the first place.

Augustine's most subtle attempt to resolve the troubling causal questions at the root of his privative definition of evil is found in book 12 of *De Civitate Dei* [*The City of God*], the first English edition of which was printed in 1610 in London by George Eld (whom we may best remember for his collaboration with Thomas Thorpe to produce the first printed edition of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* in 1609),<sup>24</sup> just about the time that *The*

<sup>24</sup> The translation was the work of John Healey, a humanist and recusant Catholic who was imprisoned and interrogated in York Castle in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot in 1606. His translation of *De Civitate Dei* (*Of the citie of God vwith the learned comments of Io. Lod. Viues*, [London, 1610] STC [2nd ed.] 916) was dedicated to Lord William [Herbert] Earl



*Tempest* was probably being completed. In book 12 of *The City of God*, Augustine undertakes a close examination of angelic nature and the first emergence of evil in Lucifer's rebellion. He argues that evil could not have been a part of Lucifer's nature, because God created his nature and God's creation was good. Further, things are not punished for their natures (of which God is the cause), but for their wills (which are free)—and scripture tells us that Lucifer was punished. So, then, Lucifer's rebelliousness must have come from an evil will, not from any evil in his nature. This solution opens another vexing problem, however:

Seeke the cause of this euill will, and you shall finde iust none. For what can cause the will's euill, the will being sole cause of all euill? The euill will therefore causeth euill workes, but nothing causeth the *euill will*. . . . So then hee that desires to know the cause of the *vicious will* . . . if he marketh well shall finde nothing. For if wee say that hee caused it, what was hee ere his *vicious will*, but a creature of a *good nature*, the worke of GOD, that vnchangeable good? . . . he shall finde that his *euill will* arose not from his nature, but from his nothing: for if wee shall make his *nature* the effecter of his *vicious will*, what shall wee doe but affirme that *good* is the efficient cause of *euill*? (12.6.446–47)

Augustine's privative theodicy seems in danger of running aground on the historical question of the original efficient cause of evil. Even if evil is absence, rather than presence, and thus the total goodness of God's creation is preserved, how did the first evil will come into being? Is God responsible for creating it? If so, we must see God as something less than entirely good, because evil cannot come out of something created with a thoroughly good nature. But to imagine God (who, for Augustine, must be entirely good in order to be understood to be truly God) as tainted by evil in his nature would be absurd.

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of Pembroke, one of Shakespeare's patrons and a likely candidate for the W. H. to whom the first edition of the Sonnets was dedicated (Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, 52–69). The translation was first entered into the Stationers' Register on 3 May, 1608. Healey includes in his translation the ample humanistic commentary of Juan Luis Vives. It is perhaps worth noting that Healey also had connections to the Virginia Company and may have been the author of the preface to John Smith's *A True Relation of the Occurrences and Accidents of Note as Hath Happened in Virginia* (*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 137). I do not know of conclusive evidence that Shakespeare knew Healey, but one could plausibly speculate that if Shakespeare did know him after 1608, he could have been Shakespeare's source not only for the translation of *De Civitate Dei* with Vives's commentary but also for William Strachey's *A True Repertory*, which is generally believed to be one of the sources of *The Tempest* but which Shakespeare must have read in manuscript, because it was not printed until 1625. Healey's translation is neither graceful nor entirely accurate, but if one were to read Augustine's *City of God* in English during Shakespeare's lifetime, one would have read Healey's translation. All quotations from *De Civitate Dei* will be from Healey's translation. All references will be cited parenthetically within the text.

Augustine's solution to this knotty problem is to slice through it with an unexpected revision of the traditional understanding of causality:

Let none therefore seeke the efficient cause of *an euill will* for it is not *efficient* but *deficient*, nor is there *effect* but *defect*: namely falling from that highest essence, vnto a lower, this is to have *an euill will*. The causes whereof (beeing not *efficient* but *deficient*) if one endeuour to seeke, it is as if hee should seeke to see the darknesse, or to heare silence: wee know them both . . . not by any formes of theirs, but priuation of formes. (12.7.447)

In order to contend with the mysterious origin of a thing which is nothing, Augustine posits a realm of deficient causality, of nothings excavated out of being by not-causes. If we can speak of a no-thing, why can we not speak of a not-cause? In the shadow-world of evil, whose logic is inevitably inside out, only a negative vocabulary can adequately and precisely apprehend the metaphysics, mechanics—and even history—of the decay of creation. We cannot speak of knowing evil any more than we can truly speak of hearing silence. No more can we speak of the causes of evil. Efficient causation causes things that are. Evil results from deficiencies, holes in the fabric of causation, not anything properly understood as a cause. Nothing can come from nothing.

### III. INHUMAN PERSUASION

Augustine's solution to what was perhaps the most difficult problem gnawing at the root of his moral ontology illuminates Ariel's inhuman rhetoric in the moral climax of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's skepticism about the power of traditional classical rhetoric to overcome a deficient will reflects a spirit of Augustinian realism that follows out the rhetorical implications of the notion of deficient causality further than Augustine did in his own writings on rhetoric. Ariel's persuasion is a deficient cause, but one that negates negation. His rhetoric paradoxically gains force by evacuating the classical techniques of persuasion—it is effectively deficient. In this final persuasion by a spirit who has made so much of "insubstantial" shadows and illusions throughout the play, Shakespeare imagines inhuman rhetoric confronting absence with absence in order to draw a malevolent Prospero out of the shadows and into the light. Ariel's inhuman rhetoric is a counterintuitive tactic that uses indirection to overcome passion, almost miraculously allowing something to come from nothing.

One hardly needs to argue that Shakespeare's plays exhibit a fasci-

nation with the moral implications of absence, the potential of various kinds of 'nothing' to result in good or evil. His most famous engagements with Augustinian moral ontology may be the myriad nothings in *King Lear*, where nothing most certainly comes from nothing.<sup>25</sup> That play's ambiguous ending provokes reconsideration of the question of whether something can come from nothing, or whether universal physical and moral annihilation is the inevitable fate of all things, regardless of their apparent truth and beauty. Nothings of one sort or another emerge as central problems and solutions in nearly all of his plays and poems. It is difficult to imagine what would be left of Shakespeare's works if we were to remove all of the absences, silences, equivocations, counterfactuals, conditionals, shadows, and gaps. Drama itself is often described as a kind of nothing in Shakespeare's plays, and the common euphemistic pun on "nothing" to mean the vagina is not merely bawdy but also locates "nothing" as the point of entry into the world of action for all human beings (or at least for all who were not ripped untimely from the womb). Though Augustine's privative sense of evil fascinated Shakespeare, Shakespeare did not agree with Augustine's rejection of drama's shadowy nature. Nothing is, for Shakespeare, as generative as it is privative. There is more than one kind of nothing, and at least one of them is a necessary opening that allows the emergence of the new. As Augustine himself argued in *De civitate dei*, in the Christian understanding, the first act of *poiesis*, the original creation of the cosmos, brought forth both being and time out of nothing (11.4–6).

But this is saying nothing new. It should be obvious enough that nothing is important to Shakespeare, and that he associates it with the necessary illusions of the dramatic art. However, different works engage with the idea of nothing in rather different ways. In the case of *The Tempest*, nothing is woven into the play's examination of the potential for coercion and persuasion to bring good out of imperfect beings and situations. In the hands of the spirit Ariel, a particular sort of nothing becomes the solution to the problem of the deficient human—the problem faced by More and Hythloday in *Utopia*, a problem that lay at the heart of the humanist project: how to move from abstract knowledge of the good to right action in the world.

Knowing is not the same as doing. As Sir Philip Sidney put it, "our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., Edward W. Taylor, "King Lear and Negation," *English Literary Renaissance* 20 (1990): 17–39.

will keepeth us from reaching unto it."<sup>26</sup> Macbeth knows perfectly well what is the right thing to do—he presents a cogent moral case in his argument with Lady Macbeth (1.7.31–47)—and yet, he still acts wrongly because he *wills* evil in spite of his *knowledge* of the good. Lear receives no end of good advice, but his implacable will is unchecked by reason. Angelo never denies that the demands he makes of Isabella are wicked, but his moral knowledge does not translate into right action. Knowledge of the good is not enough.

At the end of act 4 of *The Tempest*, Prospero appears poised to head down a similar path, this time the path of immoderate vengeance. The effectiveness of the transition from act 4 to act 5 depends upon our ability to apprehend the danger that is posed by Prospero's coercive victory—a victory that is a triumph of force over persuasion, one which does not leave much of a place for More's persuasive philosophy, because Prospero "seeketh to make men good rather *formidine poenae* than *virtutis amore*"<sup>27</sup>—he uses compulsion without love.

Prospero could very well remain a furious tyrant and return to Milan, leaving the captives behind on the island without having forgiven them or relieved their suffering. He could force his way into the political vacuum left by the disappearance of Antonio and Alonso, having already secured the loyalty and submission of Ferdinand by marrying him to Miranda. And yet, this conclusion would be morally deficient because it relies on the utter and unremitting dehumanization of his captives. The damage of this course to Prospero's own virtue would unfit him to rule well. As I noted above, the play works to provoke unease in us about the violent means of Prospero's victory over his enemies. If Prospero were to leave behind the Italian courtiers as a punishment for serving wicked men, then Gonzalo would also be left behind with the "remainder" in mournful exile, a poor reward for the crucial assistance that he gave to Prospero and Miranda in their time of need. I would even suggest that in the utopian "merry fooling" with which he attempts to move his king out of self-destructive mourning when reason fails—perhaps because Gonzalo's initial appeal to reason attempts to "cram" presence into absence<sup>28</sup>—makes him almost an image of the witty councilor More, giving a special moral force to his character that

<sup>26</sup> Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy*, in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 217.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>28</sup> "You cram these words into mine ears, against / The stomach of my sense" (2.1.107–8).

is not often recognized.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Caliban, the demi-human servant for whom Prospero bears some responsibility, would never have the opportunity to be reformed and civilized. To end the play like this would be to leave the audience with deep misgivings and an unsatisfied hunger for charity if not justice.<sup>30</sup>

Indignation is a natural response to injustice,<sup>31</sup> but Prospero's use of his "rough magic" to torture, rather than merely to subdue, threatens to shift our indignation from his foes onto himself. As Scott Crider has argued:

[T]here can be no responsibility on the part of the tortured subject. An audience can always respond otherwise and is, therefore, an ethical agent; the tortured subject cannot respond otherwise and is, therefore, not an agent at all. Torture demolishes agency in the tortured; rhetoric assumes it in the audience . . . Rhetoric makes; torture unmakes.<sup>32</sup>

Although he makes this argument in reference to the humiliation of Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well*, Crider's understanding of the difference between persuasion and coercion applies equally well to Prospero's use of torture in *The Tempest*. When Prospero becomes a torturer of both fools and knaves, he risks becoming a knave himself. And yet, he is still not entirely repugnant unless we forget the genuine injustices and human vulnerabilities that required him to use force rather than

<sup>29</sup> This would be a rather different portrayal of More from the grave and careful figure in *All Is True*, but it would be no less true to the historical man. Although there is not space in this essay for a full consideration of the larger implications of Shakespeare's depiction of Gonzalo's virtuous rhetorical 'nothings,' it is worth noting that we are not given the chance to see whether his humane and jocular rhetoric would have won the day in the end, because Ariel intervenes with a sleep-inducing song at 2.1.185. Even the notoriously wakeful More had to sleep a little, but the Devil is always awake. Perhaps it is the compromised humanity of Gonzalo that makes the virtuous power of his rhetorical nothings vulnerable to the wickedly negative wit of Sebastian and Antonio. If we do read him this way, the notoriously tragic fate of the historical More could not help but loom large behind Gonzalo's failed attempt to save his king from himself and from the schemes of evil courtiers.

<sup>30</sup> Another possible category that one might bring to bear here is the legal concept of 'equity' or accommodating the strict letter of the law to unusual cases that strain the application of the law. On equity in Shakespeare's England, see John W. Dickinson, "Renaissance Equity and *Measure for Measure*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 13 (1962): 287-97; and more recently, Andrew Majeske, *Equity in English Renaissance Literature: Thomas More and Edmund Spenser* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> I use this term deliberately to maintain a traditional distinction between righteous anger and vicious wrath, a distinction that is most relevant to our evaluation of Prospero's shifting passions in the last two acts of the play.

<sup>32</sup> Crider, *With What Persuasion*, 97-98.

persuasion to subdue his enemies. The danger is that he will, like Macbeth or Lear, be so utterly consumed by his passions that he loses the opportunity to convert vice into virtue. The more he dehumanizes his captives, the more his malevolence threatens to engulf him. The dramatic energy of the opening of act 5 depends upon the audience's intuition of this danger.

A reasonable and virtuous Christian prince ought, of course, to see the harm being caused by his rigor and to mitigate the harm caused to the innocent, but the text of the play gives no indication that Prospero feels any moral qualms at this point. Instead, he seems triumphant: "Now does my project gather to a head. / My charms crack not, my spirits obey, and time / Goes upright with his carriage" (5.1-3). There is no hint that he intends to change his course when he asks Ariel to report on the condition of the captives. Unlike the play's clear indications that his rough treatment of Ferdinand in act 2 is actually benevolent dissimulation, in the latter acts of the play there are no asides to suggest to us that his wrath toward the captives is feigned as part of a plan to remediate their vices. Instead, he seems pleased with his dehumanizing methods of vengeance. Although he shows no sign of asking for it, Prospero is a prince very much in need of humane counsel.

And yet, in the critical moment, Ariel intervenes with the dehumanizing description of the noble captives that leads to the climactic dehumanizing simile that portrays Gonzalo like a house in winter: "His tears run down his beard like winter's drops / From eaves of reeds" (5.1.16-17). Although Ariel does draw upon *ethos* by reminding Prospero that it was he who called Gonzalo "the good old lord" (5.1.15), the spirit does not deploy rhetorical figures that would be expected to provoke compassion.<sup>33</sup> As we have seen, the inhuman orator does not associate Gonzalo with Prospero's father or try to make Prospero imagine himself in Gonzalo's position. Instead, Ariel's description of Gonzalo's metamorphosis empties out his humanity, comparing him to a house suffering not injustice but the natural effects of the winter season's precipitation. Ariel's description echoes the description of Alonso's sea-change in "Full fathom five," in that it depicts a natural transmutation of the human body into an inanimate object (1.2.395-402). I can find

<sup>33</sup> Quintilian approved of the use of vivid descriptive language—which he finds necessary for producing the persuasive effect of *εὐάργεια* (6.2.32)—but he nowhere approves of anything like Ariel's dehumanizing choice of simile to evoke sympathy. Ariel's simile, in another context, might qualify as an example of kind of urbane speech Quintilian expects to generate scorn or ridicule (see, e.g., *Institutio* 6.3.37-41).

no recommendation in the classical and early modern rhetorical manuals for evoking *pathos* by verbally metamorphosing a man into a thing. Ariel's description even has a homely beauty that is enriched by assonance (tears/beard; run/from; eaves/reeds) and the metrical regularity of line sixteen and most of line seventeen. One might expect at least a shameful grotesquerie or discordant form from an attempt to awaken a vengeful prince's more tender passions. There is no pleading for clemency, little emotional intensity, no subtle metrical variations. Perhaps we could say that the "EYa—UUh—EE" sounds of the assonance imitate the sounds of Gonzalo's weeping, but if they do, then they do so in a way that naturalizes them like the inevitable sound of wind blowing through the eaves of a house. Such wind and rain is natural and inevitable, and even necessary (to wet the ground and clear the branches) for the rebirth of springtime. How could we imagine this to be an effective rhetorical approach if Ariel is seeking to provoke compassion or regret in Prospero? At first glance, it seems almost as if Ariel's speech were designed to neutralize aesthetically any qualms of conscience Prospero might have had about his punishment of the Italian nobles. To a human rhetor trained in classical methods of persuasion, this approach would hardly make sense.

However, we may now see more clearly how Ariel's inhuman rhetoric is effective because it is so skillfully deficient. It flits in and out of being, organizes a rhetorical aperture, a bounded void of being into which Prospero can step as he transforms from vengeful tyrant into merciful prince. The key to the particular effectiveness of Ariel's dehumanizing simile in the particular context of his exchange with Prospero in act 5 is the way in which it is subtly interwoven with the moral fabric of Prospero's own mythic imagination. Perhaps the most important connection may be seen with the masque that Prospero presents to Ferdinand and Miranda in act 4.

The moral allegory of that masque is not especially complicated, but it reveals much about Prospero's moral aesthetics. After admonishing Ferdinand to maintain premarital chastity, Prospero conjures up a spectacle that promises the reconciliation of Ceres with Venus and Cupid, and therefore, the reconciliation of fertility with beauty and desire, all harmonized by Juno, queen of the gods and patron of marriage. Of course, they need to be reconciled because, as Ovid tells the tale in the fifth book of his *Metamorphoses*, Venus and Cupid are responsible for stirring up the passion of Pluto, who kidnapped Ceres's daughter Proserpina and carried her down into the underworld with him. As

Ceres puts it in Prospero's masque: "Since they did plot / The means that dusky Dis my daughter got, / Her and her blind boy's scandalled company / I have forsworn" (4.1.89–91). Ceres's fury and sorrow at the rape of her daughter severs fertility from love and produces an unending winter. Jove intervenes by making a compromise in which Proserpina spends half of the year with Pluto and half with her mother. Thus, half of the year is bright and fertile, while the other half is dark, infertile, and bathed in Ceres's lonely tears.<sup>34</sup>

The masque, then, is designed to seduce the hearts of the young couple with a beautiful spectacle celebrating what a seventeenth-century audience would have understood as marital love ordered harmoniously with nature. Such a love would fully integrate beauty, desire, and fertility. Prospero's masque presents an image of love lodged in an Edenic world in which spring would come "In the very end of harvest" (4.1.115) without having to endure the cold sterility of winter. The masque contains an implicit warning to the young couple (i.e., do not pluck the fruits of love before their time, or you risk a marriage that is hellish bondage, rather than Elysian bliss) but unlike Prospero's earlier stern admonitions, this warning is bound up in a beautiful spectacle designed to make virtue desirable. It works not by coercion or fear but by the sweet 'golden world' persuasion that, according to Sidney, makes poetry superior to moral philosophy, which can discover moral truth but is incapable of persuading us to live according to it:

[The poet] beginneth not with obscure definitions . . . but he cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or well prepared for the well-enchanting skill of music; and with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney-corner. And, pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue—even as the child is brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste. (226–27)

While an entirely allusive and moralistic masque like Prospero's might not be pleasing to most modern tastes, such spectacles were honey at the court of King James, and Prospero's onstage audience is certainly impressed with the show:

*Ferd.*: This is a most majestic vision, and  
 Harmonious charmingly. May I be bold  
 To think these spirits?

<sup>34</sup> *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeline Forey (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 163–71.



*Prosper.*: Spirits, which by mine art  
 I have from their confines called to enact  
 My present fancies.  
*Ferd.*: Let me live here ever!  
 So rare a wondered father and a wise  
 Makes this place paradise.

(4.1.118–24)

What would worried fathers give to have their admonitions to self-restraint met with such enthusiastic appreciation by amorous youths like Ferdinand? Prospero knows from experience the temptations of desire and so perhaps imbues his “insubstantial pageant” with persuasive force in spite of the fact that the spirit-players themselves presumably cannot share in true human feeling. Yet this scene’s affirmation of the persuasive force of dramatic art is still limited. Even passing over the masque’s interruption because of Prospero’s “distemper,” his moral spectacle is only shown to have the power to reinforce the young people’s already-virtuous wills against the temptations of nature, not to convert an unnaturally lustful will to virtue. According to all indications in the play, Ferdinand does want to act chastely and is at least sexually temperate if not virtuous. But the gap between wanting and doing is often vast, and virtues may fall to temptation, so Prospero attempts to help the young people bridge the gap between good will and virtuous action by presenting virtue’s beauty in a sensually and intellectually engaging play that adds the positive force of *virtutis amore* to the restraining force of *formidine poenae*.

In the matter of his daughter’s marriage, Prospero knows that he must persuade rather than merely coerce. It seems this is not as clear to him in the matter of his captives, who could be taken to prefigure the Milanese subjects we presume he plans to rule upon his return to Italy. His vengeful torture here does not bode well for his future role as duke of Milan. Ariel, however, finds a point of entry into Prospero’s ethical passions in the mythological background of the masque. Coercion is the *modus operandi* of Pluto, the dark king of the underworld. Notice also that Shakespeare’s Ceres calls him not Pluto, but Dis, which connotes negation to an English speaker.<sup>35</sup> Although Prospero says nothing explicit about the major themes of the masque, enmeshed in the very fab-

<sup>35</sup> Could Shakespeare also have been aware that, in Greek, Δίς is also an old name for Zeus, a source of the Latin Diespiter—the day-father Jove as an absent possibility subtly made available by Ariel as a positive role for Prospero to fill instead of becoming an image of the lord of the underworld?

ric of Prospero's spectacle is an aesthetic rejection of absence, division, sterility, darkness, and winter. Part of the implied warning to Ferdinand is to avoid becoming like Dis, who brings winter into the world as he leaves Ceres bereft of her daughter for half of the year. Implied in this is a rejection of sinful sexual force that carves dark absences out of a world meant to be full of bright abundance.

Ariel's dehumanizing simile is illuminated by this context. Ariel sees into the aesthetic absences of Prospero's art—he is able to read between the lines to understand what Prospero does not say. Ariel moves from the unsaid to the said, and his persuasion engages Prospero's deficient will by means of fertile absences. Gonzalo is suspended in wintry mourning, so his tears elide with those of Ceres. But if Gonzalo's wintry tears echo the winter of Ceres's mourning, creating a parallel allegory, who fills the place of Dis? Ariel's simile pointedly does not say that Prospero has arrogated godlike power to himself by using coercion to achieve his ends, placing himself in the position of the rapist Dis. This is perhaps because it is not completely true—not yet anyway. Prospero's coercion is not final, and its effects are not yet irrevocably inscribed into a disordered new order, as they would be if he were to leave the captives stranded on the island.<sup>36</sup> Ariel plays in the shadows of simile, rather than the light of metaphor. At the risk of being obvious: analogy is not identity; to say that something is like something else is not to say that it is something else. Unlike the metamorphosis Ariel describes in "Full fathom five," Gonzalo's dehumanization is in the contingent realm of simile, which is as much of a 'not' as it is an 'is.' Here, the deficiency of being in the simile is crucial because it leaves open the potential for things to be otherwise. The depth of harm possible in Prospero's dehumanizing torture is not yet fully realized and need not be if Ariel can somehow negate the power of Prospero's vengeful passions by filling up the nothing of his vice with positive ethical emotions.

The contingency of Ariel's simile leads naturally to the contingency of the lines that follow it: "Your charm so strongly works'em / That if you now beheld them your affections / Would become tender" (5.1.17–19). Ariel's "if" still leaves them in a world of absence, but this conditional points to a golden possibility of compassion and reconciliation. Rather than excoriate Prospero for tyrannical torture, rather than exhort him bombastically to moral action, Ariel deftly exposes the moral gaps

<sup>36</sup> Although he never says that this is his current plan, the only other character who knows his plans does seem to think that Prospero needs to be persuaded to release the captives.

in Prospero's conduct and then holds out the possibility of something better in terms aligned subtly with Prospero's own moral aesthetics. Ariel's conditional 'if' is still an absence of a sort, but it is an absence fertile with the humane potential for justice and mercy. Ariel offers a contingent vision of Prospero's better self, opening a gap into which Prospero can choose to step.

It seems, however, that Prospero still has not felt the full impact of Ariel's inhuman persuasion in line nineteen. He fills in the metrical gap left by Ariel's half-line with an imperious question: "Dost thou think so, spirit?" to which Ariel responds with the devastating counterfactual: "Mine would, sir, were I human" (5.1.19–20). Once again, Ariel uses absence in an attempt to overcome the deficiency of Prospero's vengeful will. Ariel's odd construction seems to imply that Ariel is himself not actually compassionate. Because he is not human, implies the "mine would," Ariel's affections may not in fact have become tender when he witnessed the suffering of the captives. To say that one does not feel compassion for some person is a counterintuitive way to provoke another to feel compassion for them. It clearly violates Quintilian's assertion that the orator must himself feel the passions which he is trying to provoke in his audience: "The prime essential for stirring the emotions of others is, in my opinion, first to feel those emotions oneself" (VI.ii.26). And yet, the inhumanity of Ariel's rhetoric proves instrumental to provoking Prospero to become more fully what he ought to be. Will he remain merely the "king of ghosts" (an epithet for Dis in Golding's 1567 English translation of the *Metamorphoses*),<sup>37</sup> or will he fill up his vicious deficiency with humane tenderness?

Prospero is persuaded, moving from conditionals to the positive, though not yet complete, promise of a future action:

And mine shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself  
(One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,  
Passion as they) be kindlier moved than thou art?  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is

<sup>37</sup> Golding, trans., *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 10.15. Ovid, in recounting the Orpheus myth, names Dis "tyrannus tenebrosa" [lord of shadows] and "rex silentum" [king of the silent realm]; we may recall from above that Augustine uses both darkness and silence as analogies for the kind of no-thing that evil is said to be.

In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,  
 The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
 Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.  
 My charms I'll break; their senses I'll restore;  
 And they shall be themselves.

(5.1.20–32)

The mysterious mechanism of his conversion remains obscure in the broken fourth foot of the line, the caesura in which Ariel and the audience are suspended, waiting for Prospero to fill up the metrical, moral, and metaphysical absence left open by Ariel. And fill it he does. It is not that Prospero no longer feels his fury. He speaks of the pain of his indignation in the present tense (“I am struck to th’quick”). In spite of his passion, though, whatever the “I” is that can will to side with his “nobler reason” against his “fury” somehow freely shifts in the present (“Do I take part”).<sup>38</sup> The character of this movement is not itself purely rational: in Prospero’s self-description, it is a movement to allegiance with reason, which seems to have been in unresolved contention with passion up to this point. Instead of attempting logical argument, and instead of a heated plea that might move Prospero from flawed *pathos* to more flawed *pathos*, Ariel persuades Prospero to convert tragedy to comedy by drawing his will into alignment with the virtuous emotions that Quintilian calls *ethos*.<sup>39</sup> These ethical feelings are not passions that compel us so much as they are positive dispositions toward nobility of character. At least in Prospero’s formulation in lines 26–27, *ethos* empowers the execution of reason instead of what seems to be the only alternative: swallowing it up in an abyss of furious passion. As Prospero gives Ariel the order to release his captives with the assurance that “they shall be themselves” (5.1.32), he fulfills Ariel’s conditional invitation to become more fully himself, moving from deficiency to efficiency, from negation to being. Torture unmakes, but ethical rhetoric makes.

<sup>38</sup> The language of this section closely echoes Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s “Of Crueltie”: “He that through a natural facilitie, & genuine mildness, should neglect or contemne injuries received, should no doubt performe a rare action, and worthy commendation: But he who being toucht & stung to the quicke, with any wrong or offence received, should arme himselfe with reason against this furiously-blinde desire of revenge, and in the end after a great conflict, yeeld himselfe maister over-it, should doubtlesse doe much more. The first should doe well, the other vertuously: the one action might be termed goodnessse, the other vertue” (*The essayes or morall, politike and millitarie discourses of Lo: Michaele de Montaigne*, trans. John Florio [London, 1603] STC [2nd ed.] 18041, Y2).

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Quintilian explicitly discusses the generic character of *pathos* and *ethos*: “I cannot better indicate the nature of the difference than by saying that *ethos* rather resembles comedy and *pathos* tragedy” (*Institutio* 6.2.20).

Thus, we can see Shakespeare developing a model of persuasion that overcomes the vexing recalcitrance of the prince's passions by following out the rhetorical implications of Augustine's model of deficient causality to a conclusion rather different from Augustine's own theories of persuasion (such as that found in *De Doctrina Christiana*, which, like most classical rhetorics, requires strong passions in the persuader for evoking effective passions in the audience).<sup>40</sup> We have seen how often sincere positive persuasion fails to overcome the deficient human wills which, as More says in Augustinian fashion, will not be gone "these good many years."<sup>41</sup> It seems that, for Shakespeare, positive rhetoric cannot lead a deficient soul to choose goodness any more than I can bind a shadow with a chain. If, in Shakespeare's dramatic vision, sincerely passionate persuasion cannot pluck out the naughtiness from human hearts, then it would be reasonable to seek a new rhetorical philosophy. Perhaps the best way to work in a world exhausted by shadows is for the ethical rhetor to meet shadow with shadow. Ariel overcomes the mysterious gap between knowing what is right and doing what is right by opening up an artful rhetorical absence, one that can re-form the will like the mold of a cast sculpture. Ariel's rhetoric shadows the benevolences that Prospero himself conjured 'out of thin air' in his masque and thereby creates an ethical absence perfectly designed for Prospero to fill.

At least insofar as this play's reflection on power, persuasion, and free will is engaged with common early modern concerns about the efficacy of reason and rhetoric in political life, we may say that Shakespeare uses the ethical climax of *The Tempest* to present an unconventional rhetorical solution to the Augustinian vision of the recalcitrance of the will. This solution—this inhuman rhetoric of absence—is not only harmonious with Shakespeare's own reflections upon the strange simultaneity of being and nonbeing in art (going back at least as far as *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), but also echoes Augustine's unconventional solution to the mysterious question of evil's earliest cause in *The City of God*. Indeed, if we can see Augustinian echoes in this play's engagement with absence, we may wonder whether the emergence of the first English translation of *The City of God* in 1610 helped Shakespeare to produce a rather more hopeful resolution to the rhetorical problems created by the passions of powerful men

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina*, 4.118–19 and 4.139–41.

<sup>41</sup> More, *Utopia*, G3v.

(problems at the heart of most of his plays, but most compellingly confronted in his late plays) than he reaches anywhere else.

For justice to be truly humane in Shakespeare's dramatic world, it requires a paradoxically inhuman play of shadows that is able to coax ethical action from the abyss of malevolent passions. Inflected as the play is with Augustinian moral ontology, in the end Shakespeare subverts a straightforward application of that moral ontology by showing the goodness of certain kinds of artful nothing. In this play, inhuman rhetoric is the best and perhaps the only sufficient solution to the problem of the prince's intractably deficient will. Perhaps it is only this kind of rhetorical art that can create *ex nihilo* using deficient words, a kind of making that poets have always attributed to inhuman or divine inspiration, one that has the power to make the *ethos* of comedy win out in the end over the tragic *pathos* of annihilation toward which human beings seem so often to be hurtling themselves.

*The Catholic University of America*