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Bachelor of Arts

The Title of *The Tempest*

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“Or rather: let’s examine each and every thing in the transparent light that comes after the storm.”

-Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*

In a recent article in the *New York Review of Books* on (the lack of) Shakespearean political philosophy, Stephen Greenblatt writes: “Macbeth himself seems tormented by the question. To be sure, his anxiety derives in part from a straight forward prudential concern, a fear that what he metes out will inevitably be meted out to him, measure for measure.”

Greenblatt’s sentence about tragic self-recognition suggests the standard reading of *Measure for Measure* and its title: Angelo’s overzealous policing of Viennese sexuality will come back to haunt him.¹ There exists then a unity between title and plot or title and theme, in which the title functions as a verbal emblem standing for the play’s thematic concerns as a whole. This is rare in Shakespeare: most of the plays are protagonist-titled, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, or plot-titled, as in *A Comedy of Errors*. Only a few of the problem plays and late romances resist the author-effacing gestures of the generic-, protagonist-, or synopsis-titles.

The Tempest exemplifies this resistance, a play named after a specific event in the plot, certainly not the climax or turning point, but rather the opening scene, virtually a framing device that accounts for the range of the cast and the remoteness of the setting. Yet there exists no account of the function of *The Tempest*’s title of the kind that scholars have provided for *Measure for Measure*. There exists no analysis of the meaning of this particular title for this particular play, and no exploration of the nature of *The Tempest*’s title (event-as-title, or even storm-as-title). The category or genre which this title falls into, namely that of the event, however, dovetails neatly with the post-structuralist obsession with and imagination of ‘the event.’

¹ In a counter-anecdote, we read Jacques Lezra reading substitution into the title: “From Duke Vincentio’s concluding ‘an Angelo for a Claudio, death for death,’ to the title itself, *Measure for Measure*, the play seeks to take the measure of the many uses of *for*—linguistic, aesthetic, juridical, and sexual—that arise when absence needs, as the Duke puts it, to be supplied” (259).

My paper will argue that the storm of the play's title represents the European encounter with the New World, specifically the historical, geographical, and political ruptures resulting from this encounter. Europe's conceptions of civilization, the proper destiny of a nation, and the theological underpinnings of political life were all challenged by the event of contact with the New World. Following the event, strategies to manage or bridge these ruptures manifested themselves in colonial, religious, and artistic discourses, and yet these bridges were necessarily tense, strained. If *The Tempest* is in some ways about this encounter, then it would be possible to investigate its own attempts, however incomplete, to mend rupture. In what follows, I will sketch out a generalized form of the event, drawing from Derrida, Badiou, Deleuze, Foucault, and Lezra, searching out what is common and necessary and de-emphasizing some of the eccentricities which are for my purposes irrelevant (such as Badiou's dense riffing on Cantor set theory or the Deleuzian rhizome).

The post-structuralist concern with the event begins at the beginning² of post-structuralism itself, that is, the opening sentences of Jacques Derrida's 1966 lecture "Sign, Structure, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences": "Perhaps something has occurred in the history of the concept of structure that could be called 'an event.'" The event, then, is something which occurs in history, here specifically the history of concepts (of structure). History is not necessarily a continuous series of events; here Derrida simply figures history as the medium from which the event is seen to emerge. Moreover, 'perhaps' an event has occurred: this qualification, a typical Derridean gesture, insists on the radical contingency of the event, its ineffable, empty, decentered, indeterminate properties. To continue, "this event will have the exterior form of a *rupture* and a *redoubling*": here Derrida

² Of course, Derrida speaks of this 'beginning' as having already occurred, consistent with thought on the temporality of the event, which may only be named in retrospect.

gives the event its iconic shape or characterization as rupture, discontinuity, the basic form that has survived to this day.

C. Colwell, in a comparative discussion of Foucauldian and Deleuzian methodologies, also insists on the intractability of the event, describing its mode as the problematic (as opposed to the problem, which implies a solution, the problematic suggests permanent unanswerability or at least tension), and names the event a singularity, a mathematical concept, which is a point of infinite density and zero dimension, a rupture in the manifold of space-time, a specific, unique, undefined point of an otherwise well-behaved object or set.³ Of course, emerging as it does from the medium of history (even if history as such can only be a narrow conceptualization and ordering of events which denies the very qualities of the event), the event has a temporal aspect: “The event has a peculiar temporality that places it outside the progression of past-present-future. It exists, or rather subsists/insists, in a time which has always just past and is always about to come, i.e., is never present.”

Alan Badiou’s seminal *L’Etre et L’Evenement* (1988), translated into English in 2005 as *Being and Event*, figures the event as a rupture of “prevailing scientific, political, amorous, or artistic norms” (75), which then is memorialized by the new praxis which follows. Badiou writes of the evental site which prepares the way for the event proper, but which cannot be shown to *determine* the event. The event cannot be determined (as any rupture), but always *will have been predictable*, that is, in retrospect, certain formations can be seen to precede the event. Whether these formations are simply effects of a subjective, violent account of the event after the fact, or are somehow mathematically or ontologically present, Badiou leaves as an open question. Perhaps Badiou’s greatest contribution to event-study is his

³ Alan Sokal disclaimer: this list is drawn from the several usages among different branches of mathematics and physics of the concept ‘singularity.’ Its use in philosophy and literary studies is metaphorically related to these more precise (perhaps), quantifiable, scientific definitions (not fully given here).

demonstration of the flexibility of the concept as he switches between mathematical, conceptual, and literary modes in his work, from Cantor to Mallarmé.

Other thinkers have joined the discussion in their own idiosyncratic styles. Deleuze's suggestive description of the event teems with possibility: "turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive points'" (52).

Foucault's conceptions of the event are embedded in the methodological concerns of *The Order of Things* (1970): "Establishing discontinuities is not an easy task even for history in general" (50); "How is it that thought detaches itself from the squares it inhabited before" (217)? Jacques Lezra's impressive study *Unspeakable Subjects: The Genealogy of the Event in Early Modern Europe* (1997) translates philosophical and theoretical concepts for literary study, stating simply: "the event has no properties of its own except those of having occurred unforeseen, unpredicted, and as it were unpredicated" (8).

To summarize, the event is a contingent theoretical concept of breakage itself, of gap, of the undefined and unisolatable rupture which changes everything, and yet which is always uncertain because it can only be described after the event, by those who assume the event has occurred, by those who have a stake in fixing the event as ushering in their new practices. It should be clear by now that representations of the event as such are bound to be problematic and incomplete, because those representations are always in some way an effort to contain or manage the event. The event addressed in this paper—Europe's contact with the New World—provoked fantasies of political continuity and providential design, problematic interpretations which *The Tempest* takes up in complex ways. Yet because Shakespeare's play itself seeks to represent the event, it too struggles with comprehension and integration. The figure of the storm does not arrive at *The Tempest* fresh and new-made,

but rather as an old, deeply suggestive and meaningful trope central to Shakespeare's art; it carries with it baggage that cannot easily be left behind.

In the next section, I read this baggage or cluster of associations as a metaphysical proposition: the storm is indelibly tied to an arbitrary and inescapable condemnation unto death which is not necessarily juridical or tragic, but rather indicative of the universe's general indifference, even hostility toward human life and meaning. Tragicomic romance attempts to rewrite the storm as a mechanism of an ultimately benevolent cosmic order, and *The Tempest* in particular wants to comprehend the New World encounter as part of this providential narrative. The revision of the event along generic (tragicomic romance) and metaphysical (providential design) lines is necessarily incomplete, and traces of the event's resistance emerge, on both generic (tragic) and metaphysical (condemnation unto death) lines. Not to say that these traces, if fully voiced, would represent the event—the 'return of the repressed,' so to speak, is simply a textual effect of the impossibility of fully containing the event.

Reading the storm in *The Tempest* as representing the event of Europe encountering the New World enables one to theorize the form of history—Badiou writes of a breakage or rupture which then spawns truth procedures, new practices which struggle to comprehend the altered reality. Similarly, Derrida has worked on his notion of the archive as fundamentally linked to the event, as an array of texts that announces itself as law. The archive follows from the event; the archive is constructed to describe the event and to found the new order (whether it be political, artistic, scientific, amorous, et cetera, according to the categories of Badiou's truth procedures).

The Tempest seems to engage with the New World on some fundamental level—nearly all the play's canonical strains of criticism (postcolonial, travel literature, eschatological,

topical, pastoral/ realm of aesthetic autonomy) fit under the New World rubric. Yet because the play looks backward to the encounter-event itself, it seems to simulate a moment prior to the emergence of Badiou's truth procedures or Derrida's archive. That is, the colonial discourse (for example) is not visible as a cultural formation at the moment of contact, but is developed in response to (or determined by) the moment of contact. The encounter itself is characterized by what Stephen Greenblatt has called 'wonder,' a cultural, epistemological, and emotional response which is in many ways prior to acquisition, exploitation, and domination (though perhaps the seeds of those practices are discernible in 'wonder').

After providing an account of the tragicomic-romantic revision of the storm, I will address what happens after the event. Gonzalo's quotation of Montaigne in many ways is an example of wonder at the New World, the ravishing encounter with absolute difference, and the play's treatment of that theme is complex. *The Tempest* looks backward to the wondrous moment of contact in an attempt to forget or precede the colonialist discourse of domination and acquisition—this infantilist or naïve compulsion accords with the renewed hope of the tragicomic romances in general. Gonzalo, not knowing that Prospero has preceded him, wants to innocently rediscover the New World as if for the first time, but even at his moment of wonder, Badiou's categories are lurking in the subtext; political, amorous, artistic, and scientific concerns are all present in 'wonder,' even if they are not yet fully differentiated into new practices. The section will read Gonzalo's quotation of Montaigne and the utopian thematic as a wondrous contact which bears the traces of the archives to come. A brief discussion of *The Tempest's* use of William Strachey's *A True Reportory* as a structure for a consoling providential narrative and a consideration of the play's inconsolable silences will follow, and finally, a coda acknowledges the context in which this essay was written.

I. The Storm

A. F. Falconer, in *Shakespeare and the Sea* (1964), succumbs to a temptation now regarded as naïve, ill-conceived, and even futile. In the epilogue to his book, a thorough examination of Shakespeare's nautical language and knowledge, he suggests a hypothesis for the so-called "Lost Years":

How did Shakespeare come to know 'an art beyond most of others, not to be snatched at, at idle times and on the bye, but rather requiring so full a taking up of a man in the learned of it; as for the time nothing else is to be looked after?' Much has been written about the gap in what is known of Shakespeare's life and, despite attempts to suggest how the years 1584-90 may have been passed, they cannot be accounted for satisfactorily. (147)

In another place, Falconer proposes that Shakespeare sailed to Italy, to explain both his knowledge of the sea and his interest in Italianate settings, names, and themes. The current critical moment tends to dismiss these types of conjectures as unfounded, or as approaches that romanticize the author and his biography. The appeal of biography, for a figure so far removed as Shakespeare, becomes worse than useless: it is misleading, false image-making.

Yet dismissal is far from how I intend to treat this impulse, this desire. After all, the lure of biography is the promise of coherence, order, a final reunion with a recognizable figure at the end of our analyses. Such an appeal underlies much of the critical discourse surrounding the late romances, which imagines an older, wiser, spiritual author who makes the final statements about the role of art and inevitability of miraculous reconciliation before he gives up his powers. While few critics today maintain an identification between Prospero and Shakespeare, for example,⁴ much of the work being done on the late plays has a distinctly teleological bent. To speak of development, progression, or maturation is to reinforce a certain ideological position regarding Shakespeare's last works: the resolution of

⁴ For example, Peter Greenaway, who is not a critic, but who participates in the romantic project I am describing.

difficulties; the transcendence of tragedy; faith after all; sentimentality regarding the function of art.

Eschewing this kind of comforting coherence does not simply mean an utter disregard for the figure of Shakespeare. In fact, this seems impossible: Falconer's exhaustive inventory of a career-long obsession with the sea must mean *something*. For my purposes, we can focus on the recurring storm, the emblem of chaos for *The Tempest*: how is it possible to write an account of this abiding interest, this motif, without somehow privileging this last storm as the culmination of all storms previous?

If the romance is a mode of endings, then it must be too a mode of beginnings: in *A Comedy of Errors*, Egeon's incarceration lends the mistaken-identity farce a romantic frame of shipwreck and separation. The entire play takes place as he awaits execution, and he recounts the story of the storm to the Duke, bound by law. The family, neatly split down the middle through a series of improbable decisions and coincidences, must be reunited, even after eighteen years. It was Antipholus of Syracuse who finally persuaded his father Egeon to set out in search of his family, who feared to "[hazard] the loss of whom [he] loved" (1.1.131). Strange that Egeon was so damaged, so resigned to his fate that he suffered the loss for so long—stranger still that his worries prove prescient, landing him on death row. In the absence of any members of his family, then, Egeon delivers his last testament to the Duke, a narrative of potential blessing wrecked by a malignant fate. The storm, even within the bounds of this early play whose clockwork plot churns dizzily toward a wholly inevitable conclusion, is both the prime mover of the plot, and the last testament, the final tale of the suffering elder.

In fact, the structure of Egeon's tale is remarkably similar to Prospero's long historical narrative to Miranda; both recollections of rupture are comprised of lengthy

speeches punctuated by entreaties to continue. In the case of *The Tempest*, Prospero interrupts himself on several occasions, taking pains to ensure that Miranda hears him; Egeon, however, is overcome by grief and his sad memory must be drawn out by the Duke. Of course these narratives, both early in their respective plots, function as back-story for the audiences, crucial information that contextualizes subsequent scenes. Egeon's "unspeakable" griefs must be spoken, and while at first the Duke is content to order the prisoner to "say in brief the cause" (1.1.28), later he commands the "old man... Do not break off so" (1.1.96), then to "do me the favor to dilate at full" (1.1.122) and finally ends, when the story has been completed, with "Jailer, take him to thy custody" (1.1.155).

We are presented with the economy of interrogation, confession, confinement, and execution, the Duke extracting for his own perverse satisfaction a meaningless litany of agonies. Why does he want to hear this? It cannot be merely a question of rendering some form of justice, of allowing a kind of 'last words,' the dignity due to a condemned man: this episode is marked by the Duke's commandment and Egeon's increasing misery as the tale progresses. If Egeon's story is a tortured history, it is also a perverse love-letter to his ruptured family; he suffers the pains of impending doom, but more importantly, the pangs of consuming love for those who cannot hear his tale, his wife and sons.⁵ History, love-letter, confession— more than anything else, the structural and epistemological correspondences between Egeon and Prospero's speeches can be examined along the interplay of these genres.⁶

Once commanded to speak, Egeon assents so that "the world may witness that my end/ was wrought by nature, not by vile offense" (1.1.33-4). Bevington glosses 'nature' as

⁵ "Whom whilst I labored of a love to see" (1.1.130), a line whose balanced alliteration marks the division between lover and beloved as neatly as the bizarre shipwreck-splitting itself.

⁶ To succumb to a biographical compulsion of a different sort, this paper can be read as a confession of learning, a history of and love-letter to a certain kind of thought.

“i.e., by natural affection; here, a father’s love,” opposing familial relations to the dictates of the state. This has the form of the self-justifying confession, the speech-act that acknowledges guilt and at the same time maintains innocence. Egeon admits to a crime only to claim that he was motivated by a father’s love; such a confession which contains a demand for forgiveness is no confession at all. Yet ‘nature,’ of course, can be read in another way: as natural law, fate, or fortune, so that Egeon was fated to die, and he cannot be held responsible for the ‘vile offense.’ The confession that disavows free will can also be read as the passionate love-letter, proclaiming an emotion that exceeds the bounds of rational choice. Indeed, Egeon speaks of the “pleasing punishment that women bear” (1.1.46) in reference to his forlorn wife, in a way that characterizes his own current situation. History, love-letter, confession— all of these divert agency from individual actors to the necessity of structural harmony, symmetry, recounting their narratives in such a way as to render their inevitability self-evident.

The immediate effect of this tragic inevitability is to justify the Duke’s reluctant sentence, but it is also aligned with the traditional reading of providence and miracle in romance. Though this early romantic element would not see its fullest expression until the late tragicomedies (according to the conventional account), it is imperative that we remember that for Shakespeare, there is no romance prior to the condemnation unto death, that these seemingly opposed modes share the same birth, are twins in Shakespeare’s first play of twins. To read this moment of double birth in Egeon’s tale in parallel with Prospero’s history, love-letter, and confession would be to avow a renewed faith in the romantic recursive aesthetic⁷ of a return to naiveté, or an infantilist compulsion. Yet far from

⁷ Cynthia Marshall, writing about the late romantic conception of art through the lens of the Freudian impression, notes that “the creative process—writing a fiction or producing a fantasy—aims to fulfill desires by recovering the past or molding the future” (96).

a repetition or return to the condemnation unto death, Prospero rewrites the deadly, inescapable storm as a mode of fitting justice, as evidence of a supernatural plan.

It is time for Miranda to know, it is appropriate that the hints of so many a 'bootless inquisition' be forced to speak. In one sense Prospero's speech is persuasion, made to justify his terrorism in spite of Miranda's compassion, in another, Prospero testifies his love for his daughter and his absent wife. Prospero's story is one of unnatural betrayals and usurpations; the storm is the mechanism of fitting justice, just as the time is appropriate and fit for Miranda to learn of her origins. Curiously, Prospero repeatedly asks if Miranda attends, marks, or hears him, although we have every reason to believe that she is engrossed by his story. These interruptions divide the narrative, breaking up long blocks of text for the benefit of the audience, as in *A Comedy of Errors*, and Prospero's anxiety is as suggestive as the Duke's command. Why is Prospero so worried that his daughter does not hear him?

Prospero struggles to justify himself to his daughter and articulate a theory of justice even as he acknowledges that "By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune/(Now my Dear Lady) hath mine enemies" (1.2.178-9) brought to the island. Accident and a personified Fortune seem irreconcilable, but Prospero, a believer in romance, blurs the distinction. Yet this marginalized accident, now apparently impossible due to Prospero's wooing and seduction of Fortune, secretly motivates his anxiety that Miranda listen and comprehend. His story means to integrate the storm and wreck into a narrative of a wrong that demands redress; constantly aware of this accident, Prospero nonetheless insists that Miranda interpret the event according to those laws of cosmic justice and symmetry which would determine it. If we read the storm in *The Tempest* as a representation of the New World contact, then Prospero's narrative of redemption functions as a kind of 'Manifest Destiny' ideology.

So we have at once an inevitability that is the condition of possibility for the Duke's sentence in Egeon's speech (executing someone fated to die is not unjust), and a sense of harmony, aesthetic and ethical, that informs Prospero's understanding of the storm. Prospero harmonizes accidents, and insists on their ultimate coherence: the threat is that the accidents⁸ are arbitrary and inescapable, like the Duke's sentence, and not meaningful or fitting. These arbitrary accidents would then take the form of condemnations unto death, the senseless and universal condition of human life which the tragedies recognize and the late plays deny. In the terms of the love-letter, Prospero transmutes Egeon's complaint into a seduction, a seduction of interpretative teleology which moves inexorably toward marriage and reconciliation. Prospero's history implies restoration, both dynastic and geographic, and his confession of bibliophilia slips into a justification for the ways in which the archive governs its slaves. Viewed in a certain light, the pattern of Prospero's narrative marginalizes the accident, the condemnation unto death.

This harsh sentence is explored in other plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice*, where Shylock's obsession with exacting payment exceeds mere mercantile concerns. "The dreadful touch of merchant-marring rocks" (3.2.269-70) destroys Antonio's wealth and the possibility of paying Shylock's loan. However, it is Bassanio who utters those words to Portia, he who Antonio loved. The next scene's first lines are a disturbing echo of the Duke's sentence in *A Comedy of Errors*: "Jailer, look to him. Tell not me of mercy." Again, the figure of the storm and the condemnation unto death are indelibly linked, but in this play, instead of a Duke bound by law, a legalistic Jew pursues his bloody sense of justice. This strangely personal pursuit in large part stems from his humiliation at the hands of Antonio and his ilk, who called him "misbeliever" (1.3.109). It is both, then that Shylock is a misbeliever, that is, a

⁸ Here I refer to both Prospero's exile and the circumstances that bring his enemies to his isle.

merciless Jewish usurer, and that he has been labeled such, that he has been marked as alien, as corrupt; in this sense Shylock doubly misbelieves, and both modes motivate his actions.

I do not mean to equivocate between the juridical circumstances of the romantic frame in *A Comedy of Errors* and the fortuitous device by which the problem play *Merchant* advances its plot. Certainly the very title of the first play precludes the sort of suspense that builds in the second, where the plot moves rapidly toward an intractable situation and finally Shylock's own obsessive vengeance becomes the target of Christian justice, in a sense converting the site of the crime from Antonio's legal obligation to Shylock's soul. The conventions of romance are not present in *Merchant* and so do not imply resolution; if anything, the storm that requires Antonio's death also fractures Shylock's family. The play works to contain these destabilizing forces through both an anti-materialist casket ceremony that asserts a kind of aristocratic love which is somehow imbued with wealth and indifferent to it, and then of course insisting upon Shylock's conversion.

There is a similar movement in *The Tempest* that softens justice, that demands mercy:⁹ Prospero's pursuit of justice, of his revenge against those who wronged him, must be diffused in the same manner as Shylock's hunger for flesh. Their anger and outrage simmered with no hope of fulfillment until the storm provides the perfect opportunity, an opportunity frustrated by the romantic plot, in at least two senses of the word.¹⁰ Ariel's intercession was never necessary until after the storm; likewise the conversion scene is never necessary until the storm challenges Venice's moral and socioeconomic order. That is,

⁹ Another trend the plays share is the reliance upon ceremony to assuage the anxieties of dynastic continuity, as Prospero tests Ferdinand, and Portia's father mediates the encounter with her suitors through his test, from beyond the grave. Patriarchal ceremony controlling the moment of marriage and inheritance is the repression of stormy rupture; perhaps this is made most explicit in *King Lear*, which presents the most extended storm sequence in the Shakespearean corpus precisely at the breakdown of dynastic continuity.

¹⁰ I mean 'romantic' as in *The Tempest*'s genre, 'romantic' as Bassanio and Portia's love which saves Antonio at the trial, and 'romantic' as in Ferdinand and Miranda's courtship which tempers Prospero's vengeance.

without the storm, Antonio would have paid his loan and the moment of danger would have passed. Yet Shylock can never be moved to mercy and benevolence, being what he is— by his nature, according to the play's logic, he is incapable of Christian charity— the court must order his conversion, a judicial sentence upon his soul, in some ways a death and new birth. The paradoxically-named Gratiano's blood-thirst ensures this association: "to bring thee to the gallows, not the font" (4.1.398).

If the most immediate and persistent result of the Shakespearean storm is separation, we have seen how rupture is utilized or rectified by various comedic and romantic plots. When the storm cannot be converted, however, the play rapidly veers toward tragedy. After all, the storm in *Othello* which destroys the Turkish fleet¹¹ (2.1) separates Iago, Othello, and their ships, allowing Iago to see Cassio and Desdemona conversing intimately, which in turn sparks in his brain the ruse that will eventually provide the 'ocular proof' that Othello values so highly. Like in *Merchant*, *Othello*'s storm serves as a turning point for the plot that dramatically accelerates the pace of action. Yet this tragedy of sexual jealousy has still more in common with the discourse of the storm, especially as I have attempted to describe it here, a condemnation unto death (of course it is the storm in *Othello* that condemns Desdemona to death).

An early speech by Iago crystallizes many of the concerns I have already addressed:

¹¹ An example of the endless allusions of the period to the fate of the Spanish Armada in 1588. Jacobean insecurity and uncertainty is allayed by portraying that storm as the definitive, ordained event which assures the legitimacy and prosperity of the current regime. Falconer notes that such an imagining of that particular storm as an event was an ideological construction:

The defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 is so often thought of as a single, tremendous, and final event that it has been allowed to overshadow the struggle that led up to it and that went on for fifteen years after. (xi)

The Turkish fleet is a Muslim armada, even more feared and caricatured than continental Catholic forces, even more of an 'other.' Othello's own status as a (presumably) North African has been resolved by conversion (like Shylock) and he even speaks, paradoxically, a colonialist language, of "the Cannibals that each other eat" (1.3.145). Perhaps one way to think about the defeat of the Turkish fleet is the simulated expulsion of the other by the converted other (Othello), whose own status will be exposed and exploited by Iago in turn. There seems to be no escape from the storm.

If sanctimony and a frail vow betwixt an erring barbarian and a supersubtle Venetian be not too hard for my wits and all the tribe of hell, thou shalt enjoy her. Therefore make money. A pox of drowning thyself! It is clean out of the way. Seek thou rather to be hanged in compassing thy joy than to be drowned and go without her. (1.3.357-63)

This dense speech, packed with imaginative energy and turns of phrase, persuades Roderigo that all is not lost, that he should not succumb to suicide but instead pursue Desdemona, no matter what the cost. Roderigo's hyperbolic Petrarchan angst ("It is silliness to live when to love is torment" [1.3.311]) turns suicidal, at least figuratively, and there is at least a hint toward the near-suicidal abjuring of power with which Prospero drowns his books, turning every third thought toward death. The love-struck courtier Roderigo, 'a gulled gentleman,' perhaps reads Shakespeare's navigational Sonnet 116 (published after *Othello's* performance and before *The Tempest*, but probably written well before either) too literally: "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,/But bears it out even to the edge of doom" (11-2). The central image in the poem is the ship of love, unswerved by tempests, suicidally constant—if this be not true, then the poet threatens in effect to drown his books: "I never writ" (14).

It is possible to read Sonnet 116 as part of the context of Roderigo's love-sickness, who resembles in this part of the play the pining, melancholic Romeo of *Romeo and Juliet's* first act. Conventionally, as in Spenser's *Amoretti* 34, the Petrarchan lover suffers through a storm, but guided by the light of the beloved's virtue, he arrives at a safe harbor. Shakespeare's sonnet is more bleak and continues to associate the storm with an arbitrary and inescapable condemnation—the lover simply asserts that his passion (or storm) demands his death. Sonnet 116 functions as an example of the association of the storm and the condemnation unto death (an association preserved despite convention), but also as a crucial context for Roderigo's torment.

Roderigo carries out the morbid thesis of Sonnet 116— that love's storms, if they are not avoided, are a condemnation unto death— to its logical extreme, where it is hijacked by Iago's wily tragic plotting. Iago's speech is enmeshed further still in the webs of signification spun from the storm: his characterization of the unnatural union between 'barbarian' and Italian maiden plays to the same underlying cultural fantasies as Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda; the particularity of the Venetian context and the suggestion that natural, good sexual unions are fecund and money-making refers both to the barrenness of Shylock's usury and the social climbing implicit in Bassanio's courtship of Portia. Lastly, Iago's contrast between being willfully hanged for love and succumbing to effeminate, Petrarchan self-dissolution mixes up Egeon's distinction between a fate wrought by nature and vile offense (here, Roderigo's 'natural affection' motivates vile offense); his sense of death's inevitability and especially the hanging/drowning opposition recall the choice given the blasphemous Boatswain¹² in *The Tempest*.

It is clear by now that any attempt to separate the title of *The Tempest* from the discourse of the storm, or to distinguish absolutely between the storm and the condemnation unto death, could only be marked by a willful repression of what is at stake in the last plays.¹³ *King Lear* elevates storm from plot point to a horrifying pathetic fallacy reflecting the tempest in Lear's mind, raises it nearly to the level of setting itself. The bastard

¹² A figure upon whom turns my entire reading of Shakespeare's storms, as we shall see.

¹³ In this upside-down space it is possible to ask the questions that another, very different genre demands: the festive comedy. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is separated from her twin brother by a shipwreck and, disoriented, looking to create a space for herself, cross-dresses and assumes a male identity. Does the Bakhtinian carnivalesque mode of festive comedy celebrate the disorder of the storm? Critics have debated whether the topsy-turvy world of the carnival functions only as a safety valve for social/political strain or whether the fantasy represents a truly subversive imagining of a different world. Bakhtin's own Soviet context during the publication of *Rabelais and his World* (dissertation submitted 1941, published 1965) seems to bias his conception toward the latter (subversive imagination), but later critics, perhaps more cynical New Historicists, might contain the carnivalesque within a spectacle secretly underwriting the state's authority. Whichever side the critic comes down on in the case of *Twelfth Night*, in *The Tempest*, what passes for the carnivalesque—the spectacular manipulation of Alonso and his court by Prospero—is clearly part of a larger authoritarian schema.

Edmund's treason and the cruelty of Lear's ungrateful daughters provoke a storm on the shelterless moor that lasts from 2.4.285 through 3.4. Several lines make comparisons between meteorological and mental strife: "This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen" (3.4.77-8); "This tempest in my mind" (3.4.12); "One minded like the weather, most unquietly" (3.1.2). We might think then of a psychomachia, a war within Lear's mind between rage and insanity and the carefully-disguised, noble philosophy¹⁴ of Edgar, for whom the storm is a kind of passion, a route toward redemption in the play's only optimistic plot. The fool makes light of life's absurdity, while Lear cannot bear it.

The plethora of madnesses—Lear's rage and near-insanity, the Fool's folly, Edgar's ranting—formidably opposes the idea that natural law, the fundamental state of things, represents any kind of harmony that human beings could find meaningful or acceptable. Lear's madness causes him to call out "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks" (3.2.1), and in some sense he is the only equivalent to Prospero as conjuror of a storm. His rage at the heavens, the elements, his daughters, even approaches a kind of blasphemy, as he curses the cruel, malignant gods. Indeed Edgar's pose as an exorcist and numerous references to Harsnett's *Dedication of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603) support a reading that finds blasphemy at the heart of the madnesses in the storm. We might say that Lear's unreasonable demands on his daughters, his attempt at control beyond the grave, constitute a hubristic blasphemy that damns him, and that he blasphemes further when he curses the gods because of his damnation. In this sense, blasphemy summons a condemnation unto

¹⁴ As for which 'noble philosopher' Edgar might be, I would make the case for the famous Diogenes the Cynic, who lived in a tub, relieved himself and copulated in public, who scorned social convention and praised 'natural' appetites. Lear evidently believes Edgar's natural condition leaves him better suited to cope with the existential absurdity of the human condition than the trappings and privileges of the sovereign.

death (a tragic, still-providential narrative) as well as protests the condemnation unto death (the existential, bleak condition which Lear perceives).

Lear, who sees himself as already dead, calls upon the storm to kill him, a storm which actually does threaten his feeble body. His blasphemy, then, is both the cause of his condemnation unto death and his reaction to a kind of world where the useless elderly are condemned to die, the once powerful now powerless. The king who “hath ever but slenderly known himself” (1.1.296-7) passes through the tempest to gain self-knowledge at the price of Cordelia’s life as well as his own. The transformation of Lear’s soul, like the conversion of Shylock, is bound up in blasphemy: it is the prevailing threat to the moral and political order that necessitates the blasphemous outburst and demands its silence. This is perhaps the central paradox of blasphemy and those who would judge it— does the blasphemer blaspheme because he is cursed, or is he cursed because he blasphemes? To put it another way, the condemnation unto death, indelibly written into the storm, romantic, comedic or tragic, motivates blasphemy and is justified by blasphemy. Lear’s howls against the tempest are his howls against the chaos and disorder that naked existence makes evident.

Tragedy, in the last analysis, is the blasphemous outcry against the condemnation unto death (the universal law ordained at the expulsion from Eden, the condition of possibility for tragedy), the inevitable sentence that attends every storm. The storm invades Lear to the skin, who is so horrified by elemental ferocity, by inanimate hostility, that he cries out:

Thou’dst shun a bear,
But if thy flight lay toward the roaring sea
Thou’dst meet the bear i’th’mouth (3.4.9-12),

strangely anticipating my last example of pre-*Tempest* storm, *The Winter’s Tale*: “A savage clamor! Well may I get aboard! This is the chase” (3.3.55-6), followed by the most famous

stage direction in Shakespeare. Antigonus is blessed and cursed: graced by a miraculous vision of Hermione who tells him the infant's name, he experiences the compassion that Leontes, a parody of Othello, does not allow himself to feel. This is in some ways Shakespeare's most miraculous play, with Hermione's transformation out of statuary improbable in a sense that exceeds even the unlikelihood of Egeon's family-splitting shipwreck. Of course, 'most miraculous' is a euphemism for 'most crudely constructed,' the play as neatly divided between a poisoned Sicilian court and a pastoral Bohemia as it is temporally demarcated by Time, the Chorus, blatant (yet apologetic) artifice.

The Winter's Tale can only yoke a tragic beginning to a comedic ending through the most unnatural devices and divisions, a structural configuration that should alert every reader to Shakespeare's willful repression of incommensurability.¹⁵ Yet this border between tragedy and comedy can never be kept free of traffic, though it is strictly policed: the emblem of inevitable violent death envisioned by Lear at the height of his desperate fury takes place on the otherwise peaceful shores of Bohemia, observed by a clown, related to a shepherd. One might argue that the play divides the tragic and the comic only to posit a miraculous and providential, unified worldview (in this sense the hybrid term 'tragicomic romance,' put forth by Barbara Mowat, gains its relevance), with Time making the appeal for a leap of faith to not only accept the breach of theatrical convention, but also to escape tragedy for a more hopeful, hospitable world, rife with contradiction though it may be.

The death of Antigonus is the breach of tragic into comic, but it is also a theatrical convenience to sweep him aside in the violence of the play's unifying motion. The ineluctable trap, the tragic choice implied by the storm and the bear is thus at the very center

¹⁵ To offer a distinction between 'tragicomedy,' and 'romance,' we might say that tragicomedy is a miraculous recovery from the tragic, while romance rewrites the conventions of the tragic (like the storm) into an orderly narrative where tragedy is (incompletely) erased. This would also be the distinction between the treatment of the storm in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

of Shakespeare's romantic project, figuratively and literally (as it directly precedes Time's monologue in the next act). As much as Egeon's incarceration and sentence serves its time as the romantic frame bracketing *A Comedy of Errors* and Shakespeare's theatrical career, so too Antigonus' dilemma sits at its center, reminding us of the price that romantic violence must exact. Time's monologue itself incompletely suppresses this violence; its first four lines rhyme 'terror' with 'error' and 'Time' with 'crime.' Generic mixing manifests itself in the storm at the very site of the transition between the modes— the transition itself an act that reeks of unnatural criminality even more than the suspension of disbelief (which could be termed simply 'faith').

The sentence 'the event, by nature, is blasphemous' is by this point over-determined to the point of being unnecessary. Yet perhaps not— Cynthia Marshall writes that "the storm's destructive force is invalidated as soon as Prospero's control over it becomes evident" (98). What then of the blasphemy, hidden in the text from the first scene (1.1.37) to the last (5.1.218)? Tom McAlindon claims that the discourse of prayer and blessing "assimilates" the blasphemous curse, apparently without considering the violence that underwrites such assimilation, or what would make such an assimilation necessary. A. F. Falconer denies that blasphemy ever takes place, noting the conspicuous *lack* of blasphemy in the Boatswain's speech, he who represents hierarchy, order. Ironically, McAlindon recognizes the blasphemous trace, the dash in the Folio signifying the mark of censorship:

Enter Boatswaine.
Boatsw. Downe with the top-Mast: yare, lower, lower,
 bring her to. Try with Maine-course. A plague ———
A cry within. Enter Sebastian, Antonio & Gonzalo.

while denying its importance. Falconer denies the blasphemy while recognizing its potential threat, quoting from a maritime rule written by Sir Raleigh that prohibits blasphemy on the grounds that it engenders a curse which follows the ship.

To combine the two, to acknowledge both the reality of the blasphemy and its significance, would be to perceive the clues of an entirely different reason for the storm, a curse resulting from and occasioning blasphemy. This would, of course, give the lie to the critical belief in providential design, the teleological interpretation of Shakespeare's aging wisdom, Prospero's near omnipotence, et cetera. The Boatswain, defying and invoking the condemnation unto death, betraying those who entrusted him with their safety, calls down the storm upon himself, a last shriek of rage, muted and exiled, a trace only to be found in the title of *The Tempest*.¹⁶

Throughout his career, Shakespeare used the storm as a metaphor for inevitable and tragic death, a fact of life that confronted his characters in many different plots. The last plays, however, rewrite the storm as an agent of harmony and restoration. *The Tempest*, by seeking to represent the rupture of the New World encounter as a determined, harmonizing, benevolent storm, denies the history of its own trope. The event cannot be fully contained or closed, however, and so the old tragic resonances resurface in the Boatswain's speech, in the play's title. The title of *The Tempest* refers to the incomplete generic and metaphysical containment of the event; it unwillingly suggests the massacres and enslavements which followed the arrival at the New World. Now it is time to look at Gonzalo's wonder at the New World, and how those horrific practices wait in the margins of his speech.

II. The Archive

¹⁶ The empty signifier, verbal icon of everything suppressed by the play's romance.

Having witnessed the violent romantic revision (suppressing the death and blasphemy of the storm in order to write it as justice and reconciliation) by which Shakespeare represents the encounter with the New World, we may now turn to the archive founded by the event. Jacques Derrida's notion of the archive proceeds from the Greek *arkhe*, commencement and commandment: the collection of law which is itself a centralization of political authority, a body that when created is always revolutionary, but as it exists can only be conservative. The archive aims "to coordinate a single corpus, in a system or synchrony in which all the elements articulate the unity of an ideal configuration" (10); "archivization produces as much as it records the event" (17). That is, the very possibility of the archive assumes a violent systematization and unification of diverse elements which truly come into being only as they are archived, collected, recorded, and shelved. Especially because the event is recognizable only after the fact, the archive constitutes the event as much as it bears witness to it.

Derrida's essay "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" (1994) operates according to a familiar associative logic that turns upon the archive of psychoanalysis, the awareness of the moment of archivization (Freud's worries in Chapter 6 of *Civilization and its Discontents*), the memory/archive produced by and accessed through psychoanalysis, Freud's work as an archive of Jewish science, and the contemporary proliferation of electronic archives which serve to both disperse and consolidate. My interest here lies in Derrida's characterization of the archive as a textual retro-embodiment of the event, as a collection of texts that pronounces new laws and truths. The inseparability of archive and event accord with Badiou's description of the four types of truth procedures following the event: artistic, amorous, political, and scientific. Whereas Badiou's schema lays out new practices which may or may not be faithful to the event, Derrida seems to be intrigued, in an essay about Freud, by the founding of a textual discourse.

Badiou's truth procedures provide a way to theorize the form of history; Derrida's archive theorizes the genre of 'canon,' of authoritative texts. Considered together, their numerous overlappings become apparent: using them together, we have the means to examine historical forms now only available as texts. The forms in question are the European encounter with the New World and the variety of responses to and representations of that event which followed. It would be elementary to list the practices and texts initiated by this event: travel literature, Pocahontas lore, the colonial discourse, and ethnography (according to Badiou's categories). Furthermore, it is tempting to trace out the presence of those categories in *The Tempest*, if only it were that simple.

The Tempest certainly is a text which responds to the event of New World contact, and numerous scholars have demonstrated its furtive political programs, yet most importantly it represents the desire to return to the event *prior* to archivization and new practices. Gonzalo's famous speech is delivered out of ignorance to the fact that the island has already been colonized and is currently being managed by European exiles. *The Tempest* simulates the moment of contact as if for the first time—this nostalgia underlies Gonzalo's utopian thinking. What could be the object of this nostalgia, the retrospective imagination which seeks to escape the archive by preceding it? Stephen Greenblatt writes about *wonder* as the response to the event of New World contact, and his book *Marvelous Possessions* (1991) follows a trajectory "from medieval wonder as a sign of dispossession to Renaissance wonder as an agent of appropriation" (24).

Indeed, Greenblatt's survey of Renaissance wonder in a contextualization of Christopher Columbus's writings resembles, to an uncanny degree, the aesthetic turns of Shakespeare's late romances:

In Renaissance aesthetic theory wonder is associated with the overcoming of great difficulties and with a strange blend of chance and human intention

(Castelvetro); or with the spectacle of the unexpected and the extraordinary (Robortelli); or with passions, reversals, and discoveries (Vettori); or with novel and surprising twists of narrative (Denores, Talenti), or with the effects of awe and wonder associated with religious feeling and hence with sublimity and high gravity (Patrizi). (80)

The Tempest's romantic revision, arriving over one hundred years after the event of contact, involves an amnesiac urge to forget a certain history of conquest and exploitation. This wonder, or original innocence, however, already contains the seeds of that which *The Tempest* violently uproots— that wonder always already implies colonization is indicated by Greenblatt's title, *Marvelous Possessions*. This wonder which precedes the construction of a colonialist archive already demands exploration and colonization.

The moment in *The Tempest* which most clearly expresses this late romantic nostalgia for untainted wonder is, of course, Gonzalo's 'commonwealth speech' and its quotation of Michel de Montaigne's "Of Cannibals." Gonzalo's nostalgia is specifically described as amnesia by Antonio: "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning" (2.1.154). This naïve imagination and worldly refutation is a microcosmic back-and-forth movement that can be read as a concise encapsulation of the play's desire to forget the colonial enterprise and return to wonder, *and* as the larger tragicomic-romantic project of revising tragic tropes (such as the storm). Yet if wonder is already problematic, if the forms and conditions of Renaissance thought determined a certain kind of acquisitiveness and arrogance,¹⁷ then it should be possible to locate those traces in the simulated return to the moment of contact.

¹⁷ Greenblatt's introduction includes a remarkable, defamiliarizing description of the European culture that confronted the New World, armed with a "mobile technology of power" and "a religious ideology centered on the endlessly proliferated representation of a tortured and murdered god of love." He notes that "with a very few exceptions, Europeans felt powerfully superior to virtually all the peoples they encountered" (17).

Montaigne's "Of Cannibals," a relatively long essay for him, discusses through a variety of examples the contingency of human society and its institutions and customs, drawing on rumors and reports of New World natives to argue that

indeed, we seem to have no other level of truth and reason than the example and pattern of the opinions and practices of the country wherein we live. There one finds always the perfect religion, the perfect government, the most perfected and accomplished usage in all things. (181)

Despite its claims of enlightened cultural relativism,¹⁸ "Of Cannibals" engages in persistent moralizing, advocating values which stem from foundational Western sources. The endurance and defiance of 'the savage prisoner' is illustrated by the story of the Spartan King Leonidas at Thermopylae; the 'naturalism' of polygamy is attested to by examples drawn from the Old Testament.

Speculation and exaggeration are characteristic of the clever narrator, according to Montaigne, and he advises that a writer should "write what he knows, and as much as he knows." After this bit of sermonizing, the essayist finds that he must "return to [his] subject" (181). This self-perceptive sense of digression is a hallmark of Montaigne's subjective style, but in this essay is symptomatic of deeper tensions. The Spartan example, to note another instance, is followed by a "return to our story" (188). The tension between Montaigne's stated aim—to show the virtues of 'savage' peoples unfettered by European prejudices—and his methodological limitations—to write only as much as he knows—manifests itself in recurring, digressive anecdotes gleaned from a personal library in Bordeaux, well-stocked in classical texts.

¹⁸ A phrase that I think captures the crux of Montaigne's problem, imagining that a truly objective ethnographic discourse can derive from Renaissance reason. To return to Derrida's "Sign, Structure, and Play," we might say that Montaigne's problem is Levi-Strauss's problem, which is the problem of the *bricoleur*: how can he do the work he wants to do, without adequate tools?

There is a sense that the self-scrutinizing vigilance in “Of Cannibals” can be read *against* Montaigne’s normally free-wheeling, whimsical consciousness, as a certain policing or regulation of his own thought. Seen in this light, the return to the subject implies a moral discipline, an asceticism that aspires to reach truly cosmopolitan, unprovincial thought, but which cannot. The return to the subject serves as evidence of the impossibility of truly writing “I find that there is nothing barbarous or savage in their nation” (181) because, despite his earnest desires, Montaigne can never find anything that he does not already know. Of course, there can be no asceticism without desire, and no return to the subject without digression: policing depends on the criminal element for its sense of self, for its existence. When Montaigne writes of the New World, the frontier, the periphery, he administers and regulates that encounter as a way of regulating himself— the retired politician, steeped in moral essays from Greece and Rome, employs his Stoic discipline at the moment of his confrontation with the bounty of the savage land.

The interaction between center and periphery is made explicit when Montaigne relates an anecdote from Aristotle, who tells of Carthaginian settlers abandoning their homeland for a newly discovered paradise:

The lords of Carthage, perceiving their land little by little becoming depopulated, issued an express prohibition, that none, upon pain of death, should any longer journey thither, and they drove out the new inhabitants, fearing, ‘tis said, lest in the course of time they should so multiply as to supplant themselves and ruin their state. (181)

The center both desires and fears the bounty of the colony, the irrational excess of tropical plenitude. Domestic civil order is preserved through xenophobic, genocidal foreign policies; the center governs itself at the periphery, through the ultimate pre-emptive war. In another Greek episode, Montaigne describes how Atlantis, after over-extending itself in numerous conquests throughout the known world was itself destroyed by a great flood. Atlantis, the

imperial center undone by its own aggressive colonialism, is transformed into a figure of lost paradise, both locus of desire and cautionary tale.

To return to my subject: Gonzalo's 'golden world' speech, issued from the exiled Italian nobility, at the moment of the encounter with tropical abundance, reveals the colonial practices implied by Montaigne's detached musings. What in Montaigne ostensibly described the features of existing American Indian societies, Gonzalo declares as his intention for a new state, a utopic fantasy that as a declaration of management and regulation denies its own status as colonial administration. Gonzalo's quotation turns his source on its head, transforming a description of 'natural' society into the aims of a neo-European planned economy,¹⁹ exposing the underlying project of Montaigne's essay: the reform of European society based on classical virtues allegedly exemplified by New World natives.

Gonzalo's speech, in its studied naiveté and optimism, reveals that the image of paradise is ultimately narcissistic and blind to reality. The courtier's more cynical companions call attention to the mud in his pockets; moreover, the periphery is already regulated by a supernatural dictatorship dependent on slave labor. It is the tension between Montaigne's New World fantasy (quoted by Gonzalo) and the Carthaginian prohibition of colonization that necessitates his intensive self-regulation, fearful, as it were, to sail out of sight of shore. These opposed impulses—desire and fear—operate as a self-regulatory dynamic within the moment of wondrous encounter, a dynamic that is never fully resolved.

While the idealistic rantings of the ageing courtier—Montaigne and then Gonzalo—certainly engage in willful self-delusion, the subtext is that only the *bounty* of the New World permits non-hierarchical political and economic arrangements. Europe sees, then, in this

¹⁹ Antonio picks up on the contradiction inherent in Gonzalo's desire to be king and his fantasy of a non-hierarchical society: "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning."

idealized society only the exercise of the virtues to which it already aspires,²⁰ such that paradise is never possible, but props up the domestic police state. *The Tempest* engages “Of Cannibals” in other ways: the weakness of Caliban’s will, evident in both his drunken submission to Stephano and his perpetual, hopeless revolt against Prospero, for example, emphasizes the already-present tension in Montaigne’s essay between his claim that natives know no treason, and his account of the natives brought to Europe, who, seeing opulence and poverty, “thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer such an injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throat or set fire to their houses” (190). The transcendental valor of the natives claimed by Montaigne is contradicted in the almost Machiavellian observations the natives make on arrival in Europe: suddenly, the egalitarianism of the native is not due to the lack of materialism, but to widespread and vicious violence motivated by envy and avarice. Caliban exemplifies this insight, neither stoically enduring his captivity nor resolutely defying it— he pledges his freedom to anyone who can kill Prospero.

Greenblatt’s wonder is a suitably complex concept with which to model Gonzalo’s quotation of Montaigne, and Gonzalo’s fantasy of first contact. Wonder is the ravishment of the exotic, the condition of being at the rift (between Europe and the New World), yet it is necessarily a prelude to further interactions, an overture that subtly previews the themes to come. The play’s desire to return to wonder, then, is an impossible desire to maintain the rupture even as it then proceeds to close the rupture. Now we may examine Strachey’s contribution to the archive of travel literature and colonial history.

William Strachey’s “A True Reportory” was not published until 1625, but Shakespeare almost certainly read manuscript versions, possibly through their mutual friend

²⁰ Namely, fearlessness in war and captivity, and love of wives, according to Montaigne.

the Earl of Southampton. Educated at Cambridge, Strachey remains an important primary source for colonial historians and his lists of Powhatan vocabulary comprise one of two extant records of the language. His narrative of the voyage of the *Sea Venture*, the flagship of the Virginia Company, its encounter with a hurricane, intentional grounding at Bermuda, and the eventual construction of the *Deliverance* and *Patience* to reach Jamestown is what interests Shakespeareans.

The detailed prose account includes vivid descriptions of the storm and counter-measures taken against its dangers, several quotations from classical poetry, and extensive accounts of the flora and fauna of Bermuda. The most persistent feature of the narrative is its Biblically-derived structure of misery and deliverance, meant to justify Strachey's belief in an ultimately benevolent providential design. Overtly religious language is used to initially describe the storm which "at length did beat all light from heaven, which like a hell of darkness turned black upon us," and when the ship started taking on water, it was because "it pleased God to bring a greater affliction yet upon us." The storm, then, functions as the tribulation through which God ultimately displays his mercy, essentially a spectacle of power or religio-political propaganda.

Yet once the ship's crew and passengers find safety in Bermuda, they are plagued with factionalism and intrigue, mutiny, "bloody issues and mischiefs." Some want to stay in Bermuda, others find fault with the expedition's leadership, still others want to return to England. Luckily, a governor willing to use force to put down rebellions, even rumors of rebellion, preserves order: "into what a mischief and misery had we been given up had we not a governor with his authority to have suppressed the same?" Centralized colonial administration is thus incorporated into the miraculous, divine plan for the salvation and prosperity of the settlers.

Strachey's insistence on divine mercy grows shriller as misfortunes mount: delivered from the storm, the party faces treachery and false preaching; the first boat sent out to Virginia utterly disappears, never to be seen again. Eventually two small ships are constructed, the *Deliverance* and the *Patience*, and after nine months at Bermuda, the beleaguered voyagers again set sail for Virginia. When they arrived at Jamestown, they did not find, exactly, the Promised Land: the settlement was in ruins, practically abandoned, and they were confronted by the hollow-faced, pestilence-wracked survivors of the colony, perhaps a tenth of the original population, who were burning their houses for warmth, eating their own dead, under perpetual siege from the Powhatan. Deciding that the colony should be evacuated, everyone went aboard the ships, bound for England, but while still on the James River, they were intercepted by Lord Delaware's expedition, forced to turn back, and the rest is 'history.'

As a genre, travel literature mediates between Europe and the New World; the author longs for the comfort of his homeland while the reader is allured by visions of wonder. The rupture in European history represented by New World contact is integrated into a thrilling, action-packed tale of adventure, one filled with tribulation but always promising deliverance. Indeed, a persistent motif in the travel literature, present as well in Strachey's narrative, is consolation—either for past suffering or to allay worries about the future. Death occurs frequently, but only in the service of a divinely sanctioned (if not inspired) mission. Consolation, in both classical and Christian traditions, is essentially hermeneutic—it reads a meaning into loss which integrates it into a larger narrative. Consolation for loss in the archive following New World contact, by its very form, thus justifies colonization; without the promise of future colonization, exploration, and expansion, death in travel literature would have no meaning.

Paradoxically, Gonzalo's quotation of Montaigne forms part of his attempt to console Alonso; he cannot keep the 'king' out of his paradisaal commonwealth because praising a purely native polity would be no consolation. Instead, Gonzalo tries to offer advice to Alonso, to spark in his mind thoughts of what the future could be. In consolation, Gonzalo admires the native environment and flora: "Here is everything advantageous to life" (2.1.49); "How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green" (2.1.52)! His observations are mocked by Antonio and Sebastian not so much for their inaccuracy but rather because the would-be regicides are using the exile as an opportunity for betrayal and ambition rather than imagining a continuous, glorified dynasty expanding its power in a new land.

Perhaps most striking about Gonzalo's consolation, however, is Alonso's silence, his refusal to be comforted: "You cram these words into mine ears" (2.1.102); "Prithee, no more. Thou dost talk nothing to me" (2.1.167). Alonso is mourning, withdrawn into deep thought while his companions make bitter, ironic jokes (though the punning seems to lighten things). *The Tempest* presents a consolation for what was lost in the storm, but Alonso wants silence and an end to his troubled thoughts in sleep's oblivion. Reading Alonso's silence as a failure of consolatory rhetoric—like Hamlet's resistance to the lame commonplaces offered by Claudius and Gertrude²¹—provides another example of how *The Tempest* incompletely closes the rupture represented by the storm. Consolation certainly has its function within the colonialist archive, but here it fails, perhaps because the storm has apparently condemned to death Alonso's son and heir, the future of the dynasty (remember that consolation in travel literature presupposes future expansion). Because there now can be no future, there can be no consolation—Alonso might administer a tropical island, but for whom?

A look at Ariel's song to Ferdinand may clarify the issues:

²¹ Knowles, Ronald. "Hamlet and Counter-Humanism." *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, (Winter 1999), pp. 1046-1069.

Full fathom five thy father lies,
 Of his bones are coral made,
 Those are pearls that were his eyes;
 Nothing on him that doth fade,
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange.
 Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.
 Hark, now I hear them: ding dong bell (1.2.395-402)

Ariel imagines death as a kind of transfiguration according to ecological cycles, but also as a conversion of the body into decorative accoutrements (coral, pearls). In her rich and strange song, Ariel's speech-act becomes the aesthetic objectification of the political subject (the king), producing image, decoration, song, in other words, a masque.

This is a lie: Alonso lives. Ferdinand's misery from which he is to be delivered is no misery at all. Ariel converts disaster and death to static image so that Ferdinand can comprehend its finality; likewise, Strachey's scenes of misery and deliverance are rendered into so many images which illustrate the divine, expansionist narrative. Ariel's masque-as-consolation exposes the falsity of such image-making: her rewriting of Strachey's text as masque-script does not bode well in a play where the masque must be interrupted by concrete concerns. If the consolation-masque is structured as essentially political propaganda, then for Ferdinand it seems to work: he forgets about his father Alonso and only wants to know whether Miranda "be maid or no" (1.2.424). This amorous meeting and interest links Ariel's consolation-masque to Prospero's wedding-masque: consolation again functions by referring to the promise of the future.

Having considered the Montaignean return to wonder, and the various consolations deployed in attempts to close the rupture of New World contact, we are aware of the tragicomic romance's strategies for managing the event. If Montaigne represented a fantasy of political continuity, and Strachey a theological justification for colonization, then we have seen these efforts succeed only partially. My last point, about the success of Prospero's

project to restore the unity of a European self-identity in crisis, concerns a conspicuous silence—in this it resembles the dash which silenced the Boatswain's blasphemy, or Alonso's refusal to be consoled. Prospero forgives his 'unnatural,' treasonous brother Antonio, yet no evidence is given for Antonio's repentance or reformation. Antonio remains silent for the last two acts after his plot to kill Alonso and Gonzalo is foiled, except for a response to a direct question by Caliban. Antonio never addresses the brother whom he betrayed twelve years earlier—he broods, his one response seemingly a reminder that he is still onstage.

Antonio's silence, like Alonso's, is the failure of reintegration at the limits of romance: even the tragicomic romance cannot redeem a character as thoroughly evil as Antonio or as completely shattered as Alonso. Reading the end of *The Tempest*, we do not know what Antonio thinks about Prospero's continued existence and influence; we do not know how he reacts to forgiveness. Yet the silence itself signifies the impossibility of fully speaking the reconciliatory narrative of romance, of articulating a self-contained and self-explaining totality that creates, accounts for, and solves its own problems. Antonio's silence, like the Boatswain's blasphemy, cannot be allowed to speak because he cannot be made to speak acceptably. The mystery of this silence is a mystery that romance cannot solve. The return to wonder in order to escape the archive was an effort doomed by the very nature of wonder itself, and the archive of colonialist consolation even contains the evocation of wonder as a form of consolation.²² The Boatswain's blasphemy, Alonso's withdrawal, and Antonio's silence are the fault-lines in a romantic structure tense with violent revision and painful, self-aware failure. If at the beginning of the play, before we had seen or read it, the title of *The Tempest* suggested those terrible, deadly storms strewn throughout Shakespeare's

²² That is, the quotation of Montaigne is part of Gonzalo's consolation of Alonso.

writings, after the play, upon reflection, the title names the impossibility of containing, of narrating the event.

III. Coda

Now I wish to return to one of the questions with which we began: the impulse of the biographical. Cynthia Marshall has written about the correspondences between end-thought and beginning-thought, of the enchanted isle as both Eden and heaven. A chapter on *The Tempest* in her book *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology* (1991) contextualizes the play's New World imagery according to various schemes: apocalyptic thought, the process of artistic creation (as articulated through the Freudian impression), the biographical fact of Shakespeare's advanced age, or, as she writes, "the historicity of colonialist discussions itself was deeply ambiguated by eschatological rhetoric" (87),²³ that is, the matter of colonialist history is aware of itself as the end of history. She notes "like many other old artists, Prospero finally abandons the pretense of artistic immortality to stare death straight in the face" (99). Marshall then returns to the repressed, or witnesses the return of the repressed biography, only to overturn the wisdom, peace, understanding, et cetera, that was featured in the traditional biographical framework, favoring instead the bleak fact of oblivion.

Biography could represent a way, through its specificity, its subjectivity and ultimate indeterminacy, to resist the systematizing violence that the maturation or progression career trajectory conceals. Certainly this is the case for Jacques Derrida, whose *Circumfession* (1991) lies written under, undermining Geoffrey Bennington's own *Derridabase*. Would the context of Marshall's book then include this contemporaneous volume? Derrida's writing here is itself highly contextualized, replete with specific dates and places in a manner unlike any of his previous work, including memories of his mother's final illness, of his circumcision, of

²³ Or, as Derrida writes in his own (auto)biographical work, "I am the last of the eschatologists" (75).

his expulsion from school in Algiers, quotations from a notebook projecting a never-written book on circumcision that confesses

Circumcision, that's all I've ever talked about, consider the discourse on the limit, margins, marks, marches, etc., the closure, the ring (alliance and gift), the sacrifice, the writing of the body, the pharmakos excluded or cut off, the cutting/sewing of Glas... (70)

in an entry dated 12-20-76. The autobiographical context is the undecidable moment that has generated and exceeds Bennington's godlike providential and prophetic logic. Such a context perhaps demands a kind of confession, a recognition of context and genre, on my own part, who writes this senior thesis— a notion, which, when it arrived to me, was already marked with thoughts of the end, but also of origins, the end that is also summation of one's education,²⁴ a self-conscious monument that condemns to death everything that precedes it— in April, 2007, who thought about the storm as rupture, event, while on the Mississippi Gulf Coast in the midst of ongoing Hurricane Katrina reconstruction.²⁵

However much it may claim to explain, the temptation to succumb to (auto)biography results in a sin, which always-already structures the confession as self-justifying, as in the case of Egeon before the Duke:

'one always asks for pardon when one writes,' so as to leave suspended the question of knowing if one is finally asking pardon in writing for some earlier crime, blasphemy, or perjury or if one is asking for pardon for the crime, blasphemy, or perjury in which consists presently the act of writing (46).

The senior thesis is an eschatological tract which poses itself at the edge of the void, which is aware that it will not find an audience, especially if it proves to be true. I wonder if autobiography actually pierces the systematizing logic of philosophy or literary criticism, the

²⁴ "I'm having a great time, I will have had such a great time, but it costs a crazy price" (141).

²⁵ I worked with Lutheran Disaster Relief, a faith-based organization that framed the tempest as part of a providential design, an opportunity for complacent, bourgeois church-goers to revitalize themselves while enacting fantasies of Christ-like servitude in a praxis that left unquestioned (or even valorized, according to Christian *ressentiment*) the social and political configurations such as institutionalized poverty which exacerbated the disaster in the first place.

touch of the real, or whether it is simply another mythology, a phantom origin already compromised by rhetoric and cliché. The risk is that returning to the autobiographical is an accession to the imagery of the *auteur*, the aesthetic which underlies Peter Greenaway's film *Prospero's Books* (1991). The overwhelmingly lavish visual spectacle, replete with nudity, allusions to monuments of European high culture, and complex overlays represents the fantasy of archive-mastery, of the artist manipulating texts and writing the event as aesthetic experience. A necessary risk, the autobiographical, an illicit strategy to find a rich and strange counter-truth within a tragicomic romance obsessed with rewriting history and producing fitting, beautiful, orderly truths.

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