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A STUDY OF THE VALUES OF THE TEMPEST FOR AUDIENCES

AND READERS -- ELIZABETHAN AND MODERN

(TITLE)

BY

BLANCHE GARREN ICENOGLÉ

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS PLAN B PAPER BE ACCEPTED AS  
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A STUDY OF THE VALUES OF THE TEMPEST FOR  
AUDIENCES AND READERS →  
ELIZABETHAN AND MODERN

The greatness of Shakespeare's works is a seldom-disputed fact. Goethe speaks of him thus: "Shakespeare gives us golden apples in silver dishes. We get indeed, the silver dishes by studying his works; but, fortunately, we have only potatoes to put in them."<sup>1</sup> A realistic description of the results of the efforts of the rank amateurs who have the temerity to put their thoughts on paper for the perusal of perspicacious and patient professors would perhaps be peanuts. On the other hand, Socrates attempted to show Ion that the recognition of ignorance was the beginning of wisdom.<sup>2</sup> Assuming that so sage a man as Socrates was right in this particular, then it must be that Wisdom has a firm grip on the wheel. First to be considered will be some of the opinions of noted critics.

Harrison's classification of The Tempest seems a little paradoxical; he says it is a comedy and then later states that it has all the familiar incidents of a fairy

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen and Harry Hayden Clark, Literary Criticism (Chicago, 1941), p. 145.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 13

tale with the serious theme of reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge says of this play:

[It] is a specimen of purely romantic drama. . . . It addresses itself to the imaginative faculty . . . the principal and only genuine excitement ought to come from within, — from the moved and sympathetic imagination. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Fluchère writes that in his opinion:

[Here] everything is symbolic, beginning with the title — the Shakesperean tempest that is found in every play and is here merely a flashing prologue, of which Prospero is the supreme regulator. It is significant that the tragic central theme of the play should be the old theme of revenge. . . . This man Prospero, all-powerful . . . cannot rest until he has brought about the regeneration of his enemies. . . . It is the supreme victory, that of spirit over matter, of music over chaos, of love over hatred; in a word, of man over himself.<sup>3</sup>

To G. Wilson Knight:

The poet Shakespeare presents a reflection of his whole work. Necessarily, now, tempests and music are of overpowering importance; indeed, the play is compacted throughout mainly of this tempest-music opposition . . . in the human story . . . repeats, as it were, in miniature, the separate themes of Shakespeare's greater Plays.<sup>4</sup>

Mark Van Doren says of this play:

The Tempest does bind up in a final form a host of themes with which its author has been concerned. . . . Its meaning . . . is precisely as rich as the human mind, and it says that the world is what it is. But what the

<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare (New York, 1952), pp. 1473-74.

<sup>2</sup>Coleridge's Literary Criticism (London, 1908), pp. 207-08.

<sup>3</sup>Shakespeare (London, 1953), pp. 266-67.

<sup>4</sup>The Shakesperean Tempest (New York, 1939), pp. 280-81.

world is cannot be said in a sentence. Or even in a poem as complete and beautiful as The Tempest.

Separations and reconciliations are woven here within the circle of a remote and musical island where an enchanter, . . . controls also a tempest until it brings to pass all things he has desired.<sup>1</sup>

To me, the essence of what these scholars say of The Tempest is that the "golden apples" are there. The capacity to enjoy is limited only by the experience, the critical perception, and the taste of those who would partake. It is through a study of the characters of this play that I shall make my appraisal of some of the values they may have had for Elizabethan audiences and their significances for present-day readers. Coleridge declared that Shakespeare's characters are the main interest of his plays; the plot is no more than the canvas.<sup>2</sup>

The chief character, Prospero, as the Duke of Milan with the attendant problems of such a degree of nobility, was a probable figure to Elizabethan audiences. They were accustomed to the tragedies of rulers whose frailties of character caused their loss of power together with other attending sorrows. Prospero, too, had lost his dukedom; not as a result of evil within himself, but through being unworldly, and having too implicit trust in a brother, whom, as he told his daughter: ". . . next thyself Of all

<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare (New York, 1939), pp. 280-81.

<sup>2</sup>Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1897), p. 197.

the world I loved." I, ii, 68,69. Prospero's failure was brought about because of his refusal to accept the responsibility that was the natural accompaniment of his position. It was said of the Elizabethans:

They were socially minded and they believed in a society of ordered parts, whereof the consecrated monarch was the head: consequently they were continually intent upon examining the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, the qualities demanded of a good and capable king, the interrelationship between the various social groups of which the entire society was composed.<sup>1</sup>

Prospero's lack was in not fulfilling his obligation in this relationship. Politicians and others in places of trust of all ages might see in this man's plight the ever-present danger that laxness in discharging the duties inherent to a particular station is conducive to the growth of evil in those of lesser status. However, Prospero as ruler of the enchanted isle was more alert to danger and able to curb the ones who would have betrayed him.

Prospero had many facets to his character. As a magician, he was understandable to the play-goers and readers of his era. Sceptics of later dates, should, in the words of Alexander Pope, enter into the spirit of the writer:

A perfect judge will read each work of wit,  
With the same spirit that its author writ.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Allardyce Nicoll, Shakespeare (New York, 1952), p.12.

<sup>2</sup>Allen and Clark, "Essay on Criticism," op. cit., p.10.

Prospero, sans his magic mantle, was a man who prized scholarship and, as he confessed:

I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated  
to closeness and the bettering of my mind. . . .  
I, ii, 89, 90.

Today's public recognizes such persons as being impractical, other-worldly, harmless and fair game for people more sensitive to material values. As a parent, he is very human. Miranda is growing up; she should be told some things which as a child she needed not to know, and that furthermore he dreaded to tell her (would she understand?); " 'Tis time I should inform thee farther."

I, ii, 23. Most parents have had similar experiences of bracing themselves for making such disclosures. Miranda was reassured that of all beings she was the most important to him:

Oh, a cherubim (more than human)  
Thou wast that did preserve me. I, ii, 152, 153.

A discerning knowledge of adolescents is presented in his show of discouraging the fast-blossoming love of Miranda and Ferdinand:

They are both in either's powers, But this swift business  
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning  
Make the prize light. I, ii, 450-52.

Shakespeare uses contrast in the presentation of his characters. Antonio and Gonzalo are examples of this. Antonio was a prime specimen of a man who betrays a trust

and has pride in his deed. When he suggests to Sebastian the fruits of a double murder to gain a kingdom, and after Sebastian has hesitantly intimated that conscience might be a deterrent to the crime, Antonio brushes it aside as a matter of little consequence:

But I feel not  
This deity in my bosom. Twenty consciences  
That stand betwixt me and Milan, candied be they,  
And melt ere they molest! II, ii, 277-80.

Antonio is an opportunist who recognizes the fact that duller-witted men can be led. However, he is contemptuous of those who lack the daring to commit a crime, but who will nevertheless silently partake of the fortunes gained thereby:

For all the rest  
They'll take suggestions as a cat laps milk,  
They'll tell the clock to any business that  
We say befits the hour. II, ii, 287-89.

Shakespeare, so Nicholl states, sees loyalty as the greatest virtue.<sup>1</sup> Gonzalo typifies this quality to the fullest. Prospero spoke of him as "a noble Neapolitan," and credited him with having saved his and Miranda's lives; and what was of perhaps equal worth was Gonzalo's insight into the nature of his friend. Knowing that life for Prospero apart from the mental stimulation of his books would be a gift of small value, he thoughtfully provided, in addition to the necessities and luxuries for physical needs, the

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare, p. 147.



loved books that would make the exile bearable. Gonzalo accepts ill fortune with fortitude and reminds his partners in shipwreck thus:

Then wisely, good sir[s], weigh  
Our sorrow with our comfort. II, i, 8, 9.

He, like Antonio, appraises those around him, but for a different reason. He philosophically ponders the problems of the Elizabethan era (and the twentieth century!): succession (national and state elections!); riches and poverty; evil and purity, and marriage. He failed to find a solution, but as these issues are with us still he should not be charged with that failure. He was considerate of others and quietly chided Sebastian when he berated Alonzo for being the cause of their troubles:

My lord Sebastian,  
The truth you speak doth lack some gentleness,  
And time to speak it in. You rub the sore  
When you should bring the plaster. II, i, 136-39.

The Gonzalos of the world were described by Jesus when he said, "Ye are the salt of the earth." Matthew 5:13.

Little depth of perception is required to see Ariel and Caliban as opposites in the world of imagination. Burton tells of Ariel spirits who could cause tempests, thunder and lightnings; under the magic of Prospero, Ariel could become a spirit of fire or water, also. In early books of that period "the elementary spirits were divided into sometimes six, and sometimes four, those of Air, those

of Water, those of Fire, and of the Earth."<sup>1</sup>

Ariel was a pixy-ish sprite who worked his wonders to music; music of so heavenly a quality that it caused Caliban, the earthy one, to describe it thus:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about my ears, and sometime voices  
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again. And then, in dreaming  
 The clouds methought would open and show me riches  
 Ready to drop on me, that when I waked,  
 I cried to dream again. III, ii, 144-52.

Music had its charms for the lowly one. Ferdinand, too felt the ethereal quality of Ariel's music:

This is no mortal business, nor no sound  
 That the earth owes. I, ii, 406-407.

There was a mischievousness about Ariel that was evinced in his delight in the havoc he had wrought in the tempest, and his glee was apparent as he told Prospero of the chase he had taken the evil-plotting trio of Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano through:

Toothed briers, sharp furze, pricking goss, and thorns  
 Which entered their frail shins. IV, i, 179-81.

Again Ariel brings to mind the lagging schoolboy who does his chores to the recurring refrain of, "When do we go fishing?" when he reminds Prospero,

I prithee  
 Remember I have done thee worthy service,

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur E. Baker, A Shakespearean Commentary, Vol. 1 (New York? 1957), p. 140.

Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, served  
Without or grudge or grumblings. Thou didst promise  
To bate me a full year. I, ii, 247-49.

Nor is Prospero allowed to forget his promise for when the  
plot is approaching a climax Ariel answers his casual  
question of "How's the day?" with:

On the sixth hour, at which time, my lord,  
You said our work should cease. V, i, 3-4.

Perhaps such attitudes should not be attributed solely  
to boys; payday has ever been considered the loveliest  
day of all the week.

Of Caliban, Shakespeare's opposite to Ariel as a  
creature of the imagination, the critics have much to say.

[He] is generally thought to be one of his author's  
masterpieces. . . . Caliban is the essence of gross-  
ness, but there is not a particle of vulgarity in it.<sup>1</sup>

Van Doran speaks of him thus:

The hag-born Caliban is not deaf to the 'thousand  
twangling instruments' that hum about his ears. He  
is, however, the lowest inhabitant of the play; the  
human scale which Shakespeare has built begins with him.  
. . . . in Prospero's mind, he is uneducable. . . . He is  
a born devil on whose nature nurture can never stick.<sup>2</sup>

In appearance Caliban defied description. Trinculo,  
after meditating about what "it" was, gave forth with:  
"I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer — this  
is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a

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<sup>1</sup>William Hazlett, Characters of Shakespeare's Plays  
(London, 1929), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Shakespeare, pp. 282-84.

thunderbolt." II, ii, 35-7. Stephano calls him a monster. Prospero had seen the deformities, yet had detected human attributes. He had patiently taught him speech and shown him kindness until Caliban betrayed him by seeking to violate the honor of Miranda. After that Caliban was treated as a slave. Caliban, too, felt betrayed — the isle had been his, and he had shared the secrets of fresh springs and fertile places with Prospero; then he turned to curse his former benefactor:

Cursed be I that did so! All the charms  
Of Sincorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!  
I, ii, 339-40.

Another view of mankind was presented by Shakespeare in the debased characters of Stephano and Trinculo who were among the survivors of the tempest. Low themselves, they were delighted to find Caliban who was even less favored than they. The effect of the liquor that Stephano gave Caliban entranced that creature of earthy nature:

These be fine things, an if they be not sprites,  
That's a brave god, and bears celestial liquor.  
I will kneel to him. II, ii, 119-22.

Caliban begged to become subject to such a god. "I'll kiss thy foot, I'll swear thy subject." II, ii, 156.

In the alliance of Stephano, Caliban, and Trinculo, Shakespearean shows a political association on the lowest level that compares with that of Antonio and Sebastian of the higher social stratum. Both groups plan to kill to gain

higher social status; thus there are rogues in every camp. Trinculo does show a certain insight into the situation:

Servant-monster! The folly of this island!  
 They say there's but five upon this isle.  
 We are three of them. If the' other two be brained like  
 us, the state totters. III, ii, 5-8.

However, the combined arts of Ariel and Prospero keep the intrigues under control. A simple stratagem blocks the drunken trio of Stephano-Caliban-Trinculo and gives the idea that those of lesser intelligence may be more easily diverted from nefarious schemes. Some fancy garments left in their path cause all but Caliban (the lowest in mental stature) to forget the main idea, murder. Disgusted with them, Caliban says:

The dropsy drown this fool! What do you mean  
 To dote thus on such luggage? Let's alone,  
 And do the murder first. IV, i, 230-32.

Perhaps Caliban's not having been subjected to civilization to such a degree as had the other two could account in part for his unawareness that fripperies were extravagantly valued in some societies.

Miranda and Ferdinand are highest in the scale of human values in The Tempest according to Van Doren.<sup>1</sup> They have youth and purity, and are without guile. Their falling in love at first sight was the Elizabethan idea of real love. Coleridge agrees:

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<sup>1</sup>Shakespeare, p. 286.

[That] in all cases of real love it is at one moment that it takes place. That moment may have been prepared by previous esteem, admiration, or even affection, — yet love seems to require a momentary act of volition, by which a tacit bond of devotion is imposed, — a bond not to be thereafter broken without violating what should be sacred in our nature.<sup>1</sup>

Miranda on seeing Ferdinand for the first time could only say:

I might call him  
A thing divine, for nothing natural  
I ever saw so noble. I, ii, 417-18.

And Ferdinand, completely under her spell avows:

But you, oh, you,  
So perfect and so peerless, are created  
Of every creature's best! III, i, 46-8.

Such naïveté may be derided by some, but to others it has a restorative power; even Paul declared that of the eternal values ". . . faith, hope and love, these three; the greatest of these is love." I Cor. 13:13. Miranda projects her own goodness when on seeing the other persons Prospero has caused to be assembled, she voices this thought:

Oh, wonder!  
How many goodly creatures are there here!  
How beauteous mankind is! Oh, brave new-world,  
That has such people in 't! V, i, 182-84.

Prospero understandingly adds, "'Tis new to thee." V, i, 184.

Compassion, penitence, forgiveness, and reconciliation dominate the last scenes. All are encompassed by them except Stephano and Trinculo (they are yet on trial).

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<sup>1</sup>Lectures and Essays on Shakespeare, p. 287.

Each is affected and responds in his own way. The mischievous sprite, Ariel, reported to Prospero on the condition of the King and his followers:

The King,  
His brother, and yours abide all three distracted,  
And the remainder mourning over them,  
Brimful of sorrow and dismay. . . .  
Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender. V, i, 11-14,17-18.

"Dost thou think so, spirit?" queried Prospero, and Ariel's response was "Mine would, sir, were I human," Prospero was touched:

And mine shall. . . .  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part. The rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. V, i, 20, 24-30.

Even Caliban had insight into the error of his judgments:

I'll be wise hereafter,  
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
Was I to take this drunkard for a god  
And worship this dull fool. V, i, 294-97.

Prospero, assured of his rightful position in Milan, gave up his magic and broke his staff (a sign in that era that one was stepping down from a high position).

Characters from all social levels and in all degrees of grace were delineated in this (so far as is known) last play of Shakespeare's. In it were the components of evil: greed; hate; lust; drunkenness; and ignorance, but in the

end all were overcome through loyalty, love, compassion, penitence and forgiveness -- plus magic; a fairy tale ending that without occult powers seemed impossible. Perhaps Prospero gave the key in the epilogue. All the virtues, even as the vices, still abide. Could it be that prayer is the latent magic which the world has failed to take seriously?

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