

Prospero's Third/s in *The Tempest*

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for I

Have given you here a third of mine owne life,
Or that for which I live. (IV, i, 2-4)¹⁾

When Prospero frees Ferdinand from log-carrying and hands Miranda over to him, Prospero describes her as a third of his own life.

Prospero's "third" has been explained in different ways. So we shall give a short account of the history of the interpretation of "third." Theobald suggested in a letter to Cananen that "third" should be emended as "thread." His conjectures concerning "thread" arose from the expectation that Prospero, as a widower, would call Miranda a half, not a third of himself. Theobald's note, in his edition, is as follows: "Why is she only a third of his own life? He had no wife living, nor any other child to rob her of a share in his affection; so that we may reckon her at least half of himself." Such considerations probably spring from Iago's words in *Othello*—"you have lost half your soul." (I, i, 87). Iago regards Desdemona as her father's half.²⁾

Capell thought no emendation to be necessary considering that the three thirds are "his realm, his daughter, himself".³⁾ And he insists that this passage is connected with Prospero's final words, "Every third thought shall be my grave."⁴⁾

E. Magnusson says that the triunity of Prospero's life consisted of his departed wife, his child and himself.⁵⁾

Modern editors, for example, D. K. Swan, think that the three

thirds are "Milan, Miranda, Prospero's Art."⁶ Malcolm Evans explains the relationship of the master (Prospero) to his servants (i.e., Miranda, Caliban and Ariel). He relates that Prospero's three thirds are his servants, that is, Miranda, Caliban and Ariel.⁷

Tollett considers as follows: " 'A third of mine own life' is a part of my own life. Prospero considers himself as the stock or parent tree, and his daughter as a fibre or portion of himself, for whose benefit he himself lives."⁸

W. A. Bacon defends the view that Prospero means that Miranda's upbringing is a third of his forty-five years.⁹

Something concerning spelling should be added. Hawkins says that "thread" was formerly spelt "third".¹⁰ Wright does not take "third" but "thrid". Kermode insists that the words "third" and "thrid" were so nearly identical in form and pronunciation that the strongest argument for "third" is cemerely that it makes better sense; probably "thrid" was present as a kind of pun.¹¹

As Kermode and Furness find Capell's opinion to be plausible, I agree with Capell's interpretation. Considering the whole story, it seems that Milan, Miranda and Prospero himself are all very important aspects of Prospero's life.

In this paper, we shall consider the connection of Prospero's thirds in reference to the problems of politics in the play. First we shall concentrate on the function of Prospero's long narration to Miranda. Secondly we shall examine how territorial ambitions in Milan are reflected in the action of the play.

I

The Tempest opens with the violence and destructiveness of the storm which is raised by Prospero's magic. Miranda asks, "I pray you, sir,/For still'tis beating in my mind, your reason/For raising this sea-storm?" (I, ii, 175-77) Prospero replies: "By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,/Now my dear lady

hath mine enemies/Brought to this shore.” (I , ii , 178-80) After these words, he goes on to the heart of his long narration: what happened to Prospero and Miranda in Milan, why he came to live on the isolated island and what he underwent in Milan. For the first time, according to Prospero’s narration, Miranda learns what Prospero is, what she is and how Prospero’s magic is connected with his life in Milan. In addition, his narration shows that he cannot forget his bitter feelings in Milan twelve years before. In *As You Like It* the Duke Senior was exiled from his dukedom just as Prospero was. He, however, enjoys the life of the pastoral forest of Arden on the stage.¹²⁾

Now my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?

(II, i , 1-4)¹³⁾

The Duke Senior is free from the life of “the envious court” and we don’t find in him any bitter feelings toward his brother Frederic who usurped his ducal authority. But Prospero doesn’t free himself from the life in Milan. He has lived on the island burdened with his experience in Milan. He has held a grudge against his brother Antonio and others who usurped his ducal authority, and Prospero has planned to take revenge on them. Considering Prospero’s speech, we can say the real beginning of this play lies in the life of Milan. Prospero’s long narration to Miranda of the significant events of the past in Milan is very important to the play because past events in Milan are closely connected with the action of the play.

Prospero had been the Duke of Milan a dozen years before. He tells Miranda about his past days as follows: “Prospero the prime duke, being so reputed/In dignity, and for the liberal Arts/

Without a parallel. “(I , ii , 72-4) Certainly Prospero was the duke of Milan but he was transported and rapt in secret studies and put the management of his state to his brother, Antonio. As a result Antonio usurped Prospero’s throne and organized the new political system. Prospero’s study of “the liberal Arts” and his negligence of the government in Milan, though Prospeo is not so much attributing blame to his neglect¹⁴), “awok’d an evil nature” (I , ii , 93) in Antonio and led him to exile Prospero and Miranda from Milan. But it is clear that Prospero could rule over Caliban’s island through his study of “the liberal Arts.” Fortunately, when Prospero and Miranda were exiled from Milan, he was furnish’d with many books that Prospero prized above his dukedom by Gonzalo. So he could continue his study and he practiced his magic on the island. For Prospero, his books were indispensable. When Caliban describes Prospero to Stephano, Caliban says as follows:

Remember

First to possess his books; for without them
He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command: they all do hate him
As rootedly as I. Burn but his books. (III, ii , 89-93)

With his books, Prospero won the isle from Caliban and at last he became a magician with mastery over the isle.¹⁵

When Prospero and Miranda arrived, they found Caliban and Ariel. We cannot decide whether Ariel had come with Sycorax or had already been living on the island. Before Prospero set foot there, Sycorax had dominated the island. She had enslaved Ariel. Meredith Anne Skura says that Sycorax is “the first colonialist.”¹⁶ Prospero saved Ariel from a cloven pine twelve years ago. And Prospero makes him work hard in exchange for his “liberty.” (I , ii , 245) Ariel is given Prospero’s strict orders

according to the language of Prospero's books and Ariel translates them into action on the stage.

On the other hand, Prospero makes Caliban work, too. But Prospero deprives Caliban of his liberty because Prospero could not subject Caliban to his will. So Prospero makes Caliban work and if Caliban does not do his task, Prospero punishes Caliban with his magic. Caliban serves in offices that profit Prospero and Miranda. To borrow Stephen Orgel's words, "Caliban is indispensable to Prospero, the usurper depends upon the usurped."¹⁷⁾

In the next place, we shall examine Prospero who changes from the usurped into the usurper. Prospero's long narration to Miranda shows that his trust was betrayed by Antonio and, as a result of that, Prospero lost the dukedom of Milan to Antonio. But we can recognize Prospero changed from the usurped into the usurper on the island from his speech, too. Prospero took Caliban's island in the same way as Antonio usurped Prospero's authority in Milan. At first, Caliban gave full credit to Prospero. But he was betrayed and his land was taken by Prospero. Caliban's action was the exact counterpart of Prospero in Milan. Prospero had trust "which had indeed no limit" (I, ii, 96) in Antonio and he had entrusted the government of Milan to Antonio. But, on the island, Prospero renewed Caliban/Sycorax's land with Prospero's new world in the same way as Antonio had: "new created/The creatures that were mine [Prospero's], I say, or chang'd'em,/Or else new form'd'em." (I, ii, 81-3) Prospero taught Caliban language which was new to him. And Prospero signifies his intention by language.

There are several other examples showing that Prospero's experience in Milan was useful to him on the poor isle. In Milan, Prospero was deprived of his dukedom by Antonio while being absorbed in his study. But such failure helps Prospero to keep Caliban and his company from killing him. He interrupts his

masque:

I had forgot¹⁸ that foul conspiracy
of the beast Caliban and his confederates
Against my life: the minute of their plot
Is almost come. (IV, i, 139-42)

It was his bitter experience in Milan that makes him remember the conspiracy of Caliban and his company. In Milan, he was absorbed in his study and he could not notice Antonio's conspiracy.

As I have mentioned before, Prospero's long narration to Miranda shows what happened to Prospero and Miranda in Milan twelve years before. His narration shows how they have passed their days on the island and their social position not only in Milan but also on the island, too. We can state that the past days in Milan exerted influence upon their life on the isolated island.

II

Shakespeare had already explored the association of love with war and government in such plays as *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.¹⁹ In *The Tempest*, Miranda's words in the chess game which Miranda and Ferdinand play seem to show not only the course of love between them but also her territorial ambitions: "Yes, for a score of kingdom you should wrangle, / And I would call it fair play." (V, i, 174-75) But such ambition of her seems not to be hers but to be influenced by Prospero. Then we shall consider Prospero's territorial ambition and his influence on Miranda.

As we have mentioned before, Prospero had no territorial or political ambitions when he was in Milan. But Prospero did have them on the island where nobody lived except Caliban. He deprived Caliban of his island through his magic and owned it as

Prospero's island. At last, Prospero became the master of the isle and organized the relationship of master (I, ii, 189) and slave (I, ii, 270, 310). This kind of ambition and attitude seems to be associated with the colonialism of England. So we shall examine the influence of the New World on *The Tempest*.

Since the early nineteenth century *The Tempest* has been treated as a text in which the historical context of the New World is reflected. We don't know the exact date of the creation of *The Tempest*. But, in fact, *The Tempest* was performed at the court of King James I on 1 November 1611, and was repeated in the winter of 1612-13 at the wedding celebrations for James I's daughter Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine Frederick.²⁰ Considering that, it seems likely that *The Tempest* was written during 1611.

While the dramatic form of *The Tempest* can be shown to reflect theatrical innovations of its day, no source has been found for the plot of the play. But the events of 1609 in Bermuda are said to have provided Shakespeare with an immediate source for his creation.²¹ In particular there are three historical sources of *The Tempest*: Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Barmudas* (1610), the Council of Verginia's apologetic *True Declaration of the state of the Colonie in Virginia, with a confutation of such scandalous reports as have tended to the disgrace of so worthy an enterprise* (1610), and a letter by William Strachey, and now known as the *True Reportory of the Wrack*, dated 15 July 1610 but published for the first time in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625).²²

Each of these papers concerns the following expedition: a fleet of nine ships with five hundred colonists under the command of Sir Thomas Gates and Sir George Summers set out to strengthen John Smith's Virginia colony. But on 25 July, the ship bearing both Gates and Summers was separated from the others by a storm. It was wrecked on the coast of the Bermudas. All on board got safely to the shore and stayed there until May 1610,

when they left to continue their voyage to Virginia. News of their survival, of the beauty and fertility of the island and the American Indian, was reported to the Company by Jourdain and Strachey, each of whom had shared the fate of the shipwrecked colonists. Those who had heard this news thought that the adventure was a miraculous deliverance from disaster, and the island discovered was a new Paradise. This news of the Bermudas had reached England before the end of the same year. It is said that Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* after he had heard this news.

Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" (John Florio's edition of 1603) and Robert Eden's *History of Travaile* (1577) are reflected in *The Tempest*, too. Montaigne refers to the New World in his essay. Shakespeare has taken several parts from "Of Cannibals." His use of Montaigne in *The Tempest* is seen in Gonzalo's speech on the ideal commonwealth and the name of Caliban. The name "Setebos" is borrowed from Robert Eden's *History of Travaile*. Stephen Orgel says: "Caliban's god Setebos was a Patagonian deity; the name appears in accounts of Magellan's voyages, and is clear evidence that the Americas were in Shakespeare's mind when he was inventing his islander."²³ In effect, such words as "the still-vex'd Bermoothes" (I, ii, 229), "a dead Indian" (II, ii, 33-4) and "plantation" (II, i, 139) in *The Tempest* allude to the New World. As we have seen, we can find some influenced points of the New World in *The Tempest*. We can say one of the influenced points of the New World is reflected in Prospero's attitude toward Caliban.

Prospero's territorial ambition is shown in Miranda's marriage, too. He is to marry his daughter Miranda to the son of his enemy. He becomes the father of both the king and queen of Naples and recovers his dukedom through Miranda's marriage. He can establish the line of succession of Milan through Miranda. In this way, we can see Prospero's territorial and

political ambitions in the play.

Next, we shall consider Prospero's influence on Miranda. She has been brought up as a princess by Prospero and she is obedient to him. Malcolm Evans suggests "His [Prospero's] very subjectivity is constructed in relation to his own subjects—Miranda, Ariel and Caliban."²⁴ To be sure, from Prospero's point of view, Miranda seems to be his subject because she has grown as he wished and obeyed him. But from Miranda and Caliban's points of view, we can see another relationship between them. For Caliban, Miranda is his master as much as Prospero. Caliban calls Miranda "My mistress."(II, ii, 141) Caliban remarks, "As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd/With raven's feather from unwholesome fen/Drop on you both." (I , ii , 323-25) His word "both" indicates Prospero and Miranda. Caliban regards Miranda as a master in the same way as Prospero. For Caliban, Miranda's existence is equal to Prospero's. It is clear that Caliban is a slave from Miranda's point of view. She calls Caliban "Abhorred slave" (I , ii , 353) and she taught Caliban language: They are on a different footing. Miranda is superior to Caliban and he is an inferior to her. Miranda organizes the relationship of master and slave between her and Caliban just as Prospero does. Thus we can say that she acquires Prospero's attitude of the master.

But we cannot state that Miranda and Prospero are in the same position from a political view point. To be sure, Miranda is influenced by Prospero's attitude and view of the role of master. But she is not a master who rules over the island as Prospero is. She has been brought up as a "princess" to become the "queen" of a dukedom/kingdom. Thus we can say that her attitude of master toward Caliban is based on that of a queen. It is not the position of a "King" as is Prospero's. Such an education will be useful to Miranda in her future role as the queen of Naples.

As we have seen, Miranda's territorial ambition in the chess

game depends on Prospero's. But it seems that the chess game which Miranda and Ferdinand play involves not only their territorial ambitions but also their elders'. So in the next section we shall explore the territorial ambitions of their elders.

III

The figure of usurpation is one of the main points of *The Tempest*.²⁵⁾ We have already discussed the two achieved usurpations in this play: Antonio's usurpation and Prospero's. Antonio usurped Prospero's ducal authority in Milan and Prospero took Caliban's island. Here, we shall consider the attempted usurpations in the play.

First, we shall argue (Antonio and) Sebastian's attempted usurpation. Antonio leads Sebastian into temptation. Antonio tells Sebastian that he is satisfied with his life as the Duke of Milan: "And look how well my garments sit upon me;/Much feater than before: my brother's servants/Were then my fellows; now they are my men." (II, i, 267-69) Specifically, Antonio's territorial and political ambitions gained him the Dukedom of Milan and allow him to indulge his vanity. Antonio's words bring out Sebastian's territorial and political ambitions and drive him into attempting to kill Alonso. Sebastian says:

Thy case, dear friend,
Shall be my precedent; as thou got'st Milan,
I'll come by Naples. Draw thy sword: one stroke
Shall free thee from the tribute which thou payest;
And I the King shall love thee. (II, i, 285-89)

From his words, we can see Sebastian's territorial ambition to deprive Alonso of Naples. Their ambitions remind us of Prospero's narration about the past of Milan: Antonio's usurpation and Prospero's. Though they took or try to take the

territorials by playing the former master false or killing him, they don't blame themselves for their actions.

Secondly we shall consider Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo's territorial ambitions to deprive Prospero of the island. It has been twelve years since Caliban was deprived of his island by Prospero. Caliban, however, says, "This island's mine." (I , ii , 333) in the present tense. But after some words, he says, "I... first was mine own King." (I , ii , 343-44) in the past tense. This shows his attachment to the island, that is to say, his territorial ambition to possess the island. For him, it has been his own. He has not been dispelled of his territorial ambition. But he cannot take back the isle from Prospero. So he depends on Stephano: "These be fine things, an if they be not spirites./That's a brave god, and bears celestial liquor:/I will kneel to him." (II, ii, 117-19) Caliban's purpose is to take back this island from Prospero. So he is willing to put up with not being the master of the island in order to get it back from Prospero. Caliban remarks, "Thou shalt be lord of it, and I'll serve thee." (III, ii, 56)

In addition to these, here is another example: Gonzalo's attempted usurpation: his Utopian fantasy. Gonzalo says:

I'th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty;—(II, i , 143-52)

This speech owes much to John Florio's translation (1603) of

Montaigne's essay.²⁶⁾ Orgel suggests that: "But Caliban provides no counterargument to Gonzalo's fantasy. Shakespeare has taken everything from Montaigne except the point."²⁷⁾ But, I think, the implication of Gonzalo's words in *The Tempest* is different to some degree from that of Montaigne's essay, too. Gonzalo's words with the repetition of "no" and "none" criticize European civilization as Montaigne's do. We may say that Gonzalo criticizes the government of Prospero, Alonso and Antonio in the play. To put it in another way, he complains about the real politics of Milan and Naples: their way of politics. But Gonzalo, who is considered "A noble Neapolitan" (I, ii, 161), or "noble friend" (V, i, 120) says, "Had I plantation of this isle, my lord, —" (II, i, 139), "And were the King on't, what would I do?" (II, i, 141) We cannot find any territorial and political ambition in Gonzalo himself. But his words remind us of the territorial and political ambitions of Prospero, Antonio, Sebastian, Alonso and Caliban.

As we have mentioned above, a variety of usurpations are repeated over and over again in the play. It emphasizes the territorial ambitions of the characters and they originated in the life in Milan.

Conclusion

As we have noted, the life in Milan is connected with the action of the play. And there can be no doubt the existence of Miranda is indispensable for Prospero's life and his project; the recovery of Milan. At the end of the play, he alludes to his death; "Every third thought shall be my grave." (V, i, 311) The reason why Prospero puts an end to his life lies in the achievement of Prospero's tasks. That is to say, Prospero's thirds; Milan, Miranda and Prospero not only mean the purpose of his life but also allude to Prospero's last and greatest works of his life that he should do.

Notes

- 1) William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode, (1954; London: Routledge, 1990). All my quotations from *The Tempest* follow this edition.
- 2) William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Horace Howard Furness (1964; New York: Dover Publications, 1982) 4.1.5. note.
- 3) Frank Kermode, 4.1.3. note.
- 4) Furness, 4.1.5. note.
- 5) Furness, 4.1.5. note.
- 6) William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. D. K. Swan, (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1984) 4.1.3. note.
- 7) Malcolm Evans, "Master and Slave," *Signifying Nothing: Truth's True Content in Shakespeare's Text*, (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1986) 69-84.
- 8) Furness, 4.1.5. note.
- 9) Kermode, 4.1.3. note.
- 10) Furness, 4.1.5. note.
- 11) Kermode, 4.1.3. note. See *OED*, "thrid"; "Var. THREAD, esp. the vb.; obs.f. THIRD."
- 12) The reason why The Duke Senior enjoys the life of Arden lies in the fact that he is spared the misery of fighting for power in the court. See Meredith Anne Skura, "Discourse and Individual: The Case of Colonialism in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol.40 (1989) 62.
- 13) William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Agnes Latham (1975; London: Routledge, 1989) 29.
- 14) See A. Lynne Magnusson, "Interruption in *The Tempest*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 37 (1986) 54-60. He treats the relationship between Prospero and Antonio.
- 15) Alvin B. Kernan, "The Great Globe Itself," *The Playwright as Magician* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) 139.
- 16) Meredith Anne Skura, 50.
- 17) Stephen Orgel, "Prospero and Caliban," *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, ed. Peter Hulm (1986; London: Methuen, 1992) 127.
- 18) We should read "I had forgot" not as the past perfect tense but as the subjunctive mood: Prospero didn't forget Caliban's conspiracy at all.
- 19) Bryan Loughter and Neil Taylor, "Ferdinand and Miranda at Chess," *Shakespeare Survey*, vol.35(1982) 115.
- 20) See E.K.Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, vol. I (Oxford: Claren-

don Press, 1930) 491.

- 21) Frank Kermode ed., Introduction to *The Tempest*, xxv.
- 22) Frank Kermode ed., Introduction to *The Tempest*, xxv-xxxiv.
- 23) William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) introduction to *The Tempest*, 33.
- 24) Malcolm Evans, 76.
- 25) See Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "Nymphs and reapers heavily vanish: the discursive contexts of *The Tempest*," *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis, (1985; London: Routledge, 1992) 198-205.
- 26) This point has more fully argued in the following books. Kermode's introduction to *The Tempest*, xxxiv-vi; Orgel's introduction, 33-6; Alden. T. Vaughan & Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 47-8.
- 27) Stephen Orgel, introduction to *The Tempest*, 36.