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HIS MASTER'S VOICE: THE POLITICS OF NARRAGENITIVE DESIRE IN THE TEMPEST

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As you from crimes would pardon'd be, Let your indulgence set me free.

-The Tempest, Epilogue

Prospero's final lines in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* bear a double irony. The player who implores the audience to pardon the imperfections of his performance in the Epilogue completely inverts the role of judge and pardoner that he has played only moments earlier, in pronouncing the fate of the entire company at the end of Act V. And in pleading for his freedom from theatrical servitude, the same player negates and thereby recalls attention to his earlier position of indomitable mastery within the play. But the form of the actor's plea suggests that the playful verses of the Epilogue may contain yet a further twist. In speaking these lines, the actor signals the end of his labors and asks for his reward in the form of applause. His seeming anxiety over whether his story will have been well received is, on the one hand, a form of a standard trope conveying the artist's humility before the patron. But on the other hand, it seems to resonate with a number of passages earlier in the play where Prospero appears strangely anxious about the reception of stories of his own.

If such a connection can be reasonably made—and it will be my purpose in this essay to show that it can—then one would perhaps be justified in reading the terms of Prospero's petition in the Epilogue in a way that would help to interpret this earlier "reception anxiety." His references to crime and redemption, that is, are not simply a clever figure of mock self-deprecation, nor does the ironic, inverted reading exhaust their significance: Prospero pleads guilty in the end because he has failed to consummate his creative will within the play, and because all the rituals he

has staged have failed to purge his mind of the memory of his own impotence.

The play opens with a storm that upsets not only the King's ship, but also the hierarchical structure that he represents. Although a drunken Trunkulo notices it only in the fourth act, the state totters from the very first scene, when the lowly boatswain orders the king and his brother and councillor below deck. His impetuous directives, bordering on the mutinous, suggest a preposterous reordering of a traditional chain of command.¹ The replies he receives from Sebastian and, Antonio suggest that he has insulted not only their authority, but their courage, manliness, and linguistic prowess as well. "We are less afraid to be drownd than thou art," Antonio insists, as though to rebuke an implicit claim to the contrary. They call him a "dog" and a "cur" respectively, thereby affirming, by making him something less than a man, their own virility. The linguistic link appears in their charges that he is "bawling" and a "noise-maker"; that is, that he "speaks" a sub-human, ineffectual language that is no match for their own.

This early association between one's manhood and a certain linguistic potency forms the basis of the nagging anxiety that torments Prospero throughout the remainder of the play. While on the surface his character comes to present an image of serene and benevolent mastery, his speeches frequently reveal fears, doubts, and hostile or vindictive attitudes whose violence points to sources beyond their immediate cause. His ruling passion, like that of every sorcerer, is to create, and fully to control his creation. At every turn, however, he finds signs of insurgency, signs that in threatening his narrative mastery, remind him of a past where the play in which he acted was not his own.

The boatswain's mutiny seems to haunt Prospero as he sits down with his daughter in the following scene finally to recount the story of their exile. 'Obey, and be attentive' he commands, though she gives every sign of being a willing and attentive listener of her own accord (Lii.37). Indeed, the text gives no indication that Miranda should seem distracted, disdainful or disinterested, yet her father continually interrupts his account as if worried lest his words miss their mark. "I pray thee mark me," he says, and "Dost thou attend me?" (Lii.67,78) Several lines later he cries out, "Thou attend'st not," and though she replies (most credulously, to my ear), "O, good sir, I do," he repeats, "I pray thee mark me," and shortly after asks, "Dost thou hear?" (Lii.87-8,106).

Prospero's obsession here, it might be argued, is with asserting a form of narrative mastery. He will tell a story long withheld on the condition of absolute attention from his listener. It is the degree of a personal stake he takes in Miranda's attention that is most striking in this scene. His repeated interjections suggest that the loss would be his, rather than hers, if she closed her ears, or even that her heeding his words is a very condition of his power. At the very least, her obedience will provide her with a perfect knowledge of her past, or at least of his rendering of it.

If this scene's proximity to the first suggests a political reading of Prospero's concern, several other passages within it indicate that a politics of reproduction are implicated in Prospero's desire for narrative control. Prospero fears impotence, not in the literal sense of being physically unable to "speak" his manliness, but rather in the sense of losing control once his "words" have left his body. If ejaculation drains the firm and able of its strength, it also negates the mastery of possession in a far more lasting sense. For while the phallus "writes" upon the receiving body in a moment of pure authorial transcendence, the moment also entails a surrender, an abdication of control, a subjection of one's creative force to that of another. The father can never know what becomes of his seed, can never be certain that "his" offspring are truly his own. The sexual master of copulation is transformed by the very act of mastery into a progenitive slave.

A memory of such a usurpation of his right informs the exchange between father and daughter in this scene, and helps to explain his insistence on her attentiveness. Their lines are full of allusions to male loss of generative control. The most direct is Prospero's response to Miranda's query, "Sir, are not you my father?" (Lii.55) Whatever the truth of the matter might be, the old man's awareness of the possibility of doubt comes through in his reply, "Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and / She said thou wast my daughter" (Lii.56-7). His claim to fatherhood, that is, rests entirely on the word of his beloved and trusted wife. But Miranda's very next lines raise the specter of "foul play," and evoke from Prospero himself an admission that love and trust alone are poor guarantors of truth: his perfidious brother had once been "he whom next thyself / Of all the world I lov'd" (Lii.68-9).

The language in which fraternal betrayal is described resonates disturbingly with the question of his wife's virtue; his charges against Antonio, indeed, can be read as an extended allegory of the male reproductive anxiety described above. There is an act of insemination and the alienation from one's product that it entails: "To him [I] put / The manage of my state... The government I cast upon my brother, And to my state grew stranger" (I.ii.69-76). There is the anxiety connected with the

re-casting of the male seed that must occur in the mother's womb, and the loss of the child's primary allegiance that results: Antonio

new created

The creatures that were mine, I say, or chang'd 'em, Or else new form'd 'em; having both the key

Of officer and office, set all hearts i' th' state

To what tune pleas'd his ear... (I.ii.81-85)

A striking metaphor of copulatory emasculation confirms the sexual origins of Prospero's distress:

...that now he was

The ivy which had hid my princely trunk, And suck'd my verdure out on't. Thou attend'st not! (1.ii.85-7)

And finally, the preposterous re-ordering, or usurpation accompanying the role of the male progenitor is described: "my trust, / Like a good parent, did beget of him / A falsehood in its contrary" (Lii.93-5). Prospero's repeated recriminations of Miranda, of course, take on an added significance within the context of such a reading: the betrayal he fears at the hands of his daughter mirrors that which he suffered at the hands of her mother, only with a story substituted for a seed.

One need not look far for further evidence of Prospero's sexual anxiety. The imagery of physical impotence is prominent later in the same scene. He regrets Antonio's homage to the King of Naples because it bent "The dukedom yet unbow'd... / To most ignoble stooping" (Lii.115-6). And he sees the landing of his enemies on the island as "A most auspicious star, whose influence / If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes / Will ever after droop" (Lii.182-4). Even Miranda's own reading of her father's words seems to accord with the one outlined here: when he asks her, rhetorically, whether such a traitor as Antonio could possibly be a brother, her "naively" literal response suggests an awareness that it is a feminine, not a masculine betrayal that underlies his agitation. "I should sin," she replies, "To think but nobly of my grandmother. / Good wombs have sorne bad sons" (Lii.118-9). Her defense of her grandmother's fidelity, that is, bespeaks Miranda's perception that this woman, on some unspoken level, is the true object of Prospero's contempt.

The interpretative framework I have presented here helps to explain Prospero's violent outbursts later in the play as well. His unremitting cruelty to Caliban, for example, might be seen as an expression of his resentment towards the mother figure of Sycorax, who figures as large in Prospero's hostility towards his slave as in Caliban's curses against him. To Prospero, Sycorax presents simultaneously the figure of a double and a

rival: both are exiled single parents who employ magic to rule the island and to establish their competing claims to sovereignty over it. On a symbolic plane, it would seem, they function as mates, with Caliban as their joint offspring. Prospero's resentment towards the mother-son pair would then result from his own exclusion from it: the father's mastery is once again undermined by the betrayal implicit in the child's firm allegiance to his mother.

The sole protection for fathers' claims to their wives and offspring against the threat of cuckoldry and progenitive impotence is the sanctity of the marriage vow, a legal device intended to restrict sexual activity to a sphere where its production can be fully known and controlled. Any transgression of this law undermines not only the honor of the individuals concerned, but also the security of all those men whose peace of mind depends on the integrity of the system as a whole. This might explain, then, Prospero's vituperative warnings to his prospective son-in-law that he respect Miranda's "virgin-knot" until "All sanctimonious ceremonies may / With full and holy rite be minist'red" (III.iii.16-7). Certainly he is concerned to protect his daughter's honor and the legitimacy of his grandchildren, but the violence of his curse—recalling his earlier imprecations against Antonio and Caliban—suggests that he is concerned to protect himself against further betrayal as well.

Prospero's recourse to a well ordered, established system of law in deterring this threatened usurpation of his right typifies his response to a chronic anxiety throughout the play. If a fear of impotence motivates his action, a substitution of carefully structured narrative for sexual prowess determines its form. Male sexual potency, as we have seen, ends with the issuance of the seed. Rhetorical potency, though, as Prospero discovers, can enable one to compensate for this defect. Mastering the arts of speech enables one to ensure the continued efficacy of one's words long after they are spoken, to impregnate the minds of others with the products of one's own imagination, to create, in short, and to master one's creation to a degree unattainable through the exertions of virility alone.

Prospero's overriding fear, I have argued, is one of betrayal. If on the surface of the plot the historical origin of his obsession is a political one, I have tried to show that his experience of it is figured largely in sexual and narrative terms: he is afraid that his seed will go astray, that his story will go unheard, that the products of his creative acts will escape his control, undermine his authority, usurp the privileged position he claims over them. On the political plane, Prospero responds to the crisis of betrayal

by conjuring a sort of magical judicial process in which the defendants are forced to re-enact their crime, confront their guilt, and restore the dukedom to its rightful prince. But this drama of restoration is simultaneously staged on the same narrative and sexual planes where the crisis is most poignantly figured. Prospero's encounters with the other characters on the island reveal a persistent attempt to compensate for the natural impotence of the father / artist by imposing himself as an irrefutable father-figure onto their own memories, re-writing their pasts to describe a lineage descending directly from himself.

Not surprisingly, these attempts to assert a "narragenitive" mastery occur within the play in close conjunction with those moments where his potency is cast in doubt. The first of these is his revelation to Miranda of the scandal of their past. His repeated insistence on her full attention in this scene signals his overwhelming personal state in his successful inscription of himself into her nascent knowledge of her own origins. The most telling speech in this exchange initiates a complex play on the crucial word 'art':

I have done nothing, but in care of thee (Of thee my dear one, thee my daughter) who Art ignorant of what thou art, nought knowing Of whence I am, nor that I am more better Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell, And thy no greater father. (I.ii.16-21)

The epanalepsis in the third line of this passage at once emphasizes the paradox of Miranda's situation and hints at the manner in which Prospero intends that it be resolved. She is, the clause suggests, simultaneously an absence and a presence, a product of a particular history, and a lack of knowledge of it. The purpose of Prospero's tale, of course, is to address the gap in her self knowledge by recounting their shared past. But the prominence of the 'art' as the fulcrum of the paradox seems to insist on a role in its resolution: the means by which presence and absence will be combined, that is, will be that of Prospero's art.

Only four lines after the passage quoted above, 'art' appears again in its substantive sense in Prospero's command, "Lie there, my art" (I.ii.25). The stage directions imply that the immediate, albeit metonymic object of his address is the "magic garment" that he lays down before he begins his story. But mask the metonymic referent, and he is speaking to his art, his magical skill in itself, and, significantly, entreating it to deceive.5 The prominent juxtaposition of these three uses of 'art' and the semantic slipperiness of their contexts open the possibility that the essence of Prospero's power lies in the fabrication of masterful narratives, stories that constitute the memory and very identity of another after the image of his own imagination.

Although the ambiguity of "lie" casts her true parentage into some doubt, Miranda is presented throughout as Prospero's natural daughter, so the extent to which his art constructs her additionally as his narragenetic child is somewhat obscured. But there is no doubt concerning his parental ambitions towards Ariel and Caliban. Not content to make them his slaves, he insists on exacting an homage of filial gratitude, an acknowledgement that it was he, in both cases, who brought them into the world and made them what they are. He will be their master, but the mastery that he seeks is not that founded on superior force, but rather that arising from the deot owed one's maker.

The first encounter between Prospero and Ariel in the play follows in Act I immediately upon the narragenitive creation of Miranda in the scene discussed above. The parallels between the two conversations are striking. Ariel, like Miranda, is (according to Prospero) insufficiently cognizant of his own past, though the charge is spoken here in anger rather than sympathy. "Dost thou forget," Prospero asks the spirit, "From what a torment I did free thee?... I must / Once in a month recount what thou hast been, Which thou forget'st" (I.ii.250-63). If in his daughter's case, Prospero's art "begets" her through a rhetorically masterful narration of her past, in Ariel's case, the birthing imagery is if anything more readily apparent: "It was mine art, / When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape / The pine, and let thee out" (I.ii.291-3).6 The act represents, on a symbolic plane, the ultimate fantasy of fatherly mastery: by releasing Ariel from the "knotty entrails" of the tree, Prospero simultaneously appropriates for himself the maternal act of creation and negates the maternal claim on the child that the process normally entails, in that he breaks the curse of the mother-figure Sycorax.

While Miranda's gratitude and affection seem a sufficient recompense for his labor on her behalf, Ariel's debt to his self-declared father is to be repaid through his spritely service. It is the function, though, rather than the fact of this service that is significant to this analysis. The fantasy of potency, I have suggested, whether paternal or rhetorical, envisions extending the mastery over one's creation beyond the threshold of the body and the moment of its production, and thereby overcoming the radical uncertainty that the sire and the speaker share. Ariel is the ideal "child" to Prospero in that he not only acknowledges an originary debt to his master, but enables, through his magic, just such a perpetuation of his master's will. Prospero's commands take the form of a story, an

extended fantasy or "pageant"; Ariel's role is to act them out, to instantiate them upon the island-stage. It is only by thus bringing his own words to fruition through the service of a grateful son that Prospero can hope to redress the emasculating wrong once done him by the most recent arrivals upon the scene.

The usurpers present a special challenge to the old man's narragenitive potency. Whereas Miranda had no basis or cause to deny her father's paternal claims, and Ariel was easily persuaded of the drawbacks of doing so, Prospero has no such leverage in securing the allegiance of the king and his followers; the intention itself would to their minds seem quite preposterous, if not treasonable. Such difficulties not withstanding, by the end of the play Prospero's art has triumphed in its ultimate test, having transformed all the king's men into loyal subjects and sons. His strategy in staging this coup is informed by the wrong he thereby hopes to rectify, and by the particular anxiety with which it was bound. His experience of betrayal, we noted above, is associated with a fear of cuckoldry, uncertain paternity, and the narrative impotence that they entail. The ideal remedy for his obsession, then, would be to reclaim those who wronged him as errant sons, to bring them anew into the world with a memory of his paternity etched indelibly in their minds.

It is precisely such a re-conception that is augured by Prospero's auspicious star. His art will enable him first to emasculate or infantilize the ship's passengers through madness and bewilderment, and then to inscribe upon their boiled brains the sign of his own mastery. We see the workings of the process most vividly in the case of the gallant Ferdinand in the first act. Upon immobilizing and disarming him with a charm of boyish love, Prospero declares, "Come on, obey: / Thy nerves are in their infancy again / And have no vigor in them" (I.ii.484-6). The space in which Ferdinand feels himself contained by the charm is womb-like in its comfortable constraint, its dream-like quality, and the loss of memory and worldly cares that it brings: "So they are," he replies.

(My spirits, as in a dream, are all bound up.)
My father's loss, the weakness which I feel,
The wrack of all my friends, nor this man's threats
To whom I am subdu'd, are but light to me,
Might I but through my prison once a day
Behold this maid. (L.ii.486-92)

A loss of reason figures significantly in Prospero's prescriptions for all his guests. When he first hears of Ariel's success in stirring up the storm, he asks delightedly, "Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil / Would not infect his reason?" (Lii.207-8) Carrying logs at Prospero's

behest, Ferdinand puns on his "wooden slavery" (III.i.62). Events on the island are contrived so as to defy comprehension, to confound all knowledge of origins; hence the magical apparitions of fairies and banquets and, in the final act, of the ship's passengers to one another. When the boatswain staggers on the scene, Alonso greets him with, "These are not natural events, they strengthen / From strange to stranger. Say, how came you hither?" (Vi.227-8)

Prospero's purpose here in stripping these men of their sense is to cleanse their minds of those potent certainties that might interfere with his own narragenitive act, to wipe clean the slates, as it were, so that he might write his own story upon them and engender thereby a brood of loyal sons. Their bewilderment opens an ontological gap that they are unable to fill. On beholding Prospero, Gonzalo can assert nothing regarding the apparition:

"Whether this be, / Or be not, I'll not swear" (V.i.122-3). The gap occasions a willingness to accept any tale able to fill it. When the banquet appears before the king and his men, Sebastian swears he will believe in the unicorn and the phoenix, and Antonio takes this new-found credulity a step further: "I'll believe both; / And what does else want credit, come to me, / And I'll be sworn 'tis true' (III.iii.21-26). Alonso expresses this receptiveness as a longing for a new source of plenitude: "Some oracle / Must rectify our knowledge" (Vi.244-5).

This oracle, this phallic source that will plant the seed of their new awakening into the world of sense will be Prospero, and the seed, his story of their own guilt. He inscribes it in stages, opening with affective strains—of love in the case of Ferdinand, despair in that of Alonso, or renewed ambition in that of Antonio and Sebastian-that will lead them naturally into a final epiphany of remorse and acceptance of Prospero's mastery. Ariel's speech after the royal banquet in Act III conveys the main body of the tale. He repeats the tropes of mental and physical impotence described above ("I have made you mad:... Your swords are now too massy for your strengths, / And will not be uplifted" (III.iii.58-68), and then commands them to remember their past crimes: "But remember / (For that's my business to you) that you three / From Milan did supplant good Prospero..." (III.iii.68-70). The parenthetical explanation and the juxtaposition of "forgetting" several lines later in the speech lend special weight to the injunction "remember". Although the direct object of the verb is their deed ("that you...did supplant"), the eucharistic resonances of the feast and of the spirit's message suggest that it is the body of Prospero himself that is meant to be recalled and, literally, re-membered.

If betrayal, with the sense of impotence that it entails, implies a sort of dismemberment, then its remedy must come with restoring the body to wholeness. Re-membered, restored, Prospero recovers his former potency, and reasserts his paternal claims. The threat he holds over the heads of his captives is perpetual isolation and exile on a "most desolate isle", they " mongst men / Being most unfit to live" (III.iii.57-8,80). Prospero will deliver them into the world again for the price of their contrition "And a clear life ensuing," which means, presumably, a promise to respect paternal authority in the future (III.iii.81-2). By inscribing the story of their guilt upon their memories, Prospero establishes himself as an incontrovertible author/father, a master whose potency will never again be subject to doubt.

But a figure of darkness in the play casts a shadow across his dream. I have shown how, in the second scene of the play, Prospero successfully asserts a paternal claims over Miranda, Ariel, and Ferdinand. A fourth character, Caliban, is subjected to a parallel attempt in the very same scene, with the significant difference that it fails. We find here, as in the cases of Miranda and Ariel, the assertion that Prospero has filled an absence of self-knowledge with a narrative presence. "[Thou] art ignorant of what thou art" and "I must once in a month recount what thou has been" are closely echoed by Prospero's reminder,

When thou didst not, savage,

Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes With words that made them known. (Lii.355-8)7

Prospero, then, has endowed his prospective son with language and identity, but whereas in the other cases such an endowment served as a vehicle to his own will, in this case it backfires. Caliban resents the imposition, and turns it back against him, assaulting him at every opportunity with curses and "lies":

You taught me language, and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you For learning me your language' (Lii.363-5)

Later in the play, Prospero acknowledges that his efforts to reform, to rewrite Caliban have failed, describing him as "a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (IV.i.188-9). Something seems to have interfered with the narragenitive process here, a counter-narrative standing in the way of the inscription of the paternal claim.

It takes little probing to ascertain what this might be. Prospero's frustration with his slave often seems more directed at Sycorax than at Caliban himself, and specifically at the fact of her motherhood. *Caliban

is a "hag seed", "hag-born", "got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam" (Lii.283, 319-20, 365). Caliban, in turn, assails Prospero with curses taken from his mother's repertoire. He first appears upon the stage murmuring.

As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd With raven's feather from unwholesome fen Drop on you both! (I.ii.321-3)

Sycorax looms so large in their "dialogue", I would argue, because it is she, not Caliban, who represents the most dangerous challenge to Prospero's sovereignty. If Prospero has usurped Caliban's claim to the island, it is a claim that he inherits from his mother. Prospero's sorcery appears to be a direct appropriation of the witch's former powers." And by attempting to recast Caliban in his own linguistic image, Prospero aspires to take over her parental role as well. Thrice a usurper in his own right, then, Prospero strives to beat down the ghost of his rival by enslaving and tormenting her son. He calls Caliban "Thou most lying slave" (Lii.344) when the latter attempts to recount his version of events, but this powerful counternarrative continues to erupt in Caliban's curses, sloth, and ill-fated conspiracy. It is significant, as Barker and Hulme point out, that this plot against his life temporarily slips Prospero's mind, and that the recollection provokes such a violent response: it is a disturbance that he would much rather consign to "the dark backward and abysm of time."

But he cannot forget, and in remembering he restores the body of the mother and the maternal narrative that belies his own. When he acknowledges Caliban as his own, he acknowledges a failure and an impotence, for Caliban is a "thing of darkness", a product of inaccessible memories and of an all-powerful mother whom Prospero will neither overwrite nor displace. If *The Tempest* at times celebrates an occlusion of mother-hood, its submerged presence may resurface in the end, as Prospero dismisses his own creation as an insubstantial dream, acknowledges the human limits of his potency, and hints, in the Epilogue, of a crime of his own that still remains unpardoned.

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NOTES

 Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "Nymphs and reapers heavily vanish: the discursive con-texts of *The Tempest*," in John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shake-speares* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 198.

 William Shakespeare, The Tempest in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974), Li.11-45. All subsequent line

references in the text refer to this edition of the play.

 See Stephen Orgel, "Prospero's Wife," in Margaret Ferguson, M. Quilligan, and N. Vickers, eds., Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 50.

4. A Christian prototype for this kind of progenitive language can be seen in the Annunciation: the conception of Christ in the virgin womb is inseparable from the conveyance of God's message to her.

5. Barker and Hulme, p. 199, raise the possibility that Prospero's accounts are

not necessarily true.

6. Another noteworthy parallel between the two cases, and one which can only re-affirm the connection between them, is the twelve-year incubation period required before Prospero's art "delivers" his offspring into the world. Miranda has lived in exile twelve years ignorant of what she is; Ariel spent the same period trapped in his cloven pine.

7. According to Evans' note in the Riverside edition, these lines have been variously attributed to Miranda and Prospero. I find the assignation to Prospero more convincing, on the grounds that 1) their tone and language are so similar to those of Prospero's three other encounters in this scene, and 2) nowhere else does the rather wispy Miranda speak with such violence or self-assertion.

8. See Orgel, p. 54

9. Orgel notes on p. 61, "In giving up his magic, Prospero speaks as Medea. He has incorporated Ovids witch, prototype of the wicked mother Sycorax, in the most literal way—verbatim, so to speak—and his 'most potent art' is now revealed as translation and impersonation."

10. Barker and Hulme, pp. 201-2.