

Autumn No.4

Autumn Lectures 2016 for the Angel Foundation, by Peter Milward

No.4, Saturday November 19, at Parlor No.5, on *The Tempest*

First characteristic of *The Tempest*, last complete play by Shakespeare, 1611
though first play presented by editors of First Folio, J Hemings and H Condell,
since Ben Jonson breathing down their necks in spite of Shakespeare
as the one play of Shakespeare's observing Aristotelian unities of place and time
thus upsetting proper order of comedies, tragedies, tragi-comedies
with *Pericles* (omitted), *Cymbeline* (last tragedy), *Winter's Tale* (last comedy)

Among tragi-comedies, *Tempest* different not only as last

but also as looking neither back to KL nor forward to H8

only as P looks back to CE, with happy ending of reunion in Ephesus

so T looks back to MD, with spirits = fairies, as imagined by Sh

Further triplicity in *Dream of Learning* (envisaged by DG James, 1951)

also by myself in *Shakespeare's Other World*, BookWay 2014

Hamlet's Question, Lear's Sermon, Prospero's Meditation

Source of T. shipwreck of *Sea Venture*, flagship of Virginia fleet under Sir T Gates

on coast of Bermudas 1609, as described in three pamphlets 1610

with strange experiences of sailors on landing

echoed in play in Ariel's words, "still vexed Bermoothes"

discovery of New World in Miranda's exclamation, "O brave new world!"

but place changed from America – what a golden opportunity missed by Sh!

to Mediterranean – between Tunis and Naples/ Milan

Tragedy of "tragi-comedy" limited to opening tempest as raised by Ariel

so as to bring ship with Prospero's enemies from Tunis to magic island

followed by peaceful scene with Prospero - Miranda, father – daughter

means of explaining to audience all that has gone before, from Milan

with reference to recurrent theme of divine providence (from AL and H)

but Miranda always falling asleep, Prospero waking her up

then introduced to two strange beings, Ariel (of air), Caliban (of earth)

as other inhabitants of lonely island, from philosophy of Paracelsus

Then among survivors of shipwreck Prince Ferdinand's meeting with Miranda

arranged by Prospero/ Ariel, for them to fall in love with each other

but Prospero comes forward and arrests Ferdinand as "spy"

since "course of true love never did run smooth" (Lysander in MD)

Other survivors, Prospero's enemies with other nobles voyaging from Tunis to Naples,

entertained by good old counsellor Gonzalo to account of ideal commonwealth,
based partly on Montaigne's essay "On Cannibals" (cf. derivation of "Caliban")
partly on More's *Utopia*, as "a kind of merry fooling"

Note, figure of good counsellor in these romances from memory of More

Yet other survivors, drunken sailors, Trinculo and Stephano, come upon Caliban
amid threatening storm, ply him with liquor from ship,
impressed by them, Cal leads them to take his revenge on stern master Prospero
Now Ariel leads three others denounced as "men of sin", chief enemies of Prospero
Antonio new Duke of Milan, Alonso King of Naples, brother Sebastian,
who had originally driven Prospero out of Milan (recalling situation in AL)
while Alonso sleeps, Antonio suggests opportunity of killing him to Sebastian
but plot overheard and foiled by Ariel in background, leading them all astray
Further scene of love between Miranda and Ferdinand, as she tries to help him,
"Admired Miranda!/
Indeed, the top of admiration, worth/
What's dearest to the
world.../
But you, O you!/
So perfect and so peerless, are created/
of every
creature's best!" (echoing Benedick on Beatrice in MA, Orlando on Rosalind in AL)
Prospero now welcomes this "fair encounter/
Of two most rare effections."
goes on to celebrate betrothal with masque of spirits (as Iris, Ceres, Juno)
till suddenly remembers danger from approaching Caliban and sailors, ending
masque

"Our revels now are ended. These our actors/
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and/
Are melted into air, into thin air,/
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe
itself,/
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant
faded,/
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff/
As dreams are made on, and our
little life/
Is rounded with a sleep." (as if foretelling the Great Fire of London, 1666)
Words on scroll held by Shakespeare in statue of Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

From now on all moves to centre of island, Prospero's cell, in final Act (as in KL, Cym)

Where enemies all under magic spell, to receive not revenge but forgiveness,

"The rarer action is/
In virtue than in vengeance... They being penitent/
The sole
drift of my purpose doth extend/
Not a frown further."

He himself vows to "break my staff/
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth/
And deeper
than did ever plummet sound/
I'll drown my book."

Epilogue pronounced by Prospero/ Shakespeare. "And my ending is despair/
Unless I
be relieved by prayer/
That pierces so that it assaults/
Mercy itself, and frees all
faults." (cf. Eccclus.xxxv.17, as also Portia on mercy, xxxv.20)