

‘Thou shalt have the air at freedom’

—— The Theme of Liberty in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* ——

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ENTER, as wearing no apparent mask
and so [...] free to smile, a figure who nervously—
being unknown here—does smile, and carrying
no staff, sceptre, whip, or biro, prepares
to say there is no world but persons.¹

1. Introduction

Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* ends with the word ‘free’, and this is far from insignificant since the play can be read as a sustained meditation on the meanings of freedom. Much recent criticism has drawn attention to the fact that questions of liberty, bondage and authority are central themes. As Kiernan Ryan notes, the ‘entire cast of Prospero’s prescribed play are trapped in narratives of sovereignty and submission’.² The ways in which this multifarious theme plays out are predictably complex and go to the heart of the Shakespeare’s abiding concern with the relationship between the individual and society, with political power and with the value of the theatre.

2. Ariel’s Freedom

Ariel, clearly, is the principal embodiment of freedom in the play. Throughout, we are

reminded of his yearning to have restored to him the freedom that seems to be such an essential and inalienable part of his nature. It is an association suggested not least by his name. If he is a spirit of the air, an airy being, it is because this is the element in which freedom finds its fullest expression in the limitless expanse of the sky and in the flight of birds and insects.

Freedom, as we shall see, has everything to do with power. Yet, in a play which, as is typical with Shakespeare, has so much to say about the lust for power, the most powerful character in terms of the agency he wields in the physical world has, paradoxically, no interest in power at all. Power brings responsibilities, as Prospero's story makes clear, and Ariel's desire for an absolute form of freedom must mean that for him power holds no attractions. Every fibre of his being is oriented in the opposite direction, and it is this, in part, which makes him inhuman. His devotion to freedom is utterly simple and pure, and in this respect offers a contrast to the complexities of human aspirations. In his response to one of Prospero's frequent promises that he will 'ere long be free', Ariel luxuriates in an evocation of a childlike state of perfect freedom, a return to an infantile state of recumbent sucking.

Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
In a cowslip's bell I lie:
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

(Act 5, Scene 1, lines 91–98)

In the human world, to be merry is to enjoy the kind of temporary, carefree state that exists only on feast days and holidays. But for Ariel, the blossom that should be a symbol of the ephemeral hangs forever on the bough. Freedom resides both in the suspension of time figured in the blossom improbably weighing down the branch of the tree, and more generally in the breaking of physical laws, the defiance of gravity and time. In the fairy universe, to be free is not to be free from anything in particular but only to gain entry to an anarchic, carnivalesque state of permanent festivity.

It is Ariel's inadvertent entanglement with the human world that has led to the loss of his cherished liberty. Indeed, he loses it not just once but twice. In the first instance, he is imprisoned in a pine tree by Sycorax as a punishment for what might be seen as an assertion of his own free will in an act of rebellion. For Ariel's incarceration is a consequence of his refusal to obey the witch's 'earthy and abhorred commands'. Here he has remained for twelve years, until delivered by Prospero. Time, however, can mean little for an immortal being, and what Prospero emphasizes above all is not the duration of Ariel's ordeal but the pain that it entailed. In an image that works against the unyielding materiality of the wood, the fairy's

groans are imagined coming ‘as fast as mill-wheels strike’. The characteristic ambiguity of Shakespeare’s language here can only be resolved by unfolding Prospero’s ‘mill-wheels’ into an image of the blades of a rotating waterwheel striking the water that drives it. Immobilized in the pine, Ariel evokes through his groans the fast flow of water imparting its kinetic energy to the mechanism of the mill. In sonic terms, though, the effect is to suggest an agonized, rhythmic panting, as if Ariel had for twelve years suffered the labour pains of what was eventually to be his own birth from the knotty womb of the pine. Whether it was the confinement alone that Ariel found so painful or the nature of the punishment, the ‘torment’, as it is twice termed by Prospero, was one ‘to lay upon the damned’.

And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee
By help of her more potent ministers,
And in her most unmitigable rage,
Into a cloven pine, within which rift
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain
A dozen years: within which space she died,
And left thee there, where thou didst vent thy groans
As fast as mill-wheels strike [...]

[...] Thou best know’st
What torment I did find thee in: thy groans
Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts
Of ever-angry bears; it was a torment
To lay upon the damned, which Sycorax
Could not again undo. It was mine art,
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
The pine and let thee out.

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 320–342)

If Prospero takes pains here to remind Ariel of the hell from which he has been extricated, it is because his generosity has come with a price. For, once freed from the pine, Ariel finds himself to be no less a prisoner than he was before, this time as Prospero’s servant. As Paul Brown points out, ‘Ariel is, paradoxically, bound in service by this constant reminder of Prospero’s gift of freedom to him [...]. That bondage is reinforced by both a promise to repeat the act of release when a period of servitude has expired and a promise to repeat the act of incarceration should service not be forthcoming’.³ He is not the only critic to view with suspicion Prospero’s claim to be treating Ariel magnanimously. The magician’s tone in responding to Ariel’s attempt to obtain a curtailment of his period of service in Act I meets, as B. J. Sokol reminds us, with a rebuke which is ‘very harsh’ and at times ‘shockingly abusive’.⁴ However questionable we might think Prospero’s insistence that his role has been that of a

liberator rather than an enslaver, and however much his guarantees of an eventual emancipation are always hedged by clear reminders of the terms and conditions of the fairy's contract, the magician's appreciation of what freedom means to Ariel emerges clearly from his repeated promises.

[...] Spirit, fine spirit: I'll free thee
Within two days for this.

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 487–488)

Shortly shall all my labours end, and thou
Shalt have the air at freedom [...]

It is also evident that Prospero is in some sense bound to Ariel. To free him is not simply to lose his most potent 'minister'. It is also to sacrifice some part of himself. Hence we see that as the moment of release draws nearer, Prospero refers increasingly to Ariel using the terms of an endearment that was less apparent previously. He will, he confesses, 'miss' his 'dainty Ariel', and his final valediction is addressed to 'my Ariel, chick'. When Prospero discharges Ariel, saying 'then to the elements / Be free', it seems that what he will miss about his servant is precisely his innocent love of freedom. For this is a state of being to which Prospero himself, burdened by his own humanity, can never aspire.

Why, that's my dainty Ariel. I shall miss
Thee: but yet thou shalt have freedom [...]

(Act 5, Scene 1, lines 99–101)

[...] My Ariel, chick,
That is thy charge: then to the elements
Be free, and fare thou well.

(353–355)

Ariel's relationship to Prospero has been interpreted by Daniel Viktus in terms of the contracts that bound boy actors to a theatre company. Historical records show that schoolboys could even be seized and compelled to work in the theatre without pay whenever a theatre manager chose to abuse a privilege known as 'impressment'. On this view, Ariel's longing for freedom is an allusion to the apprentice's desire to be released from bondage and to become a 'free' member of his company.⁵ It is a reading which seems to accord with Ariel's function as an extension of Prospero's own powers as a magician. Above all, though, it makes sense of Prospero's dependency on Ariel. For his reluctance to free the fairy might thus be a reflection

not simply of an affective attachment but a reminder of the fact that in Shakespeare's day the theatre relied on bondage.⁶

3. Caliban and Ferdinand: Freedom and Service

If Prospero seems to live in as much anticipation for the restoration of Ariel's elemental freedom as Ariel himself, he registers no such sympathy for Caliban, the gross symbolic counterweight to the fairy. While Ariel was set free by Prospero's 'art', Caliban lost his freedom when the magician reached his shores. Once his 'own king', the island's sole native now bridles against his incarceration.

[...] here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o'th'island.

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 399–402)

Prospero, though, responds that Caliban is justly imprisoned as punishment for his attempt to rape Miranda. Indeed, he deserved far worse and should, his master implies, be thankful that no worse a retribution than imprisonment has been meted out to him.

[...] therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst
Deserved more than a prison.

(420–422)

The theme of incarceration is picked up later in the scene as Ferdinand speaks of the prison in which he has been placed by Prospero. The shipwrecked prince exploits his lack of freedom rhetorically to express his love for Miranda. All of his afflictions, he avers, will seem 'but light' to him were he able just once a day to gaze 'through his prison' on Miranda. Willingly he submits to his incarceration, declaring:

[...] all corners else o'th'earth
Let liberty make use of: space enough
Have I in such a prison.

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 577–579)

In his concluding quasi-personification, it is liberty itself which is granted unlimited use of all

the space in the world beyond his cell. Unlike Caliban, Ferdinand, for love's sake, embraces not only the privations of imprisonment but also the condition of servitude. Though a prince, and he suspects, if his father has indeed perished, a king of Naples, he dutifully undertakes the manual labour required of him by Prospero. In this sense, Ferdinand epitomizes what some critics have seen as one of the play's principle themes, the paradoxical notion that true freedom resides in the selfless devotion of service.⁷ Yet, if Ferdinand is a willing slave, it is not to the island's magician-ruler that he regards himself as indentured but to his bewitching daughter. In a rehearsal of one of the tropes of the courtly romance tradition, he proclaims:

I am in my condition
A prince, Miranda: I do think, a king—
I would not so—and would no more endure
This wooden slavery than to suffer
The flesh-fly blow my mouth. Hear my soul speak:
The very instant that I saw you, did
My heart fly to your service, there resides
To make me slave to it, and for your sake
Am I this patient log-man.

(Act III, Scene 1, lines 70–78)

The motif of the lover's heart pledged to the service of his lady seems all the more hackneyed in the wake of the startling image with which Ferdinand evokes the reluctance a man of his rank would otherwise feel when obliged to undertake such menial work. Were it not for Miranda, his 'wooden slavery' would be no more tolerable than death itself, and death imagined in the most horrifying terms as bodily putrefaction. It is a powerful evocation of revulsion at the thought of being enslaved.

Rather than simply accepting Ferdinand's submission, Miranda reciprocates by casting herself in an equally subservient role. The two lovers vie with one another as each offers to serve the other. In response to Ferdinand's declaration, Miranda triumphantly swears, 'I'll be your servant / Whether you will or no'. For Kiernan Ryan, however, the couple have become the victims of 'their own psychological imprisonment in the language of subjugation'. And this internalized self-suppression is a mirroring of the harsh discipline imposed by Prospero as he 'polices their desire for one another'.⁸

A number of critics have pointed to the need to view the contrast between Caliban and Ariel in terms of the 'concept of service and freedom'.⁹ While Ariel is bound as an apprentice, prized for his industry and his talents, Caliban is 'an unskilled house servant'. In possession of 'neither a contracted term of service nor a wage', his condition is that of a slave.¹⁰ A further point of contrast is furnished by Ferdinand. For if the shipwrecked prince epitomizes the liberty of a self dedicated to the service of another person in his love for Miranda, Caliban chafes in constant frustration against the bonds imposed by the colonizing 'other' that is

Prospero.¹¹ At the same time, Prospero is wholly reliant on Caliban and would be unable to survive without him. He confesses:

But as 'tis,
We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,
Fetch in our wood and serves in offices
that profit us. [...]

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 311–314)

Caliban too, however much he might lament his condition, depends on having a master. So, for all his exhilaration at having escaped from enslavement at the hands of Prospero, he has in fact simply moved from one master to another.¹²

No more dams I'll make for fish,
Nor fetch in firing at requiring,
Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish,
'Ban, 'Ban, Cacaliban
Has a new master: get a new man.
Freedom, high-day! High-day, freedom! Freedom, high-day, freedom!

(Act II, Scene 2, lines 137–142)

The question of whether or not Caliban attains freedom at the end of the play is left open. Perhaps he is left alone to reassert his possession of the island. But the play makes no explicit assertion to this effect. Prospero merely orders Caliban to retire to the 'cell', which he is to 'trim [...] handsomely' in the hope of earning a pardon for his insurrection. More than this, though, we must remember that, as Andrew Gurr points out, Caliban never voices any desire for freedom. He fails, in short, to conceive of freedom as the goal of his labours.¹³ The closest he has come to expressing the kind of yearning expressed by Ariel is in the exercise of an illusory freedom of choice by opting for another master. Caliban, then, displays, a very different understanding of freedom compared to the desire evinced by Ariel. Yet perhaps this is simply a mark of his humanity and can be viewed as an inflection of the notion that emerges elsewhere, and with particular clarity in the declarations of Ferdinand, that true freedom resides in service. It is hard to know, however, what is meant by this notion of 'true freedom'. All we can say with confidence perhaps is that the play seems to say that any notion of freedom existing outside the social bonds in which service is undertaken is an illusion. Unconditional freedom is for the likes of fairies, and the rest of us, whether we are kings or logmen—and Ferdinand believes himself to be both—must expect to be bound to others by an obligation to serve.

Plainly, the discourse of freedom is central to the play's political thought, and nowhere is

this more apparent than in Gonzalo's evocation of a polity without the hierarchies and laws that might appear to limit personal liberties.

Had I plantation of this isle, my lord—
[...]
And were the king on't, what would I do?
[...]
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.
[...]
All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,
Would I not have: but nature should bring forth,
Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.
[...]
I would with such perfection govern, sir,
T'excel the golden age.

(Act II, Scene 1, lines 131–157)

That this utopian vision is unworkable is made clear even before Gonzalo reaches the end of his oration, as Sebastian and Antonio scathingly point out its central contradiction. Gonzalo would establish a society without 'sovereignty', and 'yet he would be king on't'. As David Norbrook remarks, Gonzalo 'is so used to commanding that his own social status is simply invisible to him, and he can see himself as king of an egalitarian society'.¹⁴ The condition of freedom implicit in this *aurea aetas* is an illusion. Without labour or service and the hierarchical relationships such activities entail, there can be no society. Shakespeare, as we might expect, rejects the claims of the anarchist. A self-sustaining social order is a prerequisite to any meaningful existence, and freedom, if it is possible at all, can only be envisaged within the confines of a polity in which human beings are differentiated by the roles through which they work and serve one another.

4. Prospero's Valediction

Prospero, we learn early on in the play, had liberated himself from the burden of governing the state, a gesture Shakespeare would almost certainly have condemned as an abrogation of duty.

[...] those being all my study,
The government I cast upon my brother
And to my state grew stranger, being transported
And rapt in secret studies.

(Act I, Scene 2, lines 88–91)

Now, however, he occupies the same 'poor cell' as Caliban. As an exile, stranded on the island, Prospero is as much a prisoner as his servants are. One might even question whether his retreat into his Milanese study might not been seen as a self-imposed incarceration.¹⁵ Whether or not Prospero himself is free, however, it is clear that he is the central, omnipotent figure to whom all the other characters are, in one way or another, 'bound'.¹⁶ These themes of confinement, bondage and freedom all come clearly to the fore in the play's epilogue, delivered by a solitary Prospero now divested of all his magical accoutrements.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint: now 'tis true,
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell,
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands:
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

(Act V, Scene 1, lines 356–375)

Prospero entreats the audience to set him free, the conceit being that, now bereft of his

sorcerer's powers, he is unable to escape from the island unless the audience's applause releases him from his 'bands'. But in what exactly does this freedom consist? Ostensibly, it resides in the successful completion of the project 'to please', the accomplishment of the dramatist's art. The island is, to be sure, by definition a confining environment. But then so is the stage. And on one level Prospero conceives of himself here as an actor working in the service of his audience. His plea is to be released from the labour of creating drama.

It is in the light of this appeal, of course, that Prospero has been identified as Shakespeare's self-representation. Frank Kermode notes that the epilogue is a wholly 'conventional appeal for applause' and that there is little to indicate that it should be read as 'personal allegory'.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the play is 'almost certainly Shakespeare's last solo-authored play'.¹⁸ And this has inevitably encouraged critics to regard Prospero's epilogue as the playwright's own valediction to the stage. His assiduous orchestration of all that happens on stage, the firm control he exerts over the unfolding destinies of every other human being on the island, and above all his creation of the masque has led Prospero to be seen as a 'theatrical impresario'.¹⁹ On this reading, it is Shakespeare himself who asks us to recognize the service he has performed in devoting himself throughout his working life to pleasing audiences.

In part, the freedom Prospero speaks of here is akin to that which, at a slightly earlier moment in the play's dénouement, he had bestowed upon those he had brought to the island. Just as Prospero has freed the Milanese nobles from the corrosive guilt occasioned by their sins, so he too solicits the audience's indulgence in a plea to be released from his own consciousness of his shortcomings as actor and dramatist. The prayer that he desires his audience to intone is one which 'frees all faults'.

The nature of the freedom that Prospero speaks of here is perhaps akin to that graciously acknowledged by Gonzalo, where he offers a brief overview of the ways in which the various players in the drama have all 'found' something that has redefined their lives. Unsurprisingly, this catalogue of redemptions begins with the marriages of Claribel and her brother, with the formation, that is, of the dynastic alliances that promise to perpetuate the social order and guarantee the endurance of the civilization to which they all hope to return. In comparison, Prospero's recovery of 'his dukedom / In a poor isle' seems almost incidental. The same cannot be said, however, of Gonzalo's final assertion that what 'all of us' have found is 'our selves / When no man was his own' (Act V, Scene 1, lines 236–241). This somewhat gnomic formulation is anticipated where he observes that Ferdinand found his wife 'where he himself was lost'. Gonzalo's assessment of the prince's plight, however, is more easily understood than the climax of his synopsis. That Ferdinand, thinking himself to be the sole survivor of a shipwreck, might have viewed himself as 'lost' seems natural. Yet what Gonzalo can mean in his insistence that both he and all of his fellows have had their selves restored to them is less clear. His analysis is, of course, characteristically sanguine and imprecise. It seems doubtful, for example, that all of the king's party have been so profoundly transformed when Antonio and Sebastian have shown themselves resistant to the sea-change that Prospero's art has

worked on Alonso. Nonetheless, Gonzalo's faith in the redemptive process as resulting in a state of self-possession is significant for the way his language invokes the play's central theme of sovereignty and dominion, while giving it an inflection that is both existential and religious. To be a slave or a servant is to be owned by someone else and so in some sense to be deprived of possession of one's own self. Although the guilt that attached itself to Gonzalo's role in the expulsion of the rightful Duke of Milan was mitigated by compassion, he shares in Alonso's culpability. Both men are sinners pardoned by Prospero and it is through this process of exculpation perhaps that they can be thought of as having recovered their own 'selves'. The notion that sin is a form of slavery from which Christian redemption offers liberation is a theological commonplace that has its origins in the Bible.²⁰ That it is the forgiveness of sins that bestows freedom is also, of course, an implication of Prospero's use in the epilogue of the word 'indulgence', a term that might be seen as an allusion to the Catholic practice of granting forgiveness on the condition of some recompense.

Beyond the moral freedom hinted at here, there are also perhaps other kinds of freedom that can be associated with the figure of Prospero the dramatist. We might argue, for instance, that what is at stake here is also the artistic freedoms of the stage. Certainly, there is some sense of this in Prospero's famous mediation in Act IV on the 'insubstantial pageant' of the 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.

(Act IV, Scene 1, lines 161–171)

For audiences and critics alike, the reference to 'the great globe itself' is an unmistakable confirmation that this is an allusion to 'the production of theatrical illusion'.²¹ While the burden of the speech is undoubtedly on the ephemerality, and by implication the insignificance, of all that can take place on a stage, Prospero also celebrates here the imaginative freedom of the creative, world-building mind, arguably as an analogue for Shakespeare's own untrammelled imaginative powers. The sense of vertigo induced by the 'cloud-capped towers' and the vision of all that is solid melting into air suggests that, like Ariel, his ethereal executor, Prospero too sees himself as a creature of the air. Through his magical arts, he too knows how to fly but his flights are transports of fancy performed in the ether of the poetic imagination. And this may

be, as Theseus muses in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a kind of madness—the ‘poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling’ (Act V, Scene 1, line 12)—but it is a disciplined madness. *The Tempest* is a play in which Shakespeare allowed himself to be constrained by the classical rules of drama that insisted on the unity of time and place. He also appears to have resolved to adhere to ‘the rules for correct five-act construction as they were understood by the more classically minded playwrights in his time’. Yet, for all this, Frank Kermode argues, the play exhibits great originality in its structure. And this is not in fact paradoxical since the guidelines devised by the ancient Greek dramatists were not intended to dampen a playwright’s creativity.²² So artistic freedom, too, can only flourish within the frameworks provided by convention, just as political freedom can only exist within the ‘bounds’ eschewed in jest by Gonzalo.

Let us return finally to Prospero’s rueful recognition that the ‘baseless fabric’ of the dramatist’s carefully wrought illusions must ‘dissolve’ to leave nothing behind. Jonathan Bate has seen this as evidence that the play is ‘profoundly skeptical of the power of the book and even of the theatre’.²³ Yet, *The Tempest* is all about transformation. The moral sea-changes that Ariel’s performances work on his audiences must, to some degree, reflect a residual faith in the theatre as cathartic, as affording an experience of the kind of freedom to feel and think that leads to empathy and change.

And this brings us, ultimately, back to the question of power. If Shakespeare is here contemplating the power he and his players wield over his audience’s emotions, that relationship is reversed in the end. For there is a risk involved, surely, in the way Prospero ‘deliberately casts the audience in the role he has relinquished’, placing the question of his own freedom in our hands.²⁴ He can only be free of the obligations that his magical powers entail by transferring that power to bind or enfranchise, to recreate and transform, to another authority. What the epilogue reveals, as Jefferey Rufo has argued, is that ‘even the most powerful people are forced to appeal to a higher authority for freedom’, and thus that ‘liberty is unhappily but forever married to power and authority’.²⁵ Freedom can only exist in relation to power, as an effect of the largesse of those who are above us. What can it mean, after all, to be one’s ‘own king’? The hierarchy can never be dismantled without being rebuilt in a new configuration. There can be no utopia, the play reminds us time and again, in which freedom is made unconditionally available to all.

Does freedom, then, ultimately reside in an allowance made by others in order that we might be ourselves? Like an enfranchised apprentice, we can only experience freedom in the company of our peers. And in this case, what freedom could Caliban expect once the society he has lived in dissolves, leaving him alone on the island? There can indeed be ‘no world but persons’. And Prospero, too, as he renounces the world of books and magic in which he has lived for so long, must face the difficulties of finding a role for himself in the ‘brave new world’ composed of so ‘many goodly creatures’, as Miranda famously declares, becoming for all her naivety her father’s teacher (Act V, Scene 1, lines 204–206). The alternative is to remain not so much the colonized ‘other’ as a prisoner in a state of alienation that is a world

without people.²⁶



Prospero will return to Milan, where he declares ‘every third thought shall be my grave’ (Act V, Scene 1, 346). Death, as it liberates from every obligation, will provide the ultimate release from bondage. We are reminded of the sad resignation of Prospero’s reference to ‘our little life [...] rounded with a sleep’. Ultimately, life is completed by death, the trajectory of our existence made whole by its end.²⁷ For the actor, there must come a final curtain drop. The blossom must, at the end, fall from the bough. And so we see that freedom for the immortal Ariel and for the aging Prospero are not the same thing. The play offers a discourse on freedom, but, as ever with Shakespeare, that discourse is irreducibly and compellingly complex.

¹ Robin Kirkpatrick, ‘After Prospero’, in *A Collection* (Cambridge: Chaddesden Press, 2013), pp. 27–29 (p. 27).

² Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 153. See also Daniel Vitkus, “‘Meaner Ministers’”: Mastery, Bondage, and Theatrical Labor in *The Tempest*’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works: Volume IV: The Poems, Problem Comedies, Late Plays*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 408–426: ‘The Old World and New World readings of *The Tempest* come together in the practice of coerced labor and in the concepts of freedom and bondage that define the play’s plot and dramatic “timing”’ (p. 410). The play is, as recent critical guide for schoolchildren observes, ‘full of instances of bondage, slavery, servitude, and confinement’ (Susan H. Krueger, *The Tempest*, *Shakespeare Explained* (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 2010), p. 90.)

³ Paul Brown, “‘This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine’”: *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dillimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 48–71 (p. 60).

⁴ B. J. Sokol, *Shakespeare and Tolerance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 164.

⁵ Vitkus, “‘Meaner Ministers’”, p. 415: ‘The role of Ariel was played by a boy actor, and boys were bought, sold, and “bound” in the theatre [...] Ariel’s desire for freedom is analogous to a boy actor’s desire to complete his years of bond-servitude and be freed. Throughout the play, Ariel’s labor is associated with the elapsing of carefully regulated, contractual time’. See also Andrew Gurr, ‘Industrious Ariel and Idle Caliban’, in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare’s Time*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 193–208: ‘The relationship is presented as if Ariel had to serve a term as his master’s apprentice before reaching the journeyman or ‘free’ status that normally went with the completion of an apprenticeship’. Though he goes on to suggest that the analogy is compromised somewhat by the ‘calculations of time’ in the play, and that after twelve years imprisoned in the pine and another twelve spent in Prospero’s service, Ariel is too old to be a London apprentice.

⁶ Vitkus, “‘Meaner Ministers’”, p. 419.

⁷ See, for example, Edward Dowden, ‘Shakspeare’s Last Plays’, in *Shakspeare: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art*, 3rd edn (London and New York: Harper, 1905), pp. 369–382; reprinted in *The Tempest: Critical Essays*, ed. by Patrick M. Murphy (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 140–149: ‘A thought which seems to run through the whole of *The Tempest*, appearing here and there like a colored thread in some web, is the thought that the true freedom of man consists in service’ (p. 142). Dowden imagines that, as he composed the play’s valedictory Epilogue, Shakespeare was thinking of his retirement from the stage to become an ‘English country gentleman’, a social position in which he would discover that ‘the highest freedom lies in the bonds of duty’ (p. 144). Similarly, Krueger, *The Tempest*, p. 91, views Ferdinand, whose ‘bonds [are] freely chosen’, as representing ‘the

highest freedom in the play’.

⁸ Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 152.

⁹ Gurr, ‘Industrious Ariel’, p. 194. See also David L. Hirst, *The Tempest, Text and Performance* (Macmillan: London, 1984), assertion that ‘Caliban is the unwilling slave, Ariel the more pliant servant’ (p. 21), cited by Gurr on p. 196.

¹⁰ Gurr ‘Industrious Ariel’, p. 201.

¹¹ John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare and His Comedies*, 2nd edn (London: Methuen, 1962; repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 248, contrasts Ferdinand’s ‘delight in service’ with both Ariel and Caliban’s desire to ‘escape from service’. On slavery in *The Tempest*, see Sokol, *Shakespeare and Tolerance*, pp. 155–168. For Sokol, the situations of both Ariel and Caliban can be seen to parallel the experiences of the Virginian Algonkians at the hands of European colonists (p. 165). On post-colonial readings of the play, see Jerry Brotton, ‘“This Tunis, Sir, was Carthage”: Contesting Colonialism in *The Tempest*’, in *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, ed. by A. Loomba and M. Orkin (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 23–42.

¹² Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism*, Accents on Shakespeare (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 180 note 22, points out that although the standard gloss entails seeing Caliban’s ‘get a new man’ as defiantly addressed to Prospero, it in fact makes more sense to read the ‘get’ as ‘become’, as Horace Howard Furness did, such that Caliban is anticipating his own imminent transformation.

¹³ Gurr ‘Industrious Ariel’, p. 204.

¹⁴ See David Norbrook, ‘“What Cares These Roarers for the Name of King?”: Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*’, in *William Shakespeare: The Tempest*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Sarbani Chaudhury, Longman Study Edition (Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2009), pp. 159–197 (p. 169 and more generally pp. 166–173 for Gonzalo’s utopia and its relation to Montaigne’s ‘Of Cannibals’. Norbrook concludes that ‘Gonzalo’s facile idealism [...] is undercut by a materialist critique’ (p. 171). On the contradiction in Gonzalo’s utopia ‘between hierarchy and community, between authority and liberty’, see also Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 152.

¹⁵ See Grace Tiffany, ‘Introduction’, in *The Tempest*, Evans Shakespeare Edition, ed. by Grace Tiffany (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 29–48 (p. 41): ‘[...] the play makes plain that Prospero, like Caliban, is a prisoner. First self-fettered to books in his Milanese cell, he is now trapped not only on the island but in his own vengeful anger towards Antonio and Alonso’.

¹⁶ Vitkus, ‘“Meaner Ministers”’, p. 421.

¹⁷ Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language* (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 300.

¹⁸ Jonathan Bate, ‘*The Tempest*: Introduction’, in William Shakespeare, *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 1–5 (p. 1).

¹⁹ Noting that ‘in recent decades leading Shakespearean scholars have tended to avoid reading *The Tempest* as autobiography’ in favour of post-colonialist interpretations, Vitkus, ‘Meaner Ministers’, p. 409–411, argues that the ‘power of Prospero over the other characters in the play suggests, not only the power of the colonial governor over his subjects and servants, but it also provides an image of a theatrical impresario controlling and exploiting the players and playwrights whom he has hired to put on plays’ (p. 411).

²⁰ See, for example, the following passages from The King James Bible: ‘Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage’ (Galatians 5. 1); ‘Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness’ (Romans 6. 16–18).

²¹ Vitkus, ‘“Meaner Ministers”’, p. 418.

²² Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language*, p. 286.

²³ Bate, ‘*The Tempest*: Introduction’, p. 4.

²⁴ Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 156: ‘he bequeaths to us the ambivalent authority and magical power to judge and complete *The Tempest* ourselves.’

²⁵ See, Jeffrey A. Rufo, ‘New Directions: “He needs will be Absolute Milan”’: The Political Thought of *The Tempest*’, in *The Tempest: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, Arden Early Modern Drama Guides (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 137–164 (p. 164), who thus locates the play within the history of political thought by suggesting that it anticipates ‘the advent of liberalism with its emphasis upon the supreme virtue of individual freedom in the context of the just state’.

²⁶ Paul Brown, ‘“This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine”’: *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dillimore and Alan Sinfield, 2nd edn

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 48–71 (p. 68), argues that in the end Prospero comes to identify himself with Caliban, the colonial ‘other’, ‘as both become interstitial’.

²⁷ Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language*, p. 298, notes the alternative reading given by Stephen Orgel, ed., *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 181, according to which the “‘rounded’” means “surrounded” (“our little life... being a brief awakening from an eternal sleep”).

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