



The Tempest : From Temporality to Transcendence

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The Tempest, Shakespeare's farewell play to the world stage has enchanted the audience by its bewildering range and variety. The corpus of the play is full of complex issues. Denotatively, the play seems to be a study in family feud, political antagonism, a vaulting ambition to outshine each other. One could easily notice Machiavellian traits even in characters like Alonso, Sebastian and in Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's Kingdom. The temporal aspects of the play also comprise the acculturating and civilizing aspects of Prospero and educating the subhuman creatures at sea – Ariel, Caliban and Sycorax. When we delve deep into the heart of the play, we immediately notice that here there are elements and happenings suggesting to us a sort of timelessness, a world beyond world, a larger reality cutting through illusions and conditionings. The present paper is an attempt to study the aspects which attribute this romance a kind of transcendentality, a hyper-reality making the readers and audience speechless wonderers at Divine designs of mystery pervading humanity.

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When the play opens, the dethroned Prospero and his daughter Miranda are at sea, amidst tempestuous noise of thunder and lightening. Informing his daughter of his perfidious and usurper brother (Antonio), he also tells us about his attitude to life. He states about himself;

Being so reputed in dignity,
and for the liberal arts
without a parallel, those being
all my study – And
rapt in secret studies. (I. II. 3)

Expressing his idealism and metaphysical quest he says that his whole life was “dedicated to closeness and the bettering of mind” (I. II. 3) One cannot help feeling surprised to see another side of the picture when Prospero enters the world of monsters and fairies at the sea. When Prospero and Miranda come across Caliban, the former feel disgust at the latter's monstrosity and bestiality. Prospero calls him, “most lying slave” (I. II. 6) and Miranda calls him ‘Abhorred slave’, ‘most brutish’ (I. II. 6) belonging to a ‘vile race’ (I, II, 6). At the outset, Caliban revolts against their way of dominance and intrusion into the carefree, independent world of fairies and spirits. Showing his natural concern with his own language and belonging, he is not ready to accept the outsider's language and culture. Caliban starts cursing them for their invasion :

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. (I. II. 6)

One recalls here the observations of *Foucault* and *G.C Spivak* who treat the lesser race, aboriginals or the colonized as subject of violence by the outsiders who seem to encroach upon their originality. Referring to Foucault's ‘epistemic violence’, Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak says



that such violence is marked by the “remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as other.” (Spivak, 266)

But then very soon, the cloud of doubt and racial gaps b/n the outsiders (Prospero & Miranda) and the natives (Caliban) thin out as the latter realize the former’s power of art and magic to reform and enlighten others. Unlike that of the black magic/necromancy of Doctor Faustus, Prospero employs his art and magic to enoble and rectify the otherwise malicious motif and devil attitude of his brother (Antonio) and his conspirators. Freedom-loving as Prospero is, he does not want to enslave and subjugate others, but to set his subordinates free and fine. His very urge is evident when he assures Ariel that : “Thou shall be as free / As mountain winds, but then exactly do / All points of my command” (I. II. 8). Here it is pertinent to mention that Prospero does not suffer from what Rudyard Kipling would call in one of his poems ‘Whiteman’s Burden’. In thought and action, Prospero is committed to his fine art of magic and meditative wisdom towards bringing about the reconciliation of what B.J. Sokol call “nature and nurture in order to combine and integrate.” (Sokol, 195)

Even the Lord like Adrian admits that this island is “uninhabitable and inaccessible and it must needs be of subtle, tender and delicate temperance” (II. I. 9). Through Gonzalo, the good soul and a loyal courtier to Prospero, we come to notice that both of them are devoted to establish an ideal society where variety and complexity of human nature should rule, rather than merely political and monotonous system based on stereotypes :

I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things..... 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. 10)

He dreams that

All things in common nature should produce
without sweet or indeavour Treason or felony,
...but nature should bring forth of its
own kind, all foison, all abundance, to feed
my innocent people. (II. I. 10)

In fact, Gonzalo recalls the argumentative critical characters of Plato’s *The Republic* and Thomas More’s *Utopia* who flout the tyranny and royalty and make a powerful plea for the ideal society marked by harmony and integrity. As Plato’s persona advocates the balancing of wisdom by justice, harmony and friendship, so does Gonzalo. Prospero is also committed to set up a republic, a unique commonwealth. (Plato, 29)

In fact, along with Prospero he wishes to govern with perfection and grandeur which would excel the “Golden age” (II. I. 10). Even the monster like Caliban sings of freedom from his new master so that he may regain his identity as a new man :

Has a new master – Get a new man.
Freedom, high-day ! high-day, freedom!
Freedom high-day, freedom. (I. II. 14)

In fact, both Prospero and Gonzalo talk of a newly emerging social order marked by commonness and republicanism thereby affecting the interest of the greedy and possessive landlords and agriculturalists. More’s *Utopia* also aptly touches upon this theme.



Dramatically speaking, Prospero's art and magic bring about a transformation of his enemies into friends, monsters into humans. It is quite unlike Nietzsche's superman that Prospero does not keep himself isolated from his common brethren. Ferdinand, the son of his brother's friend (King of Naples) and his Prospero's daughter (Miranda) come closer and their love results in marriage. When they get married and the attitude of both Antonio and King of Naples become positive and undergoes repentance. The sea spirits are already taught language, manners and culture and they stand free. Miranda is wonder-struck to see the freshness, happiness, beauty and variety of world around her :

O, Wonder !
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
That has such people in't! (V.I. 25)

In this matrimonial harmony, Juno descends in her car, approaches rich Ceres to add to the entertainment and merriment of the moment. Iris celebrates the ecstasy of these blessed lovers-turned couple in the glowing words :

A contract of true love to celebrate
And some donation freely to estate
On the best lovers. (IV. I. 20)

The way Juno and Iris call upon all the nymphs and spirits to sing and shower their blessings on the young lovers – turned – couple show the heaven of freedom and gaiety. All other residents are ready to enjoy to the full least caring for authority of Prospero and other royal personages. Stephano, a drunken butcher looks for nothing but music and Caliban finds the liquor other than earthly. It seems that in their gay, carefree, ridiculous, uninhibited interaction and outbursts they recall what *Bakhtin* would call carnivalesque and multiple voices from all the nooks and corners, to the exclusion of none.

It is amidst heavenly music and dance of the earthly and ethereal spirits that the happy marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand takes place. Even Ferdinand feels elated and transformed. The new found bliss he got is heavenly. He outbursts:

This is a most majestic vision, and
harmonious charmingly. May I be bold
to think these spirits... Let me live here ever;
So rare a wond' red father and a wore/Make
this place paradise. (IV. I. 20)

According freedom and individuality to Ariel and Caliban and forgiving his wrong brother and his accomplices lets us know about his newly got wisdom about life i.e. virtue of forgiveness is superior to that of vengeance. His large-heartedness, his nobility and his compassionate love of all, to the exclusion of none is expressed in these words thereby representing his spiritual progress:

With my nobler reason 'gainst my fury Do I
take part; the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance ;
they being penitent, the sole drift of my purpose doth
extend not a frown further. (V. I. 35)



Prospero realizes the inscrutability of forces which do work on man. Like an enlightened sage and philosopher, he winds up his magic and art to unravel the further mystery surrounding us as if like Hamlet, he seemed to have realized,

There are more things in heaven and earth,
than are dreamt in our philosophy. (I. V. 1038)

Prospero seems to experience the limitations of human drama and illimitation and endlessness of divine comedy beyond human comprehension. He states it philosophically :

Our revels now are ended.
These our actors, as I foretold you,
Were all spirits and are melted into
thin air; And like the baseless fabric
Of this vision, The cloud-capp'd
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. (IV. I. 21)

It seems that Prospero does not stop but goes on journeying towards the unknown, the ultimate. Rather like *Coleridge's* Ancient Mariner, he emerges as “a sadder and a wiser man, he rose the morrow morn” (Coleridge, 250). Prospero, like a true voyager and a metaphysical quester goes on moving and moving further. His physical journey is over, but then his spiritual voyage begins afresh. He appears to be a reborn soul, quite free from pride and prejudice, ambition and inhibition willing to surrender freely to prayer and devotion. Even the closing words spoken by Prospero in the *Epilogue* point to his magnanimity and universal wisdom true to all ages and times :

And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
.....
As you from crimes would pardoned be
Let your indulgence set me free. (V. i. 26)

To sum up, *The Tempest* begins and proceeds through the temporal web of socio-political challenges and vicissitudes. But then, the play undergoes profound transformation to suggest timeless and transcendental meanings and suggestions. In fact, the kind of tranquillity and wisdom Shakespeare's Prospero experiences towards the end of his life has a prophetic insight profoundly true to all ages and times. *Tolman's* observation rings true when he states:

Great poets sum up and interpret the entire development of civilization upto their own time. The greatest pass on from this to forecast in some degree what is to come. Seeing the invisible future, they become true seers, and do attain to something like prophetic strain. (Tolman, 298)



Truly, *The Tempest* ends up with endless voyage of human soul always awaiting betterment. Perhaps here lies the timeless appeal and transcendental quality of *The Tempest*, in particular and Shakespeare's tragedies/tragic-comedies, in general.

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