

The New Historicism: Studies in Cultural Poetics
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SHAKESPEAREAN NEGOTIATIONS

*The Circulation of
Social Energy in
Renaissance England*

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What I have been describing here is the theatrical appropriation and staging of a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social practice. But the strategy of salutary anxiety is not simply reflected in a secondhand way by the work of art, because the practice itself is already implicated in the artistic traditions and institutions out of which this particular representation, *The Tempest*, has emerged. Latimer may have been indifferent or hostile to the drama and to literature in general, but his tale of the Cambridge prisoner seems shaped by literary conventions, earlier tales of wronged innocence and royal pardons. And if the practice he exemplifies helps to empower theatrical representations, fictive representations have themselves helped to empower his practice.²⁵ So too Dudley Carleton, watching men about to go to their deaths, thinks of the last act of a play, and when a pardon is granted, the spectators applaud. This complex circulation between the social dimension of an aesthetic strategy and the aesthetic dimension of a social strategy is difficult to grasp because the strategy in question has an extraordinarily long and tangled history, one whose aesthetic roots go back at least as far as Aristotle's *Poetics*. But we may find a more manageable, though still complex, model in the relation between *The Tempest* and one of its presumed sources, William Strachey's account of the tempest that struck an English fleet bound for the fledgling colony at Jamestown.²⁶

Strachey's account, with its brayura description of a violent storm at sea and its tale of Englishmen providentially cast ashore on an uninhabited island rumored to be devil haunted, is likely, along with other New World materials, to have helped shape *The Tempest*. The play was performed long before Strachey's narrative was printed in Purchas's *Pilgrims* as "A true reportory of the wrack, and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight," but scholars presume that Shakespeare read a manuscript version of the work, which takes the form of a confidential letter written to a certain "noble lady."²⁷ My interest is not the particular verbal echoes, which have been painstakingly researched since Malone, in 1808 first called attention to them, but the significance of the relation between the two texts, or rather between the institutions that the

undo the tribulations that he unwittingly and unwittingly brought about years before. At that time, absorbed in his occult studies, he had been unaware of the dangers around him; now as the condition of a return to his dukedom, he himself brings those dangers to the center of his retreat. This center, whether we regard it as emblematic of the dominant religious, aesthetic, or political institution, is not the still point in a turbulent world but the point at which the anxieties that shape the character of others are screwed up to their highest pitch. Precisely from that point—and as a further exemplification of the salutary nature of anxiety—reconciliation and pardon can issue forth. This pardon is not a release from the power in which Prospero holds everyone around him but, as with Latimer and James I, its ultimate expression.²⁸

Shakespeare goes beyond Latimer and James, however, in envisaging a case in which anxiety does not appear to have its full redeeming effect, a case in which the object of attention refuses to be fashioned inwardly, refuses even to acknowledge guilt, and yet is pardoned. The generosity of the pardon in this instance is inseparable from a demonstration of supreme force. "For you, most wicked sir," Prospero says to his brother Antonio,

whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault—all of them; and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know
Thou must restore.

(5.1.130-34)

Antonio's silence at this point suggests that he remains unrepentant, but it also expresses eloquently the paralysis that is the hallmark of extreme anxiety. It has been argued convincingly that the truculence of the villains at the close of the play marks the limit of Prospero's power—as Prospero's failure to educate Caliban has already shown, the strategy of salutary anxiety cannot remake the inner life of everyone—yet at the very moment the limit is marked, the play suggests that it is relatively inconsequential. It would no doubt be preferable to receive the appropriate signs of inward gratitude from everyone, but Prospero will have to content himself in the case of Antonio with the full restoration of his dukedom.²⁴

texts serve. For it is important to grasp that we are dealing not with the reflections of isolated individuals musing on current events but with expressions whose context is corporate and institutional.

William Strachey was a shareholder and secretary of the Virginia Company's colony at Jamestown; his letter on the events of 1609-10 was unpublished until 1625, not for want of interest but because the Virginia Company was engaged in a vigorous propaganda and financial campaign on behalf of the colony, and the company's leaders found Strachey's report too disturbing to allow it into print. Shakespeare too was a shareholder in a joint-stock company, the King's Men, as well as its principal playwright and sometime actor; *The Tempest* also remained unpublished for years, again presumably not for want of interest but because the theater company resisted losing control of its playbook. Neither joint-stock company was a direct agent of the crown: despite the legal fiction that they were retainers of the monarch, the King's Men could not have survived through royal patronage alone, and they were not in the same position of either dependence or privilege as other household servants; the crown had deliberately withdrawn from the direction of the Virginia Company. Royal protection and support, of course, remained essential in both cases, but the crown would not assume responsibility, nor could either company count on royal financial support in times of need. Committed for their survival to attracting investment capital and turning a profit, both companies depended on their ability to market stories that would excite, interest, and attract supporters. Both Strachey and Shakespeare were involved in unusually direct and intricate ways in every aspect of their companies' operations: Strachey as shareholder, adventurer, and eventually secretary; Shakespeare as shareholder, actor, and playwright. Because of these multiple positions, both men probably identified intensely with the interests of their respective companies.

I want to propose that the relation between the play and its alleged source is a relation between joint-stock companies.²⁸ I do not mean that there was a direct, contractual connection.²⁹ As we have already seen with Latimer, the transfer of cultural practices and powers depends not upon contracts but upon networks of resemblance. In the case of Strachey and Shakespeare, there *are*, in point of fact, certain intriguing institutional affiliations: as Charles Mills Gayley observed many years ago, a remarkable number of social and

professional connections link Shakespeare and the stockholders and directors of the Virginia Company; moreover, Strachey in 1605 wrote a prefatory sonnet commending Jonson's *Sejanus* and in 1606 is listed as a shareholder in an acting company known as the Children of the Queen's Revels, the company that had taken over the Blackfriars Theater from Richard Burbage.³⁰ Still, I should emphasize that these affiliations do not amount to a direct transfer of properties; we are dealing with a system of mimetic rather than contractual exchange. The conjunction of Strachey's unpublished letter and Shakespeare's play signals an institutional circulation of culturally significant narratives. And as we shall see, this circulation has as its central concern the public management of anxiety.

Strachey tells the story of a state of emergency and a crisis of authority. The "unmerciful tempest" that almost sank Sir Thomas Gates's ship, the *Sea Venture*, provoked an immediate collapse of the distinction between those who labor and those who rule, a distinction, we should recall, that is at the economic and ideological center of Elizabethan and Jacobean society: "Then men might be seen to labour, I may well say, for life, and the better sort, even our Governour, and Admiral themselves, not refusing their turn. . . . And it is most true, such as in all their life times had never done hours work before (their minds now helping their bodies) were able twice forty eight hours together to toil with the best" (in Purchas, 19:9-11). "The best"—the violence of the storm has turned Strachey's own language upside down: now it is the common sea-men, ordinarily despised and feared by their social superiors, who are, as the Romans called their aristocrats, the *optimi viri*, the best of men.³¹ Indeed the storm had quite literally a leveling force: while the governor was "both by his speech and authority heartening every man unto his labour," a great wave "struck him from the place where he sat, and groveled him, and all us about him on our faces, beating together with our breaths all thoughts from our bosoms, else then that we were now sinking" (10).

Even after the ship had run aground in the Bermudas and the one hundred fifty men, women, and children on board had been saved, the crisis of authority was not resolved; indeed it only intensified then, not because of a leveling excess of anxiety but because of its almost complete absence in the colonists. The alarm of the rulers makes itself felt in quirks of Strachey's style. He reports, for

example, that many palmettos were cut down for their edible tops, but the report has a strange nervous tone, as the plants are comically turned into wealthy victims of a popular uprising: "Many an ancient Burgher was therefore heaved at, and fell not for his place, but for his head: for our common people, whose bellies never had ears, made it no breach of Charity in their hot bloods and tall stomachs to murder thousands of them" (19).

The strain registered here in the tone stands for concerns that are partially suppressed in the published text, concerns that are voiced in a private letter written in December 1610 by Richard Martin, secretary of the Virginia Company in London, to Strachey, who was by then in Jamestown. Martin asks Strachey for a full confidential report on "the nature & quality of the soil, & how it is like to serve you without help from hence, the manners of the people, how the Barbarians are content with your being there, but especially how our own people do brook their obedience, how they endure labor, whether willingly or upon constraint, how they live in the exercise of Religion, whether out of conscience or for fashion, And generally what ease you have in the government there, & what hope of success."³²

Here the deepest fears lie not with the human or natural resources of the New World but with the discipline of the English colonists and common seamen. And the principal questions—whether obedience is willing or forced, whether religious observance is sincere or feigned—suggest an interest in inner states, as if the shareholders in the Virginia Company believed that only with a set of powerful inward restraints could the colonists be kept from rebelling at the first sign of the slippage or relaxation of authority. The company had an official institutional interest in shaping and controlling the minds of its own people. But the Bermuda shipwreck revealed the difficulty of this task as well as its importance: set apart from the institutional and military safeguards established at Jamestown, Bermuda was an experimental space, a testing ground where the extent to which disciplinary anxiety had been internalized by the ordinary venturers could be measured.

The results were not encouraging. As Strachey and others remark, Bermuda was an extraordinarily pleasant surprise: the climate was healthful, the water was pure, there were no native inhabitants to contend with, and, equally important, there was no

shortage of food. Tortoises—"such a kind of meat, as a man can neither absolutely call Fish nor Flesh" (24)³³—were found in great number, and the skies were dark with great flocks of birds:

Our men found a pretty way to take them, which was by standing on the Rocks or Sands by the Sea side, and hollowing, laughing, and making the strangest out-cry that possibly they could: with the noise whereof the Birds would come flocking to that place, and settle upon the very arms and head of him that so cried, and still creep nearer and nearer, answering the noise themselves: by which our men would weigh them with their hands, and which weighed heaviest they took for the best and let the others alone. (Purchas, 19:22-23)

Even to us, living for the most part in the confident expectation of full bellies, this sounds extraordinary enough; to seventeenth-century voyagers, whose ordinary condition was extreme want and who had dragged themselves from the violent sea onto an unknown shore with the likely prospect of starvation and death, such extravagant abundance must have seemed the fantastic realization of old folk dreams of a land where the houses were roofed with pies and the pigs ran about with little knives conveniently stuck in their precooked sides. In this Land of Cockaigne setting, far removed not only from England but from the hardships of Jamestown, the authority of Sir Thomas Gates and his lieutenants was anything but secure. For the perception that Bermuda was a providential deliverance contained within it a subversive corollary: why leave? why press on to a hungry garrison situated in a pestiferous swamp and in grave tension with the surrounding Algonquian tribesmen?³⁴

According to Strachey, Gates was initially concerned less about his own immediate authority than about the possible consequences of his absence in Virginia. The *Sea Venture* had come to grief in the tempest, but Gates thought (correctly, as it happened) that the other two vessels might have reached their destination, and this thought brought not only consolation but anxiety, which focused, in characteristic Renaissance fashion, on the ambitions of the younger generation. Fearful about "what innovation and tumult might happily [happily] arise, among the younger and ambitious spirits of the new companies to arrive in Virginia" (26) in his absence, Gates wished to construct new ships as quickly as possible to continue on to Jamestown, but the sailors and the colonists alike began to grumble at this plan. In Virginia, they reasoned, "nothing but wretchedness and

labour must be expected, with many wants and a churlish entreaty"; in Bermuda, all things "at ease and pleasure might be enjoyed" (29) without hardship or threatening. There is, at least as Strachey reports it, virtually no internalization of the ideology of colonialism; the voyagers appear to think of themselves as forced to endure a temporary exile from home. As long as "they were (for the time) to lose the fruition both of their friends and Country, as good, and better it were for them, to repose and seat them where they should have the least outward wants the while" (29). And to this dangerous appeal—the appeal, in Strachey's words, of "liberty, and fulness of sensuality" (35)—was added a still more dangerous force: religious dissent.

Arguments against leaving Bermuda began to be voiced not only among the "idle, untoward, and wretched number of the many" (29) but among the educated few. One of these, Stephen Hopkins, "alleged substantial arguments, both civil and divine (the Scripture falsely quoted) that it was no breach of honesty, conscience, nor Religion, to decline from the obedience of the Governour, or refuse to go any further, led by his authority (except it so pleased themselves) since the authority ceased when the wrack was committed, and with it, they were all then freed from the government of any man" (30–31). Hopkins evidently accepted the governor's authority as a contractual obligation that continued only so long as the enterprise remained on course. Once there was a swerve from the official itinerary, that authority, not granted a general or universal character, lapsed, and the obedience of the subject gave way to the will and pleasure of each man.³⁵ We cannot know, of course, if Hopkins said anything so radical, but this is how his "substantial arguments, both civil and divine," sounded to those in command. In Strachey's account, at least, the shipwreck had led to a profound questioning of authority that seems to anticipate the challenge posed by mid-seventeenth-century radicals like Winstanley. What are the boundaries of authority? What is the basis of its claim to be obeyed? How much loyalty does an individual owe to a corporation?

When the seditious words were reported to Gates, the governor convened a martial court and sentenced Hopkins to death, but the condemned man was so tearfully repentant that he received a pardon. This moving scene—the saving public display of anxiety—evidently did not settle the question of authority, however, for

shortly after, yet another mutiny arose, this time led by a gentleman named Henry Paine. When Paine was warned that he risked execution for "insolency," he replied, Strachey reports, "with a settled and bitter violence, and in such unreverent terms, as I should offend the modest ear too much to express it in his own phrase; but its contents were, how that the Governour had no authority of that quality, to justify upon any one (how mean soever in the colony) an action of that nature, and therefore let the Governour (said he) kiss, &c." (34). When these words, "with the omitted additions," were reported, the governor, "who had now the eyes of the whole Colony fixed upon him," condemned Paine "to be instantly hanged; and the ladder being ready, after he had made many confessions, he earnestly desired, being a Gentleman, that he might be shot to death, and towards the evening he had his desire, the Sun and his life setting together" (34). "He had his desire"—Strachey's sarcasm is also perhaps the representation of what those in authority regarded as an intolerable nonchalance, a refusal to perform those rituals of tearful repentance that apparently saved Hopkins's life. In effect Paine is killed to set an example, condemned to die for cursing authority, for a linguistic crime, for violating discursive decorum, for inadequate anxiety in the presence of power.

In his narrative, Strachey represents the norms Paine has challenged by means of his "&c."—the noble lady to whom he is writing, like Mr. Kurtz's intended, must be sheltered from the awful truth, here from the precise terms of the fatal irreverent challenge to authority. The suppression of the offending word enacts in miniature the reimposition of salutary anxiety by a governor "so solicitous and careful, whose both example . . . and authority, could lay shame, and command upon our people" (28). The governor is full of care—therefore resistant to the lure of the island—and he manages, even in the midst of a paradisaical plenty, to impose this care upon others. When the governor himself writes to a fellow officer explaining why all of the colonists must be compelled to leave the island, he invokes not England's imperial destiny or Christianity's advancement but the Virginia Company's investment: "The meanest in the whole Fleet stood the Company in no less than twenty pounds, for his own personal Transportation, and things necessary to accompany him" (36). On the strength of this compelling mo-

tive, new ships were built, and in an impressive feat of navigation, the whole company finally reached Jamestown.

Upon their arrival Gates and his people found the garrison in desperate condition—starving, confused, terrorized by hostile and treacherous Indians, and utterly demoralized. In Gates's view, the problem was almost entirely one of discipline, and he addressed it by imposing a set of "orders and instructions" upon the colony that transformed the "government" of Jamestown "into an absolute command." The orders were published in 1612 by Strachey as the *Laws Divine, Moral, and Martial*, an exceptionally draconian code by which whipping, mutilation, and the death penalty might be imposed for a wide range of offenses, including blasphemy, insubordination, even simple criticism of the Virginia Company and its officers. These orders, the first martial law code in America, suspended the traditional legal sanctions that governed the lives of Englishmen, customary codes based on mutual constraints and obligations, and instituted in their stead the grim and self-consciously innovative logic of a state of emergency. The company's claim upon the colonists had become total. The group that had been shipwrecked in Bermuda passed from dreams of absolute freedom to the imposition of absolute control.

Such then were the narrative materials that passed from Strachey to Shakespeare, from the Virginia Company to the King's Men: a violent tempest, a providential shipwreck on a strange island, a crisis in authority provoked by both danger and excess, a fear of lower-class disorder and upper-class ambition, a triumphant affirmation of absolute control linked to the manipulation of anxiety and to a departure from the island. But the swerve away from these materials in *The Tempest* is as apparent as their presence: the island is not in America but in the Mediterranean; it is not uninhabited—Ariel and Caliban (and, for that matter, Sycorax) were present before the arrival of Prospero and Miranda; none of the figures are in any sense colonists; the departure is for home rather than a colony and entails not an unequivocal heightening of authority but a partial diminution, signaled in Prospero's abjuration of magic.

I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

(5.1.54-57)³⁶

If the direction of Strachey's narrative is toward the promulgation of the martial law codes, the direction of *The Tempest* is toward forgiveness. And if that forgiveness is itself the manifestation of supreme power, the emblem of that power remains marriage rather than punishment.

The changes I have sketched are signs of the process whereby the Bermuda narrative is made negotiable, turned into a currency that may be transferred from one institutional context to another. The changes do not constitute a coherent critique of the colonial discourse, but they function as an unmooring of its elements so as to confer upon them the currency's liquidity. Detached from their context in Strachey's letter, these elements may be transformed and recombined with materials drawn from other writers about the New World who differ sharply from Strachey in their interests and motives—Montaigne, Sylvester Jourdain, James Rosier, Robert Eden, Peter Martyr—and then integrated in a dramatic text that draws on a wide range of discourse, including pastoral and epic poetry, the lore of magic and witchcraft, literary romance, and a remarkable number of Shakespeare's own earlier plays.

The ideological effects of the transfer to *The Tempest* are ambiguous. On the one hand, the play seems to act out a fantasy of mind control, to celebrate absolute patriarchal rule, to push to an extreme the dream of order, epic achievement, and teleological justification implicit in Strachey's text. The lower-class resistance Strachey chronicles becomes in Shakespeare the drunken rebellion of Stephano and Trinculo, the butler and jester who, suddenly finding themselves freed from their masters, are drawn to a poor man's fantasy of mastery: "the King and all our company else being drown'd, we will inherit here" (2.2.174-75). Similarly, the upper-class resistance of Henry Paine is transformed into the murderous treachery of Sebastian, in whom the shipwreck arouses dreams of an escape from subordination to his older brother, the king of Naples, just as Antonio had escaped subordination to his older brother Prospero:

Sebastian: I remember
You did supplant your brother Prospero.

Antonio: True.
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.

(2.1.270-74)

By invoking fratricidal rivalry here Shakespeare is not only linking the Strachey materials to his own long-standing theatrical preoccupations but also supplementing the contractual authority of a governor like Sir Thomas Gates with the familial and hence culturally sanctified authority of the eldest son. To rise up against such a figure, as Claudius had against old Hamlet or Edmund against Edgar, is an assault not only on a political structure but on the moral and natural order of things: it is an act that has, as Claudius says, "the primal eldest curse upon't." The assault is magically thwarted by Ariel, the indispensable agent of Prospero's "art"; hence that art, potentially a force of disorder, spiritual violence, and darkness, is confirmed as the agent of legitimacy. Through his mastery of the occult, Prospero withholds food from his enemies, spies upon them, listens to their secret conversations, monitors their movements, blocks their actions, keeps track of their dealings with the island's native inhabitant, torments and disciplines his servants, defeats conspiracies against his life. A crisis of authority—deposition from power, exile, impotence—gives way through the power of his art to a full restoration. From this perspective Prospero's magic is the romance equivalent of martial law.

Yet *The Tempest* seems to raise troubling questions about this authority. The great storm with which the play opens has some of the leveling force of the storm that struck the *Sea Venture*. To be sure, unlike Strachey's gentlemen, Shakespeare's nobles refuse the boatswain's exasperated demand that they share the labor, "Work you then," but their snarling refusal—"Hang, cur! hang, you whoreson, insolent noisemaker!" (1.1.42-44)—far from securing their class superiority, represents them as morally beneath the level of the common seamen.³⁷ Likewise, Shakespeare's king, Alonso, is not "groveled" by a wave, but—perhaps worse—he is peremptorily ordered below by the harried boatswain: "What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin! silence! trouble us not" (1.1.16-18). And if we learn eventually that these roarers are in fact produced by a king—in his name and through his command of a magical language—this knowledge does not altogether cancel our perception of the storm's indifference to the ruler's authority and the idle aristocrat's pride of place.

The perception would perhaps be overwhelmed by the display of Prospero's power were it not for the questions that are raised about

this very power. A Renaissance audience might have found the locus of these questions in the ambiguous status of magic, an ambiguity deliberately heightened by the careful parallels drawn between Prospero and the witch Sycorax and by the attribution to Prospero of claims made by Ovid's witch Medea. But for a modern audience, at least, the questions center on the figure of Caliban, whose claim to the legitimate possession of the island—"This island's mine by Sycorax my mother" (1.2.331)—is never really answered, or rather is answered by Prospero only with hatred, torture, and enslavement.³⁸ Though he treats Caliban as less than human, Prospero finally expresses, in a famously enigmatic phrase, a sense of connection with his servant-monster, standing anxious and powerless before him: "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-76). He may intend these words only as a declaration of ownership, but it is difficult not to hear in them some deeper recognition of affinity, some half-conscious acknowledgment of guilt. At the play's end the princely magician appears anxious and powerless before the audience to beg for indulgence and freedom.

As the epilogue is spoken, Prospero's magical power and princely authority—figured in the linked abilities to raise winds and to pardon offenders—pass, in a startling display of the circulation of social energy, from the performer onstage to the crowd of spectators. In the play's closing moments the marginal, vulnerable actor, more than half-visible beneath the borrowed robes of an assumed dignity, seems to acknowledge that the imaginary forces with which he has played reside ultimately not in himself or in the playwright but in the multitude. The audience is the source of his anxiety, and it holds his release quite literally in its hands: without the crowd's applause his "ending is despair" (Epilogue, 15). This admission of dependence includes a glance at the multitude's own vulnerability:

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

(Epilogue, 19-20)

But it nonetheless implicates the prince as well as the player in the experience of anxiety and the need for pardon.

Furthermore, even if we may argue that such disturbing or even subversive reflections are contained within the thematic structure of the play, a structure that seems to support the kind of authority

served by Strachey, we must acknowledge that the propagandists for colonization found little to admire in the theater. That is, the most disturbing effects of the play may have been located not in what may be perceived in the text by a subtle interpreter—implied criticisms of colonialism or subversive doubts about its structures of authority—but in the phenomenon of theatrical representation itself. In 1593 Sir Thomas Smith reminded each captain in Virginia that his task was “to lay the foundation of a good and . . . an eternal colony for your posterity, not a May game or stage play.”³⁹ Festive, evanescent, given over to images of excess, stage plays function here as the symbolic opposite to the lasting colony. So too in a sermon preached in London in 1610 to a group of colonists about to set out for Virginia, William Crashaw declared that the enemies of the godly colony were the devil, the pope, and the players—the latter angry “because we resolve to suffer no Idle persons in Virginia.”⁴⁰ Similarly, at the end of the martial law text, Strachey records an exceptionally long prayer that he claims was “duly said Morning and Evening upon the Court of Guard, either by the Captain of the watch himself, or by some one of his principal officers.” If Strachey is right, twice a day the colonists would have heard, among other uplifting sentiments, the following: “Whereas we have by undertaking this plantation undergone the reproofs of the base world, inso-much as many of our own brethren laugh us to scorn, O Lord we pray thee fortify us against this temptation: let *Sarballat*, & *Tobias*, Papiests & players, & such other *Ammonites* & *Horonites* the scum & dregs of the earth, let them mock such as help to build up the walls of Jerusalem, and they that be filthy, let them be filthy still.”⁴¹ Even if the content of a play seemed acceptable, the mode of entertainment itself was the enemy of the colonial plantation.

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What then is the relation between the theater and the surrounding institutions? Shakespeare’s play offers us a model of unresolved and unresolvable doubleness: the island in *The Tempest* seems to be an image of the place of pure fantasy, set apart from surrounding discourses; and it seems to be an image of the place of power, the place in which all individual discourses are organized by the half-invisible ruler. By extension art is a well-demarcated, marginal,

private sphere, the realm of insight, pleasure, and isolation; and art is a capacious, central, public sphere, the realm of proper political order made possible through mind control, coercion, discipline, anxiety, and pardon. The aesthetic space—or, more accurately, the commercial space of the theatrical joint-stock company—is constituted by the simultaneous appropriation of and swerving from the discourse of power.

And this doubleness in effect produces two different accounts of the nature of mimetic economy. In one account, aesthetic representation is unlike all other exchanges because it takes nothing; art is pure plenitude. Everywhere else there is scarcity: wretches cling to “an acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, any thing” (1.1.66–67), and one person’s gain is another’s loss. In works of art, by contrast, things can be imitated, staged, reproduced without any loss or expense; indeed what is borrowed seems enhanced by the borrowing, for nothing is used up, nothing fades. The magic of art resides in the freedom of the imagination and hence in liberation from the constraints of the body. What is produced elsewhere only by intense labor is produced in art by a magical command whose power Shakespeare figures in Ariel’s response to Prospero’s call:

All hail, great master, grave sir, hail! I come
To answer thy best pleasure; be’t to fly,
To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
On the curl’d clouds. To thy strong bidding, task
Ariel, and all his quality.

(1.2.189–93)

This account of art as pure plenitude is perhaps most perfectly imaged in Prospero’s wedding masque, with its goddesses and nymphs and dancing reapers, its majestic vision of

Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust’ring bunches growing,
Plants with goodly burthen bowing.

(4.1.111–13)

But the prayer at the end of the martial law code reminds us that there is another version of mimetic economy, one in which aesthetic exchanges, like all other exchanges, always involve loss, even if it is cunningly hidden; in which aesthetic value, like all

other value, actively depends upon want, craving, and absence; in which art itself—fantasy ridden and empty—is the very soul of scarcity. This version too finds its expression in *The Tempest* in the high cost Prospero has paid for his absorption in his secret studies, in Ariel's grumbings about his "pains" and "toil," and in the sudden vanishing—"to a strange, hollow, and confused noise"—of the masque that had figured forth plenitude and in Prospero's richly anxious meditation on the "baseless fabric" of his own glorious vision.

It is this doubleness that Shakespeare's joint-stock company bequeathed to its cultural heirs. And the principal beneficiary in the end was not the theater but a different institution, the institution of literature. Shakespeare served posthumously as a principal shareholder in this institution as well—not as a man of the theater but as the author of the book. During Shakespeare's lifetime, the King's Men showed no interest in and may have actually resisted the publication of a one-volume collection of their famous playwright's work; the circulation of such a book was not in the interests of their company. But other collective enterprises, including the educational system in which this study is implicated, have focused more on the text than on the playhouse.

For if Shakespeare himself imagined Prospero's island as the Great Globe Theater, succeeding generations found that island more compactly and portably figured in the bound volume. The passage from the stage to the book signals a larger shift from the joint-stock company, with its primary interest in protecting the common property, to the modern corporation, with its primary interest in the expansion and profitable exploitation of a network of relations. Unlike the Globe, which is tied to a particular place and time and community, unlike even the traveling theater company, with its constraints of personnel and stage properties and playing space, the book is supremely portable. It may be readily detached from its immediate geographical and cultural origins, its original producers and consumers, and endlessly reproduced, circulated, exchanged, exported to other times and places.⁴²

The plays, of course, continue to live in the theater, but Shakespeare's achievement and the cult of artistic genius erected around the achievement have become increasingly identified with his collected works. Those works have been widely acknowledged as the

central literary achievement of English culture. As such they served—and continue to serve—as a fetish of Western civilization, a fetish Caliban curiously anticipates when he counsels Stephano and Trinculo to cut Prospero's throat.⁴³

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.

(3.2.91–95)

I want to close with a story that provides an oddly ironic perspective on Caliban's desire and exemplifies the continued doubleness of Shakespeare in our culture: at once the embodiment of civilized recreation, freed from the anxiety of rule, and the instrument of empire. The story is told by H. M. Stanley—the journalist and African explorer of "Doctor Livingstone, I presume?" fame—in his account of his journeyings through what he calls "the dark continent." In May 1877 he was at a place called Mowa in central Africa. I will let him tell the story in his own words:

On the third day of our stay at Mowa, feeling quite comfortable amongst the people, on account of their friendly bearing, I began to write down in my note-book the terms for articles in order to improve my already copious vocabulary of native words. I had proceeded only a few minutes when I observed a strange commotion amongst the people who had been flocking about me, and presently they ran away. In a short time we heard war-cries ringing loudly and shrilly over the table-land. Two hours afterwards, a long line of warriors, armed with muskets, were seen descending the table-land and advancing towards our camp. There may have been between five hundred and six hundred of them. We, on the other hand, had made but few preparations except such as would justify us replying to them in the event of the actual commencement of hostilities. But I had made many firm friends amongst them, and I firmly believed that I would be able to avert an open rupture.

When they had assembled at about a hundred yards in front of our camp, Safeni [the chief of another tribe with whom Stanley had become friendly] and I walked up towards them, and sat down midway. Some half-dozen of the Mowa people came near, and the shauri began.

"What is the matter, my friends?" I asked. "Why do you come with guns in your hands in such numbers, as though you were coming to fight? Fight! Fight us, your friends! Tut! this is some great mistake, surely."

"Mundelé," replied one of them, . . . "our people saw you yesterday

make marks on some tara-tara" (paper). "This is very bad. Our country will waste, our goats will die, our bananas will rot, and our women will dry up. What have we done to you, that you should wish to kill us? We have sold you food, and we have brought you wine, each day. Your people are allowed to wander where they please, without trouble. Why is the Mundelé so wicked? We have gathered together to fight you if you do not burn that tara-tara now before our eyes. If you burn it we go away, and shall be friends as heretofore."

I told them to rest there, and left Safeni in their hands as a pledge that I should return. My tent was not fifty yards from the spot, but while going towards it my brain was busy in devising some plan to foil this superstitious madness. My note-book contained a vast number of valuable notes; plans of falls, creeks, villages, sketches of localities, ethnological and philological details, sufficient to fill two octavo volumes—everything was of general interest to the public. I could not sacrifice it to the childish caprice of savages. As I was rummaging my book-box, I came across a volume of Shakespeare (Chandos edition), much worn and well thumbed, and which was of the same size as my field-book; its cover was similar also, and it might be passed for the note-book provided that no one remembered its appearance too well. I took it to them.

"Is this the tara-tara, friends, that you wish burnt?"

"Yes, yes, that is it!"

"Well, take it, and burn it or keep it."

"M-m. No, no, no. We will not touch it. It is fetish. You must burn it."

"Ti Well, let it be so. I will do anything to please my good friends of Mowa."

We walked to the nearest fire. I breathed a regretful farewell to my genial companion, which during many weary hours of night had assisted to relieve my mind when oppressed by almost intolerable woes, and then gravely consigned the innocent Shakespeare to the flames, heaping the brush-fuel over it with ceremonious care.

"Ah-h-h," breathed the poor deluded natives, sighing their relief. "The Mundelé is good—is very good. He loves his Mowa friends. There is no trouble now, Mundelé. The Mowa people are not bad." And something approaching to a cheer was shouted among them, which terminated the episode of the Burning of Shakespeare.⁴³

Stanley's precious notebook, with its sketches and ethnographic and philologic details, survived then and proved invaluable in charting and organizing the Belgian Congo, perhaps the most vicious of all of Europe's African colonies. As Stanley had claimed, everything was indeed of general interest to the public. After Stanley's death, the notebooks passed into the possession of heirs and then for many years were presumed lost. But they were rediscovered at the time of

the Congo independence celebrations and have recently been edited. Their publication revealed something odd: while the notebook entry for his stay at Mowa records that the natives were angry at his writing—"They say I made strong medicine to kill their country"—Stanley makes no mention of the burning of Shakespeare.⁴⁴ Perhaps, to heighten that general interest with which he was so concerned, he made up the story. He could have achieved his narrative effect with only two books: Shakespeare and the Bible. And had he professed to burn the latter to save his notebook, his readers would no doubt have been scandalized.

For our purposes, it doesn't matter very much if the story "really" happened. What matters is the role Shakespeare plays in it, a role at once central and expendable—and, in some obscure way, not just expendable but exchangeable for what really matters: the writing that more directly serves power. For if at moments we can convince ourselves that Shakespeare is the discourse of power, we should remind ourselves that there are usually other discourses—here the notes and vocabulary and maps—that are instrumentally far more important. Yet if we try then to convince ourselves that Shakespeare is marginal and untainted by power, we have Stanley's story to remind us that without Shakespeare we wouldn't have the notes. Of course, this is just an accident—the accident of the books' resemblance—but then why was Stanley carrying the book in the first place?

For Stanley, Shakespeare's theater had become a book, and the book in turn had become a genial companion, a talisman of civility, a source not of salutary anxiety but of comfort in adversity. The anxiety in his account—and it is not salutary—is among the natives, and it is relieved only when, as Caliban had hoped, the book is destroyed. But the destruction of one book only saves another, more practical, more deadly. And when he returned to London or New York, Stanley could always buy another copy (Chandos edition) of his genial companion.