

The Shakespearean Name

Essays on *Romeo and Juliet*,
The Tempest, and Other Plays

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Part Three

The Tempest

9 'Burn but his books'

Rough Magic in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*

Though in allusive and almost hieratically symbolic form, *The Tempest* addresses a problem that was becoming a major source of preoccupation during the Elizabethan age, that of the new learning which was remapping the frontiers of human knowledge at the same time as it was redefining the nature of man and his place in the universe. The period in which Shakespeare was active as a playwright was also that of Walter Raleigh and his School of Night, of Francis Bacon and his new scientific method intended to supersede Aristotle's, of John Dee's curious blend of medieval mysticism, Renaissance science and imperialist apologetics. It was the age of a 'new Philosophy call[ing] all in doubt', as John Donne famously expressed it in his 'An Anatomy of the World',¹ the allusion being to recent scientific developments that were enabling man to explore new worlds of knowledge only at the cost of relegating his own world to an insignificant corner of a universe grown bewilderingly vast and empty of value. *The Tempest* was almost exactly contemporary with Donne's poem, and may be seen as Shakespeare's imaginative response to the same climate of thought, marked by mingled euphoria and apprehension, that was steadily gaining ground among other concerned minds of the epoch.

1 Donne, 'An Anatomy of the World: The First Anniversary', l. 205. *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (1971; reprint Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), 276.

Shakespeare was not the only playwright of the period to engage with the issue of knowledge and its role in human life, and his contribution to the subject should be seen in the light of those of two of his contemporaries, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, whose own respective views on the subject found expression in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Alchemist*. While the similarities between *The Tempest* and *Doctor Faustus* have by no means escaped critical attention,² comparative analyses of the two plays have tended to focus on the different attitudes towards magic evinced by their respective authors, and on their relation to the cultural and historical matrix within which they were written, without entering into the specifics of the parallels existing between them. The sheer density of verbal and situational echoes linking the two works is however of considerable significance in its own right, and what I wish to do in this chapter is examine these features in depth in order to provide some indication of just how intricate the connection between the two plays is—of the degree to which Shakespeare, at a distance of more than twenty years, was working under the shadow of Marlowe when he composed *The Tempest*. It would be tempting indeed to go one step further, and suggest that Shakespeare was intentionally signalling to his audience that such was in fact the case,

2 Among those who have dealt with this issue, see David Young, 'Where the Bee Sucks: A Triangular Study of *Doctor Faustus*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Tempest*', 149–66 in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 1978); and John S. Mebane, 'Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination in *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest*', *South Atlantic Review* 53:2 (1988): 25–45. Also relevant to the concerns of the present paper are Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition in Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); and Kurt Tetzeli Von Rosador, 'The Power of Magic: From *Endimion* to *The Tempest*', *Shakespeare Survey* 43 (1990): 1–13.

and that he meant *The Tempest* to be viewed as a reply to *Doctor Faustus*.³ While it must be acknowledged that the question of whether Shakespeare was deliberately invoking the precedent of *Doctor Faustus* remains a matter of conjecture in the final analysis, such an assumption will be implicit in much of what follows.

The most obvious point of similarity between *The Tempest* and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is that they both employ the metaphor of magic to dramatize the problem of knowledge and its relation to other aspects of human life. The fact that in both works magic is persistently referred to as *art*, moreover, broadens the implications of the metaphor even further, ultimately bringing the activities of the dramatists themselves within the thematic purview of their own plays. The intellectual pursuits with which the two works are concerned, in other words, are not of a scientific or technological order only, but also embrace the liberal arts and even the art of playwriting itself. Such an assimilation is reinforced by the fact that one of the principal means by which both magicians publicly manifest their power is that of staging their own theatrical spectacles within the framework of the dramatic constructs in which they themselves figure. The two plays are thus invested with what it would be reasonable to describe as a metadramatic dimension, with the consequence that the investigation into magic—a heightened metaphor for man's power to refashion reality after the image of his own desire—becomes in effect a meditation upon the status of the artistic effort itself.⁴ Although this metadramatic aspect is

3 This is essentially the position that Harold Bloom is taking when he suggests that 'Prospero is Shakespeare's anti-Faust, and a final transcending of Marlowe', and that Shakespeare is 'foregrounding an ironic contrast between his long-defunct rival's protagonist and the magus of *The Tempest*'. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 663, 667.

4 This aspect of the two plays has been explored in considerable depth by Mebane in 'Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination'.

more readily discernible in Shakespeare's work, it is latent in Marlowe's play as well, so that in this respect as in others *The Tempest* might be seen to be actualizing implications already present in its predecessor.

Another point of convergence between the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe is that the names of the two protagonists—Faustus and Prospero—have their origin in words expressing very much the same concept, that of fortune or prosperity. The name Faustus was not of course Marlowe's invention, and it has been conjectured that Shakespeare too might have derived some of his material from a text in which the name Prospero figured.⁵ But it seems very likely as well that the associations of the word Prospero, so similar to those attaching to the word Faustus, might have been one of the factors motivating Shakespeare's decision to adopt this particular name for his protagonist. There would have been a considerable measure of poetic propriety in such a decision, for what is significant from the point of view of the analogies and divergences that can be mapped out between the two works is the discrepancy that emerges between the virtually identical import of the two names and the very different destinies that await those who bear them. This discrepancy is thrown into relief by the explicit use that is made of the words *fortune* and *fortunes* in both plays. When the chorus in the Prologue to *Doctor Faustus* undertakes to 'perform / The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad'

5 This is the story of Prospero Adorno as recounted in William Thomas's *Historie of Italie* (1549). However, a Prospero also figures among the original *dramatis personae* of Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a play in which—since Jonson acknowledges his performance in the 1616 folio of his works—Shakespeare is known to have acted. For a discussion of the source of Prospero's name, see Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Introduction to the Arden Edition of *The Tempest* (Walton-on-Thames: Nelson, 1999), 23.

(*DF* Prologue 7–8),⁶ the audience is perhaps meant to register the coupling of words that share common semantic terrain, a juxtaposition that will reveal itself to be either tautological or oxymoronic according as the positive or negative character of the protagonist's 'fortunes' appears to prevail. In the event, of course, these 'fortunes' prove to be unmitigatedly calamitous, so that the 'fiendful fortune' that eventually befalls Faustus (*DF* Epilogue 5) belies the implications of a name that connotes good fortune. The name of Shakespeare's Prospero, on the other hand, turns out in the end to accord perfectly with the character's destiny. He is able with complete assurance to inform his daughter that 'bountiful fortune' is now his 'dear lady' (*Tmp.* 1.2.178–9), and although the words *fortune* and *fortunes* assume a variety of contrasting significations within the play of which he is the protagonist, the predominant impression is that in Prospero's life at least fortune does play a generally positive role. Not only does his good fortune manifest itself in his own affairs, but he is able to share this 'prosperity' with others. Sebastian's ironic comment that 'we prosper well in our return' (*Tmp.* 2.1.74–5) should not be construed as an authoritative commentary on the events of the play in their totality, but rather as an expression of the vicious nature that prevents the speaker from recognizing their underlying significance.

Another prominent feature that the two works have in common, and that sets them apart from the generality of plays, is their peculiar obsession with time, both works insistently reminding us of the period of time allotted to the drama and the amount of that time that remains to transpire. In *Doctor Faustus* this period is twenty-four years, the duration of the contract stipulated between Faustus and Mephistophilis (*DF* 2.1.103–9). As the years pass

6 The edition of *Doctor Faustus* used here and in all subsequent references is that included in *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963).

Faustus becomes increasingly haunted by time, and the relentless chiming of a clock provides a grim counterpoint to his anxious meditations in the final scene of the play. ‘What are thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?’, he asks himself at one point, adding that ‘Thy fatal time draws to a final end’ (*DF* 4.5.33–4). In the 1604 quarto we find the observation that

the restless course
That time doth run with calm and silent foot,
Shortening my days and thread of vital life,
Calls for the payment of my latest years.

(*DF* 4.5.1–4).

As the expiration of his term on earth approaches Faustus imagines an infernal voice reminding him that ‘thine hour is almost come’ (*DF* 5.1.58), and when Lucifer claims his soul at the end of the tragedy, it is on the grounds that ‘The time is come / Which makes it forfeit’ (*DF* 5.2.6–7). In apprising his friends of his situation on the last evening of his life, Faustus once again lays great stress on the element of time:

For the vain pleasure of four and twenty years hath Faustus lost eternal joy
and felicity. I writ them a bill with mine own blood. The date is expired. This
is the time, and he will fetch me.

(*DF* 5.2.62–5)

And when the clock strikes eleven time becomes an almost palpable presence in the room in which the doomed man awaits his fate:

Ah Faustus.
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually.
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come.
Fair nature’s eye, rise, rise again, and make

Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.
O lente, lente currite noctis equi!
The stars move still; time runs; the clock will strike;
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.

(DF 5.2.130–41)

The Latin epigraph appended to *Doctor Faustus*—‘*Terminat hora diem; terminat auctor opus.*’—in a certain sense sets the seal on this intense preoccupation with time, at the same time assimilating the creative labour of the author to the events depicted within his play in a moment of metaliterary self-reflexion that anticipates Prospero’s Epilogue.

In *The Tempest* the span of time with which the play is concerned is the three hour term within which Prospero must bring his project to fruition. This juxtaposition of a radically circumscribed and vividly illuminated present within which a series of decisive events is destined to take place, and a temporal backdrop constituted by the ‘dark backward and abysm of time’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.50) corresponding to Prospero’s extended sojourn in a social limbo, is analogous to the foreshortening of time that occurs as the expiration of Faustus’s term on earth approaches in Marlowe’s play. Prospero is intensely aware of the fatefulness of the moment and of the fact that if he does not exploit it without hesitation ‘my fortunes / Will ever after droop’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.183–4). His relation of the details of their history to Miranda commences with the portentous announcement that ‘The hour’s now come; / The very minute bids thee ope thine ear’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.36–7), while his initial conversation with Ariel delineates the temporal boundaries within which events will evolve:

Prospero What is the time o’th’ day?
Ariel Past the mid season.

Prospero At least two glasses. The time 'twixt six and now
Must by us both be spent most preciously.
(*Temp.* 1.2.239–41)

Such references to time and its passing abound in *The Tempest* as they do in *Doctor Faustus*. At the beginning of Act V Prospero asks 'How's the day?', to which Ariel replies 'On the sixth hour; at which time, my lord, / You said our work should cease' (*Temp.* 5.1.3–5). At the end of the play Alonso says that it is 'three hours since' that they were 'wrack'd upon this shore' (*Temp.* 5.1.136–7), and to Ferdinand later that 'Your eld'st acquaintance cannot be three hours' (*Temp.* 5.1.186). The Boatswain also remarks that the shipwreck occurred 'three glasses since' (*Temp.* 5.1.223). Even the title of the play might, as Northrop Frye suggests, embody an allusion to time.⁷ It is at least arguable, furthermore, that it is Faustus's invocation of Ovid—'*O lente, lente currite noctis equi!*'—that is being recalled in altered form in *The Tempest* when Ferdinand anticipates that his wedding day will be one on which 'I shall think, or Phoebus' steeds are founder'd / Or night kept chain'd below' (*Temp.* 4.1.30–31). If Faustus wants to retard the course of the steeds of the night, Ferdinand, more faithful to the spirit if not to the words of the Ovidian source, will want those of the day to complete their passage as swiftly as possible.

There are a number of more specific verbal echoes linking the two plays that might be mentioned in passing. Miranda's description of the storm—'The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch, / But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek, / Dashes the fire out' (*Temp.* 1.2.3–5)—recalls Faustus's description of the night that 'dims the welkin with her pitchy breath' (*DF* 1.3.4). Faustus's comment that 'fearful echoes thunder in mine ears: / "Faustus,

7 Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 153.

thou art damned!” (DF 2.2.20–21) bears a certain resemblance to Alonso’s exclamation in *The Tempest* that ‘the thunder, / That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc’d / The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass’ (*Tmp.* 3.3.97–99). The almost perpetual snarling of thunder, indeed, is another feature that the two plays have in common, although music also figures prominently in both works. The indirect reference in *The Tempest* to Amphion, whom legend credits with having raised the walls of Thebes with the music of his harp—

Antonio His word is more than the miraculous harp.

Sebastian He hath rais’d the wall, and houses too.

(*Tmp.* 2.1.88–9)

—recalls a more explicit allusion in *Doctor Faustus*:

And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes

With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,

Made music with my Mephistophilis?

(DF 2.2.28–30)

Since Amphion’s feat might be regarded as paradigmatic of the power of art to impress its own forms upon reality, partaking of a realm of the imagination in which the creative faculties of man and the magic he wields are coextensive with one another, the legend is peculiarly appropriate to both of the plays we are examining.

In view of its theme, it is hardly surprising that the world of *Doctor Faustus* should be densely populated with devils and lesser demons that function as the magician’s agents and enact his fancies. What is perhaps less to be expected is that those who arrive on Prospero’s island should be of the opinion that it too is a domain infested by devils. According to Ariel’s report, Ferdinand leaps into the water during the shipwreck crying ‘Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.214–15). Prospero remarks

that the torture inflicted upon Ariel by Sycorax before his own advent was ‘a torment / To lay upon the damn’d’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.289–90), and it is undoubtedly significant that when he threatens to punish Ariel it is through precisely the same means. Trinculo, hearing Stephano’s voice when he thinks he is drowned, fears that he is being assailed by devils (*Tmp.* 2.2.88), and Stephano also arrives at the conclusion that Caliban must be ‘a devil, and no monster’ (*Tmp.* 2.2.97). For somewhat different reasons, Prospero too stigmatizes Caliban as ‘A devil, a born devil’ (*Tmp.* 4.1.188). On the other hand, Prospero also remarks in an aside that some of those belonging to the King’s party are ‘worse than devils’ (*Tmp.* 3.3.36). And that attributions of diabolism are, like everything else, wholly dependent upon individual point of view is indicated by Sebastian’s comment concerning Prospero, who has revealed his knowledge of their conspiracy against Alonso’s life, that ‘The devil speaks in him’ (*Tmp.* 5.1.129).

In *Doctor Faustus* the word *spirit* is frequently used interchangeably with *devil*—as in Mephistophilis’s statement that Lucifer is ‘Arch-regent and commander of all spirits’ (*DF* 1.3.64)—and spirits of various sorts abound in *The Tempest* as well. The word is most often used in connection with Ariel, and there are occasions indeed in which this particular spirit comports himself in a manner very similar to that of the diabolical agencies inhabiting Marlowe’s play. He is commanded to be invisible to all eyes other than Prospero’s own (*Tmp.* 1.2.303–4) as Mephistophilis is bound to render himself invisible by the terms of his contract with Faustus (*DF* 2.1.100). He plays a pipe and beats a drum, as various devils do in *Doctor Faustus* (*Tmp.* 3.2.126 SD, 4.1.175; *DF* 2.2.109 SD, 4.3.105 SD). He deceives people into thinking they have been insulted by other persons present on the scene as Faustus himself does at the Pope’s banquet (*Tmp.* 3.2.46, 64, 77; *DF* 3.2.59). This is not of course to imply that there is anything malicious about him. On the

contrary, it is to be wondered whether the triangular relationship that exists between Prospero, Ariel and Caliban might not have had its origin in that between Faustus and the Good and Bad Angels that represent the opposed tendencies of his own nature.⁸ Faustus's destiny is sealed when he rejects the advice of the Good Angel who tells him that salvation is still available to him, and chooses to obey the promptings of his evil counterpart. In contrast to this, the affirmative outcome of *The Tempest* becomes possible once Prospero has repudiated the impulse towards brute vengeance that Caliban embodies, allowing himself to be persuaded by Ariel's words that 'the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance' (*Temp.* 5.1.27–8).

In both plays the power of the magicians is concentrated in their books, which means that the traditional emblem of learning assumes something of a talismanic significance both for themselves and for others. When we first encounter Faustus in his study, he is poring over volumes that have delighted him in the past but that he now finds wholly unsatisfactory. So disenamoured has he become of conventional learning that it is now his opinion that only 'necromantic books are heavenly' (*DF* 1.1.51), notwithstanding the Good Angel's admonitions that the work he is perusing with such rapt attention is a 'damned book' (*DF* 1.1.71). After Faustus has pledged body and soul to Lucifer Mephistophilis bestows upon him a book of charms, a 'sweet book' that Faustus promises to 'keep as chary as my life' (*DF* 2.1.164–5). At the end of the play, however, Faustus expresses the wish that 'I had never

8 There is no contradiction between this suggestion and the view that it is the Morality tradition in general that lies behind this configuration of personages, or that the relationship adumbrates the doctrine of the 'hierarchy of souls' that was a central tenet of Elizabethan psychology. For a discussion of *The Tempest* in terms of this latter doctrine, see Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1955), 195.

[...] never read book' (*DF* 5.2.45–6), and the final words he pronounces as the devils appear to bear him away are 'I'll burn my books!' (*DF* 5.3.187). Prospero's drama also begins in his study, though we learn of this only through his own retrospective account of the events culminating in his expulsion from Milan. Prospero confesses to Miranda that he became so absorbed in his studies that it seemed to him that 'my library / Was dukedom large enough' (*Tmp.* 1.2.109–10), and that it was this single-minded dedication to learning that engendered the ambition in his brother that led to the insurrection in Milan. Even on the island Prospero remains in possession of volumes that 'I prize above my dukedom' (*Tmp.* 1.2.168), books which, it would appear, lie at the basis of his magical power:

I'll to my book;
For yet, ere supper-time, must I perform
Much business appertaining.

(*Tmp.* 3.1.94–6)

Caliban makes the connection between books and magic even more explicit in his energetically formulated advice to Stephano and Trinculo as to how they can most expeditiously render Prospero impotent:

Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him
I' th' afternoon to sleep: There thou mayst brain him,
Having first seiz'd his books; or with a log
Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake,
Or cut his wezand with thy knife. 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.

(*Tmp.* 3.2.89–97)

This final injunction, interestingly enough, echoes Faustus's exclamation *in extremis*: 'I'll burn my books'. An even more significant transmutation of Faustus's words occurs at the conclusion of *The Tempest*, when Prospero, announcing his intention to renounce his 'rough magic' (*Tmp.* 5.1.50), promises that 'I'll drown my book' (*Tmp.* 5.1.57). The possible implications of this partial parallel is a matter that will be taken up again at the conclusion of this chapter.

In both *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* the magical powers wielded by the protagonists are parodied in subplots revolving around the comic antics of subordinate characters. Faustus's acolyte Wagner makes a disciple of the clown Robin as Stephano makes a slavish follower of Caliban. Whereas Wagner parodies his master's pact with Mephistophilis by prevailing upon Robin to bind himself to his service for a period of seven years (*DF* 1.4.18–21), Stephano exercises his dominion through the power of a bottle containing what Caliban conceives to be 'celestial liquor' (*Tmp.* 2.2.116). Here again the role of books as the source of magical power is alluded to, though only in travesty. The clown Robin in *Doctor Faustus* seeks to invest himself with occult powers by appropriating one of Faustus's volumes: 'I have gotten one of Doctor Faustus' conjuring books, and now we'll have such knavery as't passes' (*DF* 2.3.1–3). When Stephano plies Caliban with wine in *The Tempest* the rather curious words he pronounces are 'Here, kiss the book' (*Tmp.* 2.2.128), an invitation that might seem irrelevant unless we remember that Stephano's power is a parody of Prospero's. It has already been mentioned that Caliban urges his accomplices to possess themselves of Prospero's books in order to divest him of his magical power.

Both Faustus and Prospero become the objects of conspiracies on the part of other characters, and their methods of dealing with their enemies are virtually identical. In *Doctor Faustus* the sceptical Benvolio is converted into a latter-day Acteon, and Faustus not

has somehow allowed himself to be directly influenced by his German predecessor.

As I have already remarked, one of the more conspicuous features that *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* have in common is the fact that the magicians exhibit their skill by staging theatrical spectacles within the plays of which they are the protagonists. Indeed there is an element of the histrionic in all their doings, and the protagonists of both plays occasionally discharge the function of actor as well as that of playwright. When Faustus witnesses the ecclesiastical pomp practised in the papal palace in Rome his request is that 'in this show let me an actor be' (*DF* 3.1.76). In the second scene of *The Tempest* Prospero enacts the stock role of *senex iratus* for the benefit of Ferdinand, thus promoting the burgeoning of love between the two young people whose union he has planned. The emissaries of Hell exhibit a no less pronounced dramaturgical bent in *Doctor Faustus*, and in their efforts to induce Faustus to respect his promise contrive various entertainments to divert his mind from thoughts of repentance. In one stage direction we read: 'Enter Devils, giving crowns and rich apparel to Faustus. They dance and then depart' (*DF* 2.1.81 SD). Very similar stage directions are to be found at various points in *The Tempest*.⁹ Thus the third act contains the direction 'Enter several strange shapes, bringing in a banquet; and dance about it with gentle actions of salutations; and inviting the King, etc., to eat, they depart' (*Temp.* 3.3.17 SD), while slightly

9 This is not the place to enter into the vexed question of whether these and other stage directions were actually contributed by Shakespeare, or whether—as has occasionally been argued—they were inserted at some later point in order to embellish the play that was to occupy pride of place in the 1623 Folio. It seems to me that in the absence of definite indications to the contrary, the least complicated course is to assume that the stage directions were present in the manuscript or prompt-book that Ralph Crane transcribed for the Folio, and are therefore to be regarded as an integral component of the play.

later we have ‘enter the shapes again, and dance, with mocks and mows, and carrying out the table’ (*Tmp.* 3.3.82 SD). The aborted banquet which these stage directions frame may be a reminiscence of the Pope’s feast in *Doctor Faustus*, in which various tantalizing dishes are snatched away from the participants just as they are on the point of partaking of them (*DF* 3.2).

In Act Four of Marlowe’s play *Faustus* conjures up Alexander the Great and his paramour at the bidding of the German Emperor, in a scene that is comparable to that in which Prospero stages what he admits to be ‘Some vanity of mine Art’ (*Tmp.* 4.1.41) for the benefit of Ferdinand and Miranda. *Faustus* warns the spectators that they must not attempt to interrogate the apparitions, ‘But in dumb silence let them come and go’ (*DF* 4.2.47). This corresponds to Prospero’s injunction to Ferdinand and Miranda to ‘hush, and be mute, / Or else our spell is marr’d’ (*Tmp.* 4.1.126–7). A stage direction shows the Emperor about to disregard this warning, when, saluted by the two apparitions, he ‘offers to embrace them, which *Faustus* seeing, suddenly stays him. Then trumpets cease and music sounds’ (*DF* 4.2.52 SD). Prospero’s masque is disrupted when he remembers the conspiracy of Caliban and his confederates, an intrusion that shatters the spell that his art has been weaving: ‘Prospero starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hollow, and confused noise, they heavily vanish’ (*Tmp.* 4.1.138 SD). The words that *Faustus* addresses to the Emperor after the interruption of his pageant consist in the reminder that ‘you do forget yourself. / These are but shadows, not substantial’ (*DF* 4.2.53–4). While Prospero’s remarks are very much of the same tenor, he goes to considerably greater lengths to draw out the metaphysical implications of what has occurred:

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-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.

(*Temp.* 4.1.148–56)

It might perhaps be remembered in this connection that one of Faustus's most spectacular achievements, reminiscent of Amphion's feat of raising the Theban walls through the agency of music, has been that of 'erecting that enchanted castle in the air' for the benefit of the Duke of Anholt (*DF* 4.7.2–3).

While the role played by coincidence is by no means to be ruled out in discussing occasional points of similarity between works of literature that are otherwise unconnected, it seems to me that the parallels I have been tracing here are too many and too close to be accidental, and that Shakespeare must almost certainly have had Marlowe's play in the forefront of his imagination while he was composing *The Tempest*. Marlowe's play was a well-known and popular one in the years in which Shakespeare was active as a writer, and that Shakespeare himself was not only personally familiar with the work but regarded it as being in some ways an inevitable point of reference is attested by the fact that he invokes it directly in such plays as *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and (as seems likely) *Richard II*.¹⁰ It has been suggested by Jean Mac-

10 Bardolph's report in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that a trio of assailants 'threw me off [...] in a slough of mire; and set spurs and away, like three German devils, three Doctor Faustuses' (4.5.65–8) recalls an incident in Marlowe's play that is echoed in *The Tempest*, while Troilus's observation in *Troilus and Cressida* that Helen is 'a pearl, / Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships' (2.2.82–3) is a rather pragmatic reformulation of the rapturous words with which Faustus greets the shade of Helen of Troy: 'Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships' (*DF* 5.1.99). In *Richard II* the deposed king

Intyre that *Doctor Faustus*, which was printed for the first time in 1604, and reissued in 1609 and 1611, may have influenced Shakespeare in the composition of a number of comparatively late works, including *King Lear*.¹¹ Since *Doctor Faustus* dramatizes issues that were the object of intense investigation in the Renaissance—and in particular the role of knowledge and art in human life—it is only to be expected that in addressing the same themes Shakespeare would have reflected on his predecessor's work and responded to its implications. At the very least it might be argued, therefore, that Shakespeare's fundamentally affirmative exploration of the theme of magic constitutes an implicit commentary on the pessimism of Marlowe's vision, according to which those faculties which define man as a unique entity in the universe are also those that must fatally condemn him. But as I have already suggested, in the light of the many verbal and situational echoes linking *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest* it would also be possible to make the stronger claim that the commentary was more than a merely implicit one, and that Shakespeare was intentionally invoking Marlowe's tragedy with a view to dissipating the bleakness of its vision of the human condition.

Faust commences his career as a sorcerer by performing the most infamous of all acts of necromantic conjuration, that of tracing a magic circle on the floor in which the name of Jehovah is ritually anagrammatized (*DF* 1.3.8–9). This circle in effect isolates him not only from God but also from the nobler aspects of his own humanity, and it has often been pointed out that one of the more conspicuous features of *Doctor Faustus* is the moral deteriora-

comments on his own reflection: 'Was this face the face / That every day under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men?' (*R2* 4.1.281–3).

11 MacIntyre, 'Doctor Faustus and the Later Shakespeare', *Cahiers élisabéthains* 29 (1986): 27–37. Curiously enough, MacIntyre does not mention *The Tempest* in her discussion of Marlowe's influence.

tion that its protagonist undergoes once he commands virtually unlimited power. While the temptation has been to attribute the cruder scenes to a less fastidious collaborator rather than to the playwright himself, there is nothing in those scenes that do appear to have issued more or less directly from the pen of Marlowe to suggest that Faustus might be using his magic for more elevated purposes. Magic might begin as the highest possible expression of human creativity, but it swiftly degenerates into an instrument of coercion, cruelty and buffoonery. The man who aspired to infinite knowledge contents himself in the end with clapping antlers upon the heads of his enemies, heaping up material riches, and gratifying his carnal appetites. Except for a few isolated episodes, such as that in which the shade of Helen of Troy materializes at his behest, there is little to distinguish Faustus's magical practices from those indulged in by his parodic double Robin.

In a somewhat different manner, Prospero too has isolated himself from his own humanity by immersing himself utterly in his recondite studies, and the island on which he has sojourned for so many years is the image of that isolation at the same time that it is, as Kurt Tetzeli Von Rosador points out, 'a geographical version of the magician's circle'.¹² As far as we are able to infer from the information made available to us, there is nothing either subtle or particularly noble about the magic that Prospero has been wielding during his exile, and a comparison with the witch Sycorax, his predecessor on the island whose career exhibits significant parallels with Prospero's own, is at least invited.¹³ From the point of view

12 Von Rosador, 12.

13 The parallel between Prospero's career and that of Sycorax is discussed in Douglas L. Peterson, *Time, Tide, and Tempest: A Study of Shakespeare's Romances* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1973), 218. Jonathan Bate draws attention to the significance of the fact that 'Prospero cannot quite differentiate his own powers from those of Sycorax' and that 'he has to acknowledge Sy-

of those subjugated to his authority he is little more than an overbearing tyrant imposing his own arbitrary laws and enforcing them by violence. There is therefore a considerable element of justice in the opinion expressed by various characters that the island is riddled with devils, notwithstanding the fact that Prospero himself believes his magic to be of a wholly virtuous variety. Even when the Europeans arrive on the island, Prospero does not comport himself in a manner markedly different from that of Faustus. He too charms his enemies into immobility, drives them to distraction, inflicts physical torments upon them, subjects them to illusions. Most important of all, perhaps, for much of the play he seems to be impelled primarily by the impulse of revenge, one of the least admirable of human motives, although it must be acknowledged that a number of incongruities appear in his conduct which suggest that his project might be fundamentally beneficent from its inception.¹⁴

All this changes in the final act of the play, however. Having accomplished his objective of subduing his enemies to his power, Prospero brings his career as a magician to an appropriate close by inscribing another circle on the ground (*Tmp.* 5.1.32 SD). In performing this gesture he is symbolically completing a circle of another kind, that corresponding to the trajectory of spiritual evolution which begins with Faustus in Wittenberg and continues in his own career in Milan. Far from being an emblem of isolation in this case, the final circle that Prospero traces on the ground comes to symbolize a restored and regenerated community as the other personages in the play 'enter the circle which Prospero has made, and there stand charm'd' (*Tmp.* 5.1.57 SD). The drawing of this circle,

corax's child as his own thing of darkness'. *The Genius of Shakespeare* (1997; reprint London: Picador, 1998), 129.

14 As in the fact that he preserves Alonso from an assassination attempt, and promotes the 'fair encounter' of Ferdinand and Miranda.

which occurs after Prospero has recapitulated the various prodigies that his 'so potent art' has rendered possible (*Temp.* 5.1.50), coincides with his announcement of his intention to renounce his magical powers:

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music,—which even now I do,—
To work mine end upon their senses, that
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

(*Temp.* 5.1.50–57)

These words would seem intended once again to recall those of Faustus, who at one point meditates upon the possibility of abandoning his magic in the following terms: 'O, something soundeth in mine ear: / "Abjure this magic; turn to God again."' (*DF* 2.1.7–8). But whereas the spheres of magic and religion are radically opposed to one another in Marlowe's play, so that no reconciliation or convergence between the two is possible, things are not so simple in *The Tempest*. There is at least a suggestion at the conclusion of Shakespeare's play that, unbeknownst to Prospero himself, his magic has all the time been at the service of a providential design transcending his personal intentions, and that he himself has been an unwitting agent of divine purpose. This appears for example in Gonzalo's suggestion that it is the 'gods' who have 'chalk'd forth the way / Which brought us hither' (*Temp.* 5.1.201–4), and in the question with which he formulates his version of the *felix culpa*: 'Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue / Should become Kings of Naples?' (*Temp.* 5.1.205–6). In the Epilogue, of course, with its references to the Lord's Prayer and the theological conception of redemption, the Christian perspective becomes even more

explicit, Prospero the magician having played a role in a drama of salvation which is not wholly of his own devising and perhaps not entirely that of Shakespeare's either.

As I have already pointed out, Prospero's promise to 'drown my book' (*Tmp.* 5.1.57) echoes Faustus's last words that he will 'burn my books', and perhaps the difference between the two magicians and the kinds of power they represent appears in their choice of verbs, evoking as they do the opposed elements of fire and water. If burning partakes of the dimension with which Faustus has been transacting, from which he has been drawing his power and to which he is now condemned for all eternity, drowning belongs to that of the 'sea-change' through whose alchemy everything is transmuted into 'something rich and strange' (*Tmp.* 1.2.403–4). Magic itself is transformed from the 'rough' power by means of which Prospero has been brutally manipulating events and people in accordance with a design that is all his own, to something that is more in harmony with the ordinary exigencies of life and yet also, it is suggested, participates in the divine. What we are afforded a glimpse of, then, is the possibility of a redeemed magic, and what this translates into is the possibility of a redeemed art and science perfectly compatible with the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence.¹⁵ As the spirits enacting his masque vanish into thin air, Prospero has begun his most sublime speech by declaring that 'Our revels now are ended' (*Tmp.* 4.1.148),

15 This is basically the point that Frances Yates is making when she argues that in the figure of Prospero Shakespeare 'vindicates the [John] Dee science and the Dee conjuring' that Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* had been concerned to discredit. Yates, 160. However, I disagree with Yates both in reading *Doctor Faustus* as a pure exercise in anti-Renaissance propaganda, a 'dismissal of the traditions of Renaissance magic and science' (Yates, 119), and in seeing Prospero's magic as a undeviatingly positive from the start. It seems to me that such schematic interpretations render little justice to either of the plays.

the larger implication of his words being that the rough magic of which this masque has been a culminating expression has been discarded. And yet there is one final theatrical spectacle that remains to be presented, this being the tableau that Prospero discloses when he 'discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess' (*Temp.* 5.1.171 SD). Magic of an occult order has only indirectly contributed to the realization of this image of perfect concord, which even Sebastian, not normally given to sentimental effusions, can find it in his heart to acclaim as 'A most high miracle' (*Temp.* 5.1.177). The magic that has gone into its making is as entirely natural as it is in its own way mystical, and is of a kind that no one can ultimately fail to approve.

10 Carrying Tempest in his Hand and Voice

The Magician in Jonson and Shakespeare

The argument of the foregoing chapter was that *The Tempest* elaborates a dense network of verbal and situational echoes in order to invoke *Doctor Faustus* as a kind of precedent for itself, thereby advertising its own status as a sustained meditation on, and deliberate reply to, its Marlovian predecessor. Though in very different ways, both plays address the problem of the role played by knowledge in human affairs, as well as that of the relation between the intellectual and moral dimensions of life in general, questions that ultimately concern the metaphysical identity of man himself. It was my contention that in his own treatment of these issues Shakespeare was examining the repercussions of, and in the end rejecting, Marlowe's pessimistic estimate of knowledge as a necessarily vitiating factor in human existence, offering in its stead the vision of a redeemed science capable of intervening positively in the world and promoting the noblest aspects of human nature. Since the word *art* is used as a virtual synonym for magic in both *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*, moreover, a certain amount of attention was also dedicated to the metadramatic elements threading the two plays, and to the implication conveyed by means of such elements that there exists some sort of analogy between the activity of the magician and that of the playwright himself.

Marlowe's was not the only play other than Shakespeare's own to explore the theme of magic, and more particularly that of what magic represents in the way of man's aspiration to exercise domin-

ion over the natural world, his fellow human beings, and his own self. Another drama finding its inspiration in the broad spectrum of activities pursued under the name of magic is Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*, and although the magic depicted in this case is of the fraudulent kind practiced by a thoroughly cynical charlatan the play constitutes in its own way as telling a commentary as any on the equivocal role played by esoteric knowledge in human life. A number of critics have commented on the conceptions of magic evinced in Shakespeare's works and in those of his fellow playwrights, and it has more than once been suggested that in writing *The Tempest* Shakespeare might have been in some measure influenced by Jonson as well as by Marlowe. David Young argues for instance that '*The Tempest* is a great play about magic partly because other great plays about magic preceded it, and it is not, therefore, too much to think that Shakespeare profited from considering those plays, recent and distant, as he sat to compose his own'.¹ John S. Mebane contends in a similar vein that in 'Shakespeare's final, consummate dramatic statement on the nature and purposes of art he chose to return to the subject of the occult in part because both Marlowe and Jonson, Shakespeare's two great rivals, had previously made use of the same metaphor'.² These remarks, like those of other commentators who have expressed analogous

1 Young, 'Where the Bee Sucks: A Triangular Study of *Doctor Faustus*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Tempest*', 149–66 in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University Of Nebraska Press, 1978), 160–1.

2 Mebane, 'Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination in *Dr. Faustus* and *The Tempest*', *South Atlantic Review* 53:2 (1988): 32. While Mebane does not reiterate this assertion in his book *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition in Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), the organization of the chapters dedicated to Marlowe, Jonson and Shakespeare respectively implies that Shakespeare's contribution to the subject is chronologically the last in the sequence.

views,³ are based on the assumption that *The Tempest* was the last in the series of dramas dealing with magic to be written, and that it must therefore have been Shakespeare who was responding in retrospect to the work of other playwrights. While I am fully in agreement with the premise that the parallels between the three plays cannot be dismissed as fortuitous, it seems to me that the pattern of influence may not be quite as straightforward as such statements as these suggest, and that the problem of the relative chronology of the works under examination perhaps merits somewhat greater attention than has generally been dedicated to it.

In the case of *Doctor Faustus* no particular difficulties arise, because although different versions of the play are extant the number of years that elapsed between the death of Marlowe and the probable composition of *The Tempest* is such as to make it highly unlikely that the influence was other than unidirectional. Although there has been some speculation to the effect that an early version of *The Tempest* might have been circulating even in Marlowe's lifetime,⁴ the internal evidence of the plays would seem to indicate clearly enough that it is Shakespeare who is alluding to Marlowe's work, and not the reverse. But matters become more complicated in the case of *The Alchemist* and *The Tempest*, which from the point of view of public record at least are so closely contemporaneous with one another as to make it extremely difficult to establish the exact sequence of composition. The relevant documents would seem to suggest that it was *The Alchemist* that appeared first, since it was

3 See for instance Harry Levin's observation 'that *The Tempest* came after *The Alchemist* means, of course, that Shakespeare had the opportunity to reflect and reply [...] He responded to Jonson's brilliant example not through imitation or refutation but [...] through sublimation'. 'Two Magian Comedies: "The Tempest" and "The Alchemist"', *Shakespeare Survey* 22 (1969): 57–8.

4 For more on this theory, see Frank Kermode, Introduction to the fifth Arden Edition of *The Tempest* (1954; reprint, London: Methuen, 1976), 15–17.

entered in the Stationers' Register on 3 October 1610, nearly thirteen months before the first recorded performance of *The Tempest* at Court on 1 November 1611. However, many scholars are of the opinion that a version of Shakespeare's play had been staged on some occasion prior to the Whitehall performance recorded in the Revels Accounts, and it is to be observed in fact that one of the foremost historians of the Elizabethan theatre assigns precisely the same production date—1610—to both *The Alchemist* and *The Tempest*, indicating for the two plays moreover the identical venue (Blackfriars) and company (The King's Men).⁵

While the precise order of chronological precedence remains to a very large degree a matter of conjecture, what cannot seriously be disputed is that both *The Alchemist* and *The Tempest* would have been in a highly fluid state during the years between 1610 and 1612, the year in which Jonson's play was published in a quarto edition. Even if *The Alchemist* did marginally precede *The Tempest* in strict order of composition, in other words, it would almost certainly have been subjected to more or less extensive revision throughout the period in question, as was normally the case with works that were performed under varying stage conditions and before different audiences.⁶ One of the factors influencing the adjustments that the two playwrights made to their respective dramas—whether during the phase of composition or that of subsequent revision or readaptation—might well have been their awareness that their rivals were actively working on plays in which very similar themes were addressed. That Jonson was personally

5 Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 233, 241.

6 For a discussion of the mutable quality of Elizabethan plays, which gives them the status more of pre-texts than of literary texts proper, see Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare: Genesi e struttura delle opere*, 2nd ed. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998), 10–12.

familiar with *The Tempest*, and had brooded on its implications at least as regards dramaturgical technique, is attested by the circumstance that it is somewhat sardonically referred to in his induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, first acted on 31 October 1614. For his own part, Shakespeare could not have failed to be aware of the contents of *The Alchemist*, since it was his own company of actors that first performed the play in London in 1610, and it is not impossible that he himself might have had a hand in its production. In the light of the obvious affinities that exist between the two works from the point of view of their mutual concern with the magical arts, it is therefore tempting to suspect that both playwrights might have been stealing sidelong glances at the work of their respective rivals as they composed their own, and that they might in this sense have been writing in critical counterpoint to one another. Such a hypothesis would seem to be borne out by the fact that there are elements in Jonson's play that appear not so much to furnish inspiration for *The Tempest* as to parody it, which would obviously imply that certain portions of Shakespeare's play at least are antecedent to those passages in Jonson's comedy with which they exhibit significant parallels.

Near the beginning of *The Tempest* Prospero—whose name, it might not be irrelevant to recall, was possibly borrowed from the *dramatis personae* of one of Jonson's plays⁷—takes both Ariel and Caliban rather vehemently to task for the symptoms of restiveness they have been manifesting under his authority. In both cases he reminds his vassals of the desperate plight in which he found them

7 A Prospero figures among the original *dramatis personae* of Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, a play in which—since Jonson acknowledges his performance in the 1616 folio of his works—Shakespeare is known to have acted. For a discussion of the source of Prospero's name, see Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Introduction to the Arden Edition of *The Tempest* (1999; reprint, London: Thomson Learning, 2001), 23.

when he first arrived on the island, and from which he released them through his art. The chronicle he recites for the edification of Ariel is particularly gruesome:

Dost thou forget
From what a torment I did free thee? [...]
Hast thou forgot
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy
Was grown into a hoop? hast thou forgot her? [...]
I must
Once in a month recount what thou hast been,
Which thou forget'st. [...]
Thou, my slave,
As thou report'st thyself, wast then her servant;
And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate
To act her earthy and abhorr'd 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
Imprison'd 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 damn'd, which Sycorax
Could not again undo: it was mine Art,
When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape
The pine, and let thee out.

(*Temp.* 1.2.250–93)

It seems to me that this passage bears more than an incidental resemblance to the opening scene of *The Alchemist*, which depicts a violent altercation between Face and Subtle, in the course of which

both evoke the circumstances in which they first encountered one another, and both claim to have rescued the other from the most abject misery. As is consistent with his distinctly down-to-earth character, Face's version of the story is couched in blatantly material terms:

Do but collect, sir, where I met you first. [...]
I shall put you in mind, sir, at Pie Corner,
Taking your meal of steam in, from cooks' stalls,
Where, like the father of hunger, you did walk
Piteously costive, with your pinched-horn-nose,
And your complexion, of the Roman wash,
Stuck full of black and melancholic worms,
Like powder-corns, shot, at the artillery-yard. [...]
When all your alchemy, and your algebra,
Your minerals, vegetals and animals,
Your conjuring, cozening, and your dozens of trades,
Could not relieve your corpse, with so much linen
Would make you tinder, but to see a fire;
I ga' you countenance, credit for your coals,
Your stills, your glasses, your materials,
Built you a furnace, drew you customers,
Advanced all your black arts⁸

(*Alc.* 1.1.23–46)

Here we would seem to have a kind of parodic inversion of the situation described by Prospero, it being in this case the magician who is rescued from destitution by the exceedingly pragmatic butler with an eye to the main chance. What is to be noted is that however different the particulars may be, and however dissimilar the language they use, the same fundamental pattern of argumentation is to be discerned in the speeches of both Prospero and Face.

8 The edition of Ben Jonson's plays used here and in all subsequent references is *Ben Jonson: Five Plays*, ed. G. A. Wilkes (1981; reprint, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999).

Both begin with a rhetorical denunciation of the fact that the individual they are addressing has forgotten the origins of his relationship with the speaker, this providing the pretext for the latter to declare his intention to set the record straight. This is followed by a graphic evocation of the conditions in which the character addressed found himself before the advent of the speaker, terminating in a description of the manner in which the latter intervened to remedy the situation. When Subtle presents his own version of events in answer to Face's charge of ingratitude, it is one that in all essential respects conforms to the same basic pattern. To Face's rhetorical query 'Who / Am I, my mongrel? Who am I?' (*Alc.* 1.1.12–13), Subtle replies: 'I'll tell you, / Since you know not yourself—' (*Alc.* 1.1.13–14). And after the extended tirade by Face that has been quoted above he resumes:

Thou vermin, have I ta'en thee, out of dung,
So poor, so wretched, when no living thing
Would keep thee company, but a spider, or worse?
Raised thee from brooms and dust and watering pots?
Sublimed thee, and exalted thee, and fixed thee
I' the third region, called our state of grace?
Wrought thee to spirit, to quintessence, with pains
Would twice have won me the philosophers' work?
Put thee in words and fashion?

(*Alc.* 1.1.64–72)

This time it is the magician who, in his own eyes at least, has played the role of saviour, using his art to redeem Face from the ignominy of a mere servant's existence and initiate him into a higher sphere of life. In thus invoking his own role as a spiritual rather than strictly material benefactor, Subtle's remarks are more than a little reminiscent of Prospero's (or his mouthpiece Miranda's) words to Caliban:

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness; I have us'd thee,
Filt' as thou art, with human care, and lodg'd thee
In mine own cell [...]

I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known.

(*Temp.* 1.2.346–60)

While it seems to me that the resemblances between these passages are too close to be coincidental, the temptation should be avoided of drawing simplistic conclusions as to which play influenced which. Notwithstanding the belief expressed by the critics I cited earlier that it is Shakespeare who had Jonson in mind, it appears equally plausible that *The Alchemist* might have been echoing *The Tempest* for parodic effect. Such a tactic would have been entirely consistent with Jonson's sometimes notorious practice of caricaturing the work of other playwrights as a means of defining his own position both intellectually and as a dramatist.⁹ A particularly pertinent illustration of Jonson's habit of employing parodic allusion to earlier texts as an instrument of his satire is to be found in the sly references to Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* contained in *The Alchemist*. While Frances Yates may well be right in arguing that a certain convergence of outlook can be perceived between Jonson and Marlowe in respect of occult philosophy in general and John Dee in particular,¹⁰ and while it might therefore be supposed that

9 For a full-length study of this technique, see Robert N. Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy: Literary Imperialism in the Comedies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

10 Yates's argument with regard to the figure of John Dee is that while 'the white magician Doctor Dee [...] is defended in Prospero, the good and

Jonson would have felt less impelled than Shakespeare to criticize Marlowe's play on the grounds of the position it takes in such matters, this does not mean that *Doctor Faustus* is entirely exempt from such travesties as the following:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| <i>Face</i> | He has |
| | Four angels, here— |
| <i>Subtle</i> | You do me wrong, good sir. |
| <i>Face</i> | Doctor, wherein? To tempt you, with these spirits? |
| <i>Subtle</i> | To tempt my art, and love, sir, to my peril. |

(*Alc.* 1.2.36–9)

That the 'angels' referred to are gold coins rather than spiritual agencies is a characteristically Jonsonian deflation that enhances the satiric effect. If it is objected that in this instance Jonson is playing with the Morality tradition in general, rather than with Marlowe's tragedy in particular, then another reference occurring somewhat later establishes the literary precedent beyond doubt:

Or he is the Faustus,
That casteth figures, and can conjure, cures,
Plague, piles, and pox, by the ephemerides,
And holds intelligence with all the bawds,
And midwives of three shires?

(*Alc.* 4.6.46–50)

The reference to 'some fustian book' that occurs elsewhere in the play might also be an ironic pun intended to caricature the talismanic object that Marlowe elaborates as the emblem of his protagonist's necromantic power in *Doctor Faustus* (*Alc.* 4.2.59).

learned conjuror', a different reaction is evinced by Marlowe and Jonson, who 'are writing from similar attitudes [...] of reaction against the occult philosophy and with particular reference to Dee'. *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 160, 162.

In view of this distinct parodic vein, it might not be unreasonable to suspect the presence of an elaborate pattern of intertextual allusion in what would seem to be an echo in *The Alchemist* of Shakespeare's own borrowing from John Florio's translation of Montaigne's 'Of the Cannibales'. The transcription of Montaigne that Shakespeare assigns to Gonzalo reads as follows:

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 its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

(*Temp.* 2.1.149–66)

This is Gonzalo's vision of a Golden Age in which property and hierarchy and all the other accoutrements of a perverse and alienating civilization have been banished, and human beings restored to what an optimistic view conceives to be their own natural condition. Sebastian and Antonio point out, not without an element of justice, that Gonzalo is contradicting himself in this speech, because what he dreams of doing in effect is legislating into existence a commonwealth in which legislators do not exist. On the level of the comic subplot of *The Tempest*, it is precisely this that Stephano is doing when, having determined to found a brave new world of

his own on Prospero's island, he loses no time in replicating all the deficiencies of the old by declaring himself king and nominating Trinculo and Caliban his viceroys (*Temp.* 3.2.109–10). If, as has more than once been suggested, *The Tempest* contains a satiric commentary on the positive valuation of uncultivated human nature conveyed by Montaigne's essay,¹¹ then what Jonson is doing in *The Alchemist* is transposing that same satire into an even more mordant key. When Doll Common intercedes in the quarrel between Face and Subtle, her words seem to echo Shakespeare's famous borrowing, evoking the image of a cosy cozeners' Arcadia in which all live on terms of democratic equality:

You will insult,
And claim a primacy in the divisions?
You must be chief? As if you, only, had
The powder to project with? and the work
Were not begun out of equality?
The venture tripartite? All things in common?
Without priority?

(*Alc.* 1.1.130–6)

The phrase 'All things in common', it should be noted, appears in Gonzalo's speech in *The Tempest*, but not in Florio's translation of Montaigne. The name of Doll Common herself, whose activity as a prostitute constitutes a manifest denial of the principle of division and priority even in the matter of distributing sexual favours, assimilates her to this parody of the Golden Age. Like Gonzalo's commonwealth, however, this 'republic' (*Alc.* 1.1.110) is one riven by self-contradiction. At some point Subtle and Face have been dignified with the titles of 'Sovereign' and 'General' respectively (*Alc.* 1.1.5, 87–8, 172), and their state is increasingly rent by what

11 See for instance Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1948), 238n.

Doll calls ‘civil war’ (*Alc.* 1.1.82) before the ‘indenture tripartite’ is abandoned altogether (*Alc.* 5.4.131).

There are other elements in *The Alchemist* that might seem deliberately intended to remind us of *The Tempest*, or at the very least might betray an unconscious recollection on Jonson’s part. While none of these can be regarded as conclusive when examined in isolation, what they suggest in their ensemble is that Jonson is systematically poking fun at Shakespeare, although it must be admitted that there are occasions as well in which it appears that the reverse might be the case. The quarrel between Face and Subtle with which the play opens is finally settled with Subtle’s conciliatory promise that ‘I’ll conform myself’ (*Alc.* 1.1.153), words reminiscent of Ariel’s propitiatory assurance to Prospero that ‘I will be correspondent to command’ (*Tmp.* 1.2.297). Mammon’s pledge to Face that ‘I will set a period, / To all thy labours’ (*Alc.* 2.2.31–2) recalls Prospero’s vow to Ariel to enfranchise him after two days (*Tmp.* 1.2.299–300). The obsessive concern with the passing of time, and the repeated allusions to the exact hour of the day, is another element that Jonson’s play shares with Shakespeare’s, although in this case it would seem to be Shakespeare who is deliberately and ostentatiously appropriating the unity of time for his own purposes. Face’s explanation to Lovewit that the mysterious sounds emanating from his house are to be imputed to ‘Illusions, some spirit o’the air’ (*Alc.* 5.3.66) recalls the figure of Ariel (‘which art but air’, *Tmp.* 5.1.21), although it might also call to mind Prospero’s reference to his masque as having being performed by ‘spirits’ that are ‘melted into air’ (*Tmp.* 4.1.149–50). Surly’s rather unchivalrous remark to Dame Pliant that ‘your fortunes may make me a man’ (*Alc.* 4.6.13) parallels Trinculo’s comment concerning the benefits to be derived from conveying Caliban to England, since ‘there would this monster make a man’ (*Tmp.* 2.2.30). Face’s comment ‘I ne’er must hope to be mine own man again’ (*Alc.* 4.5.78) may echo

Gonzalo's phrase 'When no man was his own' (*Temp.* 5.1.213). While the name *Claribel*, which appears in *The Alchemist* (1.2.46), may as some editors suggest have its origin in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*,¹² it also happens to be that of Alonso's daughter in *The Tempest* (2.1.73, 5.1.209). And would it be an exaggeration to perceive more than a chance resemblance between the following speeches, taken from *The Tempest* and *The Alchemist* respectively?

Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition
Worthily purchas'd, take my daughter: but
If thou dost break her virgin-knot before
All sanctimonious ceremonies may
With full and holy rite be minister'd,
No sweet aspersion shall the heavens let fall
To make this contract grow; but barren hate,
Sour-ey'd disdain and discord shall bestrew
The union of your bed with weeds so loathly
That you shall hate it both: therefore take heed,
As Hymen's lamps shall light you.

(*Temp.* 4. 1. 13–23)

If you, my son, should now prevaricate,
And to your own particular lusts employ
So great and catholic a bliss: be sure,
A curse will follow, yea, and overtake
Your subtle and most secret ways.

(*Alc.* 2.3.19–23)

The similarities between *The Tempest* and *The Alchemist* even extend to the plots of the two plays, although the parallels should not be forced beyond the limits of plausibility. On the most general level, both works depict the passage of various personages through circumscribed realms—Prospero's island and Lovewit's Blackfriars

12 Cf. Wilkes, 368n.

residence—that have assumed the character of private kingdoms presided over by magus figures (Prospero and Subtle). These realms have been appropriated by the magicians in the absence of their former proprietors (Sycorax and Lovewit), through the assistance of a knowledgeable resident (Caliban and Face). The powers of the magicians are exercised through the agency of a third figure (Ariel and Doll), who in pursuit of the master's objectives plays a variety of roles and dons a number of different disguises. The characters visiting these realms participate in, or are subjected to, various magical proceedings adapted to their particular characters and expectations, and ostensibly intended to elevate them in some way from their former spiritual or material condition. Towards the end of each play the separate strands in the plot begin to mesh together as the various personages converge simultaneously on the scene. Both plays conclude with the abandonment of their respective realms by the magician-masters, Prospero when he undertakes to return to his duties in Milan, and Subtle when he is obliged to effect a precipitous escape over the garden wall. Both dramas terminate with an address delivered directly to the audience by one of the principal actors, a device which, like the crucial role played by spectacle in the strategies of both magicians, imparts a metatheatrical self-consciousness to the two works that invites reflection on the status of the dramatic artefact itself.

There are more minor details that might be compared as well. In both plays male characters (Ferdinand and Mammon) become enamoured of the female adjuncts of the magicians (Miranda and Doll), and the fact that they both attribute a divine quality to the object of their passion raises the issue of the relation between love and illusion. Dapper's temporary confinement to a noisome privy (*Alc.* 3.5.78–81), recalls the punishment inflicted on Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban, who are plunged into a 'filthy-mantled pool' that is also reported to be something other than fragrant (*Tmp.*

4.1.182). As I argued in the preceding chapter of this book, this episode in Shakespeare's play was in its turn almost certainly inspired by the treatment meted out to his enemies by Faustus in Marlowe's tragedy,¹³ so once again what we are perhaps witnessing is a complex game of intertextual allusion in which various works are simultaneously invoked. The masque presented by Prospero before an audience constituted by Ferdinand and Miranda has its analogue in the scene in which Doll Common assumes the guise of the Fairy Queen for the benefit of Dapper (*Alc.* 3.5), a mock theophany that is rudely interrupted by the unexpected arrival of Mammon as Prospero's spectacle is by the approach of Caliban and his confederates. In this case as well *Doctor Faustus* is distantly implicated, since a fairly clear analogy can be discerned between the 'vanity of mine art' (*Tmp.* 4.1.41) that Prospero stages and a pageant that Faustus mounts at the behest of the German Emperor in Marlowe's play.¹⁴

This brings us finally to the problem of the metatheatrical element of the plays we are discussing, and to the issues concerning the nature and function of art that are implicitly raised by such means. In *The Alchemist*, as in *Doctor Faustus* and *The Tempest*, magic is repeatedly referred to as art, the keynote being sounded when Subtle invokes 'mine own great art' in the first scene of the drama (*Alc.* 1.1.77). The debate concerning the relation between art and nature that is one of the recurrent topoi of Renaissance literature is alluded to on a number of occasions in Jonson's play, most notably in connection with the grandiose schemes for universal social transformation concocted by Sir Epicure Mammon. Mammon is far from consistent in the pronouncements he makes on the subject, since at one point he says that Subtle can 'teach dull nature /

13 Cf. *Doctor Faustus* 4.3.84–7, 4.4.5–6. *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey Press, 1963).

14 Cf. *Doctor Faustus* 4.2.43 et seq.

What her own forces are' (*Alc.* 4.1.88–9), while at another he describes art as the 'wise, and almost-equal servant' of nature (*Alc.* 4.1.169). What is important however is not so much his fluctuating opinions concerning the relative status of the two terms in this contraposition as his conviction that nature can be perfected through art, for what he seeks to accomplish by alchemical means is inaugurate a version of the Golden Age that nature has been curiously negligent in bringing about on her own initiative. The description that Subtle supplies of this aspiration invests it at first with a visionary quality that—were it not for our knowledge of the speaker's own character and motivations—might almost seem to vindicate the role of art in human life:

He will make
Nature ashamed of her long sleep: when art,
Who's but a stepdame, shall do more than she,
In her best love to mankind, ever could.
If his dream last, he'll turn the age, to gold.

(*Alc.* 1.4.25–9)

However, the 'gold' that Mammon has in mind is not of the figurative kind but the precious metal itself, so that what we are witnessing when he brings all the metal implements in his possession to Subtle for transmutation is not a re-enactment but a travesty of the mythical conversion of the Age of Iron into that of Gold. The myth of metamorphosis that is caricatured in the alchemical hocus-pocus of *The Alchemist* is prominent in *The Tempest* as well, in which the notion of a sea-change transfiguring all things constitutes a governing metaphor, but Shakespeare's views concerning the character and scope of such a transformation are obviously of another kind altogether.

The question of whether art merely imitates nature, perverts nature from her true course, or perfects nature, was one much debated in the Renaissance, and the essay by Montaigne that was cited

earlier in this chapter represents a significant contribution to that controversy. In support of his thesis that the Indians of the New World are 'savage' only in the sense that they are uncontaminated by the mores of European society, Montaigne likens these people to fruits growing wild, which are in his estimation superior in many respects to those that have been 'bastardized' through human cultivation. In a celebrated exchange in *The Winter's Tale*, Perdita echoes Montaigne's professed objection to the artificial transformation of nature when she explains that 'carnations and streak'd gillyvors, / which some call nature's bastards' have been excluded from her 'rustic garden' because 'There is an art which, in their piedness, shares / With great creating nature' (4.4.82–8). But that this is not the only possible conception of the relation between art and nature appears in the observations of another character in the play, Polixenes, who counters Perdita's objections to deliberate cultivation with the following argument:

Say there be;
Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather—but
The art itself is nature.

(WT 4.4.88–97)

The art which actualizes the potentialities of that nature from which it derives attains its apotheosis at the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*, when what seems to be an inert statue is symbolically brought to life through the agency of Paulina. This apparent miracle provokes Leontes's comment that 'If this be magic, let it be an

art / Lawful as eating' (5.3.110–11), the implication being that there might exist an art which, far from being at variance either with the imperatives of nature or with the dictates of Providence, is somehow conducive to the fulfilment of each. This would seem to be the kind of art that is endorsed in *The Tempest* as well, in which Prospero willingly abjures the 'rough magic' he has been wielding (*Tmp.* 5.1.50) once it has created the conditions that enable him to 'bring forth a wonder' at the end of the play (*Tmp.* 5.1.170). As it turns out, the 'wonder' that is produced, the spectacle of the children of two rival houses playing at chess, no more constitutes a subversion of the natural order than does the symbolic resurrection of Hermione with which *The Winter's Tale* culminates. Art and nature have become one, and the magic that is immanent in the symbolic tableau that Prospero presents is once again 'lawful as eating', not a perversion of nature but an affirmation of her deepest laws. It is a spectacle, moreover, that also reflects upon the function of the playwright's own art, which neither mimics nature nor corrupts it, but through an act of imaginative transfiguration assists in the process of bringing it to fruition. Prospero's masque itself, notwithstanding its acknowledged status as 'some vanity of mine art', and notwithstanding all the self-conscious contrivance and irony that characterizes it, is a celebration of the creative energies of nature and a kind of theatrical parable about how most appropriately to harness them for human purposes.

This is quite the reverse to what occurs in *The Alchemist*, in which the 'great art' that Subtle vaunts can assume no form other than that of calculated and systematic deception. The Golden Age that Mammon aspires to usher in through the agency of the Philosopher's Stone is very literally an age of gold in which he will possess an exclusive monopoly over the prime commodity, and it is his inordinate greed that renders him almost pathetically credu-

lous. Subtle's magic being wholly spurious, the only natural energies that can flourish under its influence are those of lust, avarice, and the craving for power, the vicious forces that, in the words of Albany in *King Lear*, make humanity 'prey on itself, / Like monsters of the deep' (4.2.49–50). In this respect his craft constitutes a parodic inversion of the conception of art enunciated by Polixenes, since it originates in the demonic aspects of nature and can only minister to the demonic aspects of nature. At the same time his activities too, no less than those of Prospero and Faustus, have implications respecting that other kind of art practiced by the playwright. If, like those other magicians, Subtle also engages in elaborate theatrical spectacles, it is not in order to reform the nature of those witnessing his performances, nor even to exhibit his necromantic virtuosity, but simply in order to dupe the gullible for purely material gain. Is this the realist Jonson's derisive comment on the magical theatre of his great contemporary, a theatre of illusion in which, as Jonson complains in his address to the reader prefaced to the 1612 edition of *The Alchemist*, 'to run away from Nature and be afraid of her, is the only point of art that tickles the spectators'?¹⁵ This was a charge that Jonson would reiterate in the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, and on this occasion the reference to the author of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* would be unmistakable:

If there be never a servant-monster i'the Fair; who can help it? he [the author] says; nor a nest of antics? He is loth to make Nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget Tales, Tempests, and such like drolleries.¹⁶

It is clear from such comments as these that the reaction provoked in Jonson by *The Tempest* was one of amusement mingled with amiable scorn, sentiments that were also aroused by *The Win-*

15 In Wilkes, 354.

16 In Wilkes, 492.

ter's Tale with its equally flagrant flouting of mimetic conventions and its implication that art can redeem a defective nature rather than merely mirroring it. I have been arguing throughout this discussion that even before voicing such overt objections to the view of art conveyed in Shakespeare's later drama Jonson might have been presenting a kind of parodic critique of *The Tempest* in a play that in all practical respects was virtually contemporaneous with it. And I will conclude by venturing even further out on the speculative limb, and suggesting that Jonson might have been effectively announcing this to be the case in one of the comments he has Subtle make near the beginning of that play. The comment I am referring to is one of the more portentous threats of which Subtle delivers himself in the course of his quarrel with Face:

I'll thunder you in pieces. I will teach you
How to beware to tempt a fury again
That carries tempest in his hand and voice.

(*Alc.* 1.1.60–62)

The fact that the word *tempest* belongs to the lexicon of alchemical terms should not be allowed to deflect attention from what might very well be an oblique reference to Shakespeare's play, the title of which is itself susceptible to interpretation as a thinly-veiled alchemical allusion.¹⁷ Subtle might be a charlatan, but he is one who takes himself extremely seriously, and there are moments in which he seems to be claiming a certain kinship with the tempest-wielding Prospero. If this is so, then it is of course deeply ironic that even this most deliberate of illusionists should allow himself

17 The term denotes a process by which impurities are removed from base metal, so making possible its transmutation into gold. John Mebane's intriguing suggestion that the title of Shakespeare's work might refer to this process receives the endorsement of the Arden editors of the play. See Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 181, and Vaughan and Vaughan, 63.

to be caught up in the very illusion he is perpetrating, to confound the persona he is projecting with his real self. But what intensifies the irony still further is the fact that the delusion to which he succumbs might ultimately originate not with himself but with Jonson's arch-rival Shakespeare, under the spell of whose magical theatre he unconsciously falls even as he seeks to entangle his victims in a counterfeit drama of his own.