

Closure and the Antimasque of *The Tempest*

Geraldo U. de Sousa*

Howard Felperin writes that a Shakespeare play invites two contradictory responses: on the one hand, it "demands a conservative or archeological response in so far as it carries within itself an archaic or received sign-system"; on the other, "it insists on its own difference from that older sign-system, its departure from prior art in the direction of present life" (*Shakespearean Representation* 8). He adds that "literature seems to carry its own history encoded or inscribed within it" (27).¹ *The Tempest* has remained one of the most closed plays in the entire canon; it seems the very emblem of closure. Yet many think that it contains Shakespeare's veiled farewell to the theater or that it reflects topical concerns of court aesthetics and the royal family of James I.² I would like to examine the question of boundary and closure in *The Tempest*, especially in relation to the wedding masque in Act IV, scene i. Although self-contained and independent, the masque seems incomplete, not only because Prospero breaks it off but also because it raises questions about a possible antimasque embedded in it. My main contention here is that the boundaries of the masque collapse to reveal an antimasque-like reality.³ From this examination, one can perhaps make generalizations about the play's generic encoding and embedded literary history.

One can hardly disagree with Geoffrey Bullough's statement that "although the Masque of Ceres and Juno affects the plot little, it fits admirably into the ethical pattern of the play" (237). Stephen Orgel cautions against seeking connections between this interlude and court entertainments: "the masque in *The Tempest* is not a court masque, it is a dramatic allusion to one, and it functions in the structure of the drama not as a separable interlude but as an integral part of the action" (Introd. to *Tempest* 43-44). Obviously, the masque is very

*Geraldo U. de Sousa is co-author of *Shakespeare: A Study and Research Guide*, and author of articles and reviews on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama.

well integrated into the structure of *The Tempest*, which may mean that it was originally conceived as a part of the entire play, or, as Dover Wilson and Irwin Smith contend (see Orgel, *Intro. to Tempest* 44n), Shakespeare carefully revised the play to include the masque for the 1613 court performance. An integral part of the text as it has come down to us, the masque seems to retain a high degree of closure and independence.

As with the entire play, no direct source has been discovered for the masque, although, as David M. Bergeron points out, "texts of Jacobean masques stand behind the text of Prospero's masque" (196). Geoffrey Bullough identifies two main analogues: *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604), by Samuel Daniel, and *Hymenaei* (1606), by Ben Jonson. One might make a stronger claim, as Bergeron has done, that although Daniel's *Twelve Goddesses* may not be a source in the traditional sense, Prospero's masque alludes to it. Some of the same goddesses, performing similar roles, appear in the court entertainment and in Shakespeare's play: Juno, Ceres, and Iris.

The resemblances, fully discussed by Bergeron, are quite apparent,⁴ but the changes that Shakespeare introduces are equally instructive. In creating the masque within the play, Shakespeare may have taken his cue from Daniel's statement in the dedication to the Countess of Bedford:

And though these images have oftentimes divers significations, yet it being not our purpose to represent them with all those curious and superfluous observations, we took them only to serve as hieroglyphics for our present intention, according to some one property that fitted our occasion, without observing other their mystical interpretations, wherein the authors themselves are so irregular and confused as the best mythologers, who will make somewhat to seem anything. (Spencer & Wells 26).

Daniel adds that he chose for his masque the "aptest representations that lay best and easiest for us" (26). Juno thus represents the "Goddess of empire and *regnum praesidi*"; Venus, love and amity; Proserpina, riches; Ceres, plenty; Iris, the messenger of Juno. Shakespeare clearly retains this representation of the goddesses.

As in *The Tempest*, Daniel's *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* does not claim to present the goddesses themselves but Sibylla's vision of them: "It can be but a dream: yet so great Powers have blest as humble roofs, and use, out of no other respect than their own gracefulness, to shine where they will" (33). As Daniel explains, this is but a representation of the goddesses: "for well may'st thou there observe

their shadows, but their presence will bereave thee of all save admiration and amazement, for who can look upon such Powers and speak" (32). Similarly, Prospero invites Miranda and Ferdinand to think of the spectacle Ariel and his spirits have just staged as an "insubstantial pageant" and a dream: "we are such stuff/ As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.i.156-58). But Prospero combines the roles of the playwright (Daniel) and Sibylla. Prospero, unlike Sibylla, however, emphasizes that he has created the vision: "I must / Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity of mine art" (IV.i.39-41).⁵ Later he again asserts that the actors are "spirits, which by mine art / I have from their confines called to enact / My present fancies" (IV.i.120-22).

Because Prospero states that the vision of Ceres reflects his "present fancies" and is his creation, one needs to explore the entertainment as a representation of Prospero's inner struggle. Unlike Daniel's masque, Prospero's ends not in music but with an outburst of almost uncontrollable anger when Prospero remembers Caliban's plot against his life. Caliban plans to take possession of Prospero's books (his source of power), kill Prospero, and seize Miranda (III.ii.87-89). Prospero's intense anger impresses both Ferdinand and Miranda. Ferdinand notes: "This is strange. Your father's in some passion / That works him strongly" (IV.i.143-44); to which Miranda responds: "Never till this day/ Saw I him touched with anger, so distempered" (144-45). Prospero himself admits to Ferdinand:

Sir, I am vexed.
Bear with my weakness, my old brain is troubled.
Be not disturbed with my infirmity.
If you be pleased, retire into my cell,
And there repose: A turn or two I'll walk
To still my beating mind. (158-63)

"Vexed," a troubled brain, "infirmity," "beating mind"--there is no such reaction in Daniel's *Vision*. What is going on? Prospero's behavior, considering his immense magical power, seems an irrational overreaction to Caliban and the two drunks.⁶

Obviously, Prospero's inner struggle is apparent from the beginning of the play. A political prisoner exiled on a desolate island for twelve years, Prospero becomes both excited and apprehensive about the outcome of the day's events. Within a few hours, he has staged a violent storm, asserted his power over Ariel, revealed amazing family secrets to his daughter, and caused the shipwreck of his enemies and their wandering on the isle. He has lost his temper with Ariel, Caliban, Miranda, and Ferdinand. He has obviously contemplated revenge,

a course he swerves from when Ariel's compassion for the royal party convinces him that "the rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance" (V.i.27-28). Yet his reaction to Caliban's plot seems excessive, which may indicate that the anger is symptomatic not of a real threat from without but an irrational fear from within. Perhaps the masque is not only Prospero's dream but also his nightmare.

As a dream, the masque depicts Miranda's happiness in marriage. In this context, the goddesses are instruments in the fulfillment of the dream. Iris, the messenger of the goddesses, is the first to appear to announce that Juno, "the Queen o'th'sky" (IV.i.70) and Ceres approach. Ceres inquires of Iris: "Why hath thy queen / Summoned me hither to this short-grassed green?" (82-83); Iris responds: "A contract of true love to celebrate, / And some donation freely to estate / On the blessed lovers" (84-86). This exchange reveals that the goddesses have come to celebrate Miranda's betrothal and to bless the marriage. Juno wishes the couple "long continuance" and "hourly joys"; Ceres, "earth's increase, foison plenty, / Barns and garners never empty" (IV.i.105 ff). In true masque fashion, the actors-goddesses speak directly to Ferdinand and Miranda; the idyllic world of the masques and that of the spectators become one. Thus Prospero's dream--the masque--enacts what Prospero desires most: Miranda's happy and fruitful marriage.

But the dual nature of the masque soon becomes apparent. Miranda is not yet safely married to Ferdinand; the possibility still exists that something may go wrong. To entrust her to Ferdinand, hoping that Ferdinand will not attempt premarital intercourse, must be a difficult decision because Prospero fears that Miranda will lose her virginity before marriage. This nightmare possibility in fact became a real threat when Prospero and Miranda first arrived on the island. At the beginning Prospero treated Caliban as the son he does not have; but Caliban betrayed his trust and tried to rape Miranda, as Prospero bitterly recalls:

... I have used thee [i.e., Caliban]--
 Filth as thou art--with humane care, and lodged thee
 In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
 The honour of my child. (I.ii.345-48)

Laughing heartily, Caliban says that he would have peopled the isle with Calibans (349-50). Later Prospero returns to the same subject when he gives Miranda to Ferdinand. If Ferdinand, Prospero warns, breaks Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the "full and holy rite" is ministered, the young couple will face "barren hate," and "sour-eyed disdain, and discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed with weeds so loathly / That you shall hate it both" (IV.i.14-22). The nightmarish

possibility of premarital intercourse haunts Prospero.

Prospero's preoccupation with his daughter's sexuality may simply indicate an overly protective father, or it may indicate an obsession. On this desolate island for twelve years, Prospero has not had any sexual outlet. Perhaps, there is even a suggestion of incest, which would of course intensify his struggle to give up his daughter to a possible suitor. The changes Shakespeare introduces in Daniel's masque may help us understand Prospero's concerns. In Daniel, Juno descends "crown'd with bright stars"; Ceres, the goddess of "plenty," promises that "who sows on Virtue shall with glory reap"; Venus speaks of "amity" and "affections true"; Proserpina holds "the mine of wealth, with cheerful majesty" (33-34). I singled out these four goddesses because these are the only ones who appear or are alluded to in Prospero's masque. Daniel presents no sense of struggle or tension among the goddesses, but Shakespeare excludes Venus (and her son Cupid) and Proserpina from the masque, a fact to which Ceres calls attention:

Tell me, heavenly bow [i.e., Iris],
If Venus or her son, as thou dost know,
Do now attend the Queen [Juno]? Since they did plot
The means that dusky Dis my daughter got,
Her and her blind boy's scandalled company
I have forsworn. (IV.i.86-91)

Ceres alludes to her daughter Proserpina, whom "dusky Dis" (Pluto, god of the underworld, has abducted and raped. Angry with both Venus and Cupid, who conspired with Dis to abduct and take Proserpina to Hades, Ceres implies the immediacy of the tragedy, perhaps suggesting that it happened recently. Her grief seems strong. Like Prospero, Ceres is a parent concerned with her daughter's reputation and future; but unlike Miranda, Proserpina has been violated.

The abduction of Proserpina constitutes, of course, part of the myth of the goddesses, but, as Daniel and others have shown, it can be excluded.⁷ In the entertainment staged for the baptism of prince Henry of Scotland in 1594, Ceres appeared as a symbol of plenty with no reference to her family problem: "In the first front stood Dame Ceres, with a sickle in her right hand, and a handfull of corne in the other; and upon the outmost part of her thigh was written this sentence, 'Fundent uberes omnia campi', which is to say, the plenteous fields afford all things" (Nichols, III, 364). One wonders whether James I and his family watching a court performance of *The Tempest* in 1611 recalled this rather different Ceres. The allusion to Proserpina's plight in Prospero's masque surprises and shocks us. One

wonders why Ceres refers to her personal tragedy during the celebration. Even as she rejoices in the happiness envisioned for Miranda, Ceres cannot put her mind to rest. She knows that if Venus and Cupid had their way, they would disrupt this joyous occasion. Iris finally allays Ceres' fear, saying that Venus and Cupid were seen "Cutting the clouds towards Paphos," even though they would rather do "some wanton charm" upon Ferdinand and Miranda (IV.i.91-96). From personal experience, Ceres knows that she cannot trust Venus and Cupid, who have already brought about more than enough pain and sorrow.

Venus, Ceres, and Proserpina have become rather different characters in Prospero's masque, revealing a side that Daniel did not find necessary to expose. But, although Shakespeare does not follow Daniel, he may have gotten the idea for his representation of the goddesses from another masque: Jonson's *Hymenaei*. In this masque, the presenter Reason argues that without Hymen, "Venus can doe nought, / Save what with shame is bought" (Bullough, 331). Shakespeare could find, however, a complete dramatization of Proserpina's rape in Thomas Heywood's *The Silver Age* (1611/1613). In this play, Pluto, who comes in "*his Chariot drawne in by Diuels*" (135), instantly falls in love with Proserpina. She rejects him, calling him "Hell-hound" and "Diuell," but to no avail because he is determined to take her to Hades. When Ceres notices her daughter's disappearance, she is extremely sad: "I haue sought the medowes, gleabes, and new-reap't fields, / Yet cannot finde my childe" (137). She turns to various gods to help her find the missing daughter, but no one can help her. Finally, the River Arethusa says: "My head's in Hell, where Styngian *Pluto* reignes, / There did I see the louely *Proserpine*, / Whom *Pluto* hath rap't hence" (140). When Jove himself refuses to help Ceres, she turns to Hercules who succeeds in bringing Proserpina back. Proserpina thanks him for rescuing her "out of the armes of *Dis*, / The vnder-world, and fiery iawes of hell" (160). But because she has eaten a pomegranate, she must remain in hell. Jove eventually decrees that she will stay half the time in Hades and half in heaven, a compromise to which Ceres finally agrees.

Several similarities exist between the masque in *The Tempest* and Heywood's *The Silver Age*. Caliban and Dis resemble Pluto of Heywood's play, who is described as a devil and hell-hound. Ceres, who is also extremely distraught about her daughter's fate, asks Jove: "canst thou suffer her / To be intoomb'd in hell before her time?" (161). Curiously enough, Venus proves villainous; she sides with Pluto, defending the rape: "What could he lesse do if he lou'd the Lady" (161).

In re-presenting *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, Heywood's

The Silver Age, or a similar text, Shakespeare decides to include Venus and her son Cupid as antimasque-like characters to dramatize the story of a mother who lost her daughter to the monstrous god of Hades. In the masque Juno presides over harmony, fruitfulness, and happiness in marriage; in the antimasque Venus represents strife, intrigue, and lust. Because of what Venus and Cupid have done to Proserpina, Ceres' fear seems indeed well founded. Yet one should highlight that even this antimasque embedded in Prospero's masque seems incomplete. Ceres does not mention any resolution to her problem; this may suggest that in his subconscious Prospero cannot contemplate a compromise similar to the one Ceres had to accept.

Within the masque of Prospero lies the tragic story of a mother's suffering over her daughter's abduction. In the goddesses, Prospero obviously sees himself and Miranda because he superimposes the celebration of Miranda's betrothal upon Proserpina's fate. Prospero cannot altogether omit the allusion to Proserpina; whenever he contemplates Miranda's happiness, a demonic representation of her rape lurks out of the "dark and backward and abysm" of his subconscious, where Proserpina--Miranda's double and foil--is forever lost.

In this larger context, Caliban seems to pose much more of a threat to Prospero than Prospero admits. Caliban's plot interrupting the masque brings out the fear that perhaps even Ferdinand will become another Caliban. It reminds Prospero of Caliban's earlier attempt to ravish Miranda and of Pluto's successful abduction of Proserpina. The recollection is untimely; at the very moment Prospero gives away his daughter to a young suitor, he has once again to confront an old distrust and a subconscious fear. A threat against Miranda's honor lurks out of the past; for a moment present hopes and past fear coalesce in chaotic, antimasque-like fury. The dusky underground, where Pluto has taken Proserpina, opens up; in the antimasque world, Miranda's betrothal turns into the nightmarish rite of Proserpina's rape.

I do not want to overstate my case by saying that the story alluded to constitutes an antimasque in any formal sense, but it provides an interesting alternative to the contentions that the Caliban plot and the banquet apparition in III.iii. constitute antimasques, as proposed by Enid Welsford and Glynne Wickham, respectively. Only in the most general sense could one say that the Caliban plot is the counterpart of Prospero's masque. The banquet apparition also offers a more attractive alternative because, as Wickham aptly states, it "mirrors the unnatural and disorderly spiritual state of the 'three men of sin' for whom it is displayed--royal persons whose crimes and hypocrisy make them unfit to govern" (5). He explains the separation, by some seventy lines, of the banquet (the antimasque) from the

masque by saying that "this is a necessary deviation to permit one set of characters to react to the first vision and then quit the stage in order to make way for those other characters who are to witness the second of Prospero's 'high charms' and who must first be prepared by him to perceive it" (4). In a sense, both the banquet apparition and the Caliban-plot reflect in an antimasque-like way the political conflict of the larger play, but they can hardly be--thematically, structurally--the counterpart of the masque of the goddesses, which celebrates a betrothal.

Wickham overstates his case, however, when he claims that Shakespeare borrowed the antimasque from Jonson, who first formally used it in *The Masque of Queens* (February 2, 1609); Wickham is amazed at the "remarkable fact that Shakespeare should have chosen to borrow this double device [masque and antimasque] within a year and a half of the invention of the anti-masque" (4). But a stronger case could in fact be made for Shakespeare going to an older form of the masque, which contained its own antithesis. Such antithetical elements or embryonic antimasques, as Orgel points out, occur as early as the *Mask of Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* (3 Mar. 1595), by Francis Davison, and were included in other masques, as for example in Jonson's *The Masque of Blacknesse*.⁸ If Shakespeare was consciously trying to write an antimasque, he did not have to go to the *Masque of Queens* to find a precedent.

Whether the story Ceres alludes to is enough to constitute an antimasque or not, the question remains as to what the critic can make of such allusions. Howard Felperin notes, for example, in his essay on *The Winter's Tale*:

The problem I have in mind arises for the audience or interpreter whenever a work of literature makes reference to prior or off-stage or, in the most general terms, unrepresented action. To what extent ought we to feel constrained in interpreting that which is not actually presented in the text, not actually 'there', as we say, before us? (3-4)

Felperin fully discusses the problem of what to make of unrepresented action or allusions in his essay on the ambiguities of *The Winter's Tale*. An example close to the problem in *The Tempest* occurs in *Cymbeline*.⁹ Unable to obtain Imogen's favors, Iachimo hides inside a trunk, which is then carried to her chamber. He hopes to obtain proof to convince Posthumus of Imogen's infidelity. In one sense Iachimo symbolically rapes Imogen, invading the privacy of her bedroom and examining her body as she sleeps. In the process, he discovers that she had "been reading late, / The tale of Tereus, here the

leaf's turn'd / Where Philomel gave up" (II.ii.44-46). Just before she went to sleep, Imogen as if foreseeing what was to happen had been reading the story of Philomel's rape. The mythological story serves as a foil for what has *not* taken place in the world of the play, much in the same way that Proserpina's myth functions in *The Tempest*.

Through unrepresented action or allusion, Shakespeare explores alternative planes of reality. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen fortunately escapes the experience that her double Philomel endured; similarly, in *The Tempest* Proserpina fulfills Miranda's antimasque destiny. But perhaps more important, the story of Ceres and her daughter undermines the closure of the masque, revealing Prospero's subconscious worry and offstage events. The resulting lack of closure is consistent with the "rethinking of old issues," which Orgel sees as dominant in *The Tempest*: "there is a profoundly retrospective quality to the drama, which is deeply involved in recounting and re-enacting past action, in evoking and educating the memory" (Intro. to *The Tempest*, 5). The nonclosure and deferral brought about by the alternative reality represented in the masque also point to the characteristic use of interlacement in romance, as Eugene Vinaver has demonstrated. It also resembles the use of "detours, postponements, and suspensions" in romance, a genre that Patricia Parker has described as "the quest for, and simultaneous distancing of, an end or presence" or "desire to remain suspended on the threshold before arrival" (227).

The Tempest, which is rather claustrophobic by Shakespeare's standards, reveals that its action extends backwards to recapitulate not only the events surrounding Prospero's deposition but also the story of the witch Sycorax and her son, and, as I have shown, the tragic story of Ceres' daughter's abduction and rape. The masque with the embedded antimasque illustrates how romance deals with boundaries.¹⁰ *The Tempest* represents in many ways the culmination of Shakespeare's artistic achievement; yet it looks back to reveal its roots in romance,¹¹ resisting closure, breaking boundaries. Obviously, the vision that the masque presents must prevail. In a sense this is closure, but the antimasque concealed by layers of sedimentation opens up the boundaries of the masque to give us a glimpse into Prospero's concern--how things would have been otherwise. While the Masque of Prospero differs from all known sources and analogues, it may, in fact, include Heywood or another text where Shakespeare found a dramatization of Proserpina's fate. The goddess' story underscores Prospero's subconscious fear. "The simple act of referring," as Felperin notes, "has turned into an endless process of deferral" ("Deconstruction of presence" 15).

Notes

1. Felperin adds that "it might be possible, then, to derive literary history from within literature itself rather than impose upon it an historical model drawn from the apparently non-literary context of the natural organic world, or political and military history, or the sublimated savagery of the Freudian family romance" (27).
2. See Orgel, *Introd. to The Tempest*, Oxford Shakespeare, and Bergeron.
3. For a cogent discussion of closure, see Howard 113-127. Also see my discussion of genre boundaries in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* 134-146. "Antimasque," which was performed by professional actors, refers to a grotesque interlude presented in a court masque serving as a foil to the masque proper, which was performed by courtiers. The antimasque world is antithetical to the masque.
4. For a discussion of masque elements in *The Tempest*, see Welsford 336-49; Kermodé, *Introd.*, *The Tempest*, Arden edition lxxi-lxxvi; Wickham 1-14; and Grudin 401-409.
5. All quotations from the play are from *The Tempest*, The Oxford Shakespeare, ed. Stephen Orgel.
6. For an interesting discussion of Prospero's reaction, see Lindenbaum 161-171.
7. Ceres appears in a number of entertainments and plays of the period, but only in Heywood's play is the fate of her daughter dramatized. She appears, for example, in the entertainment that lady Russell put on for the Queen at Bisham in 1592 (Wilson 43-47); John Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis*; the ceremonial for the baptism of Prince Henry of Scotland in 1594; and John Marston's *Histrion-mastix*. In Robert Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (1594), Ceres also opposes lust, as she instructs Mercury: "Now doo I leaue thee Mercury, and will in to take my place,/ Doo what thou canst in wanton lusts disgrace" (ll. 43-44); however, she does not refer to her daughter's tragedy.
8. *The Masque of Blacknesse*, for instance, is an example of a masque with an antimasque. The title, writes Orgel, "is paradoxical, for blackness is a quality antithetical to the court, symbolic source of light and beauty, and to the courtly masquers" (*Jonsonian Masque* 120). "The Masquers," he adds, "provide their own antimasque"; "it is only necessary that the 'twelve Nymphs, Negro's' be revealed--that we see them--for the antimasque to have taken place" (120).
9. I am indebted to David Bergeron for bringing this example to my attention.
10. Lemly (131-47) and Frye (11-39) explore connections between romance and masque.
11. See Schmidgall 423-39.

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