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_The Tempest_ and the betrothal of Princess Elizabeth
to Frederick the Elector of Palatine
at Whitehall Palace, 1612–1613

There are few certainties we can claim for Shakespeare’s life or his plays. When the plays were composed or performed has been grist for the scholarly mill, and still there is little about these matters we know for sure.¹ But that the King’s Men performed Shakespeare’s _The Tempest_² at the behest of the Court of King James I during the Court’s 1612–1613 season is as close to a fact about Shakespeare as we can obtain.

_The Tempest_ at court, 1612–1613: its first recorded performance

Records indicate that _The Tempest_, among other plays, was performed at Whitehall Palace. Not only do we know this, we also know for what purpose it was played: to celebrate the betrothal ceremonies of James’s daughter Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector of the Rhineland Palatinate, culminating in their wedding ceremony on February 14, 1613. So sometime between December 1612 and May 1613 (when their marriage revels ended), we know King James, his royal family, his courtly entourage, and others with access to Court viewed _The Tempest_.³ This paper will suggest that the play’s 1612–1613 theatrical, political, and poetical milieu may provide us with new insights. Indeed, this Court _Tempest_ offers an opportunity unusual in Shakespeare studies: to surmise from eye-witness accounts how an actual, though

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¹ “Shakespeare probably wrote _The Tempest_ between the arrival of those accounts [of a 1610 English shipwreck] and the play’s first recorded performance about a year later. According to a rare surviving record of performances on 1 November 1611 (‘Hallomas nyght’), Shakespeare’s acting company ‘presented att Whitehall before the kings Majestie a play Called the Tempest.’ During the winter of 1612–13, _The Tempest_ had a second royal performance as part of the festivities celebrating Princess Elizabeth’s betrothall to the Elector Palatine” (Chambers 1923, 1.490–4; also cf. Kermode xvii–xxiv).

² All references to speeches in Shakespeare’s _The Tempest_ are from the Vaughan and Vaughan edition (2011); James’s political speeches are from Sommerville (1994) and cited as KJ.

³ Kermode (xxii) citing Chambers (1923, 2.342): “Item paid to John Hemings [...] for presenting before the Princes Highnes the Lady Elizabeth and the Prince Pallatyne Elector sowerteene severall playes, viz [...] The Tempest”.

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extraordinary, spectator, King James I, at Whitehall Palace, during 1612–1613 – with his known personal and public predilections – might have viewed it. This perspective provides a window into *The Tempest* at the moment of production.

**The theatrical milieu**

Plays and entertainments in 1612–1613 could have been performed in any number of areas in Whitehall Palace. But large-scale entertainments, like *The Tempest*, were probably performed either at the old Banqueting House (1606–1619) or the Great Hall (Kernan 18). Whatever the venue, the King, the royal family, and his entourage, viewed the plays and other entertainments from a special raised platform called “the State” (ibid.). Where “the State” was placed varied according to the Hall. Whatever the Hall, the royals and their guests occupied an elevated platform. Although there is scant evidence to determine precisely where in Whitehall “the State” was located (cf. Kernan 18–19), what little we know is quite suggestive.

The King sat on a raised stage, where he could best hear the performance. While the “great stage” was erected at one end of the old Banqueting House, the King’s “stage” served as “the King’s dais”; it was a “dais with the Chair of State set under the great window of the south wall which always formed the directive centre of the hall” (Palme 151, 182). The lines of perspective, then, “ran together in the King’s eye, so the acting, the songs, and the dances were also directed toward him. It was to the King that heralds and actors turned at highpoints of the spectacle” (Palme 152). So “only from where he [the King] sat did the stage illusion work to perfection” (Palme 151). From this, we can surmise that King James, at Whitehall, was conspicuously positioned to hear plays and entertainments presented there.

Records also indicate that it was equally important for the King to be seen as it was for him to hear the play. Here it is worth retelling a commonplace account of King James’s seating arrangement at entertainments:

In 1605 King James paid a visit to Oxford, and the university undertook to entertain him with four plays. A stage was constructed in Christ Church hall, and for the first time in England drama was produced with perspective sets and moveable scenery [...]. The location of the royal seat was determined by the law of optics. However, according to a contemporary account, when representatives arrived from court to oversee the arrangements for the performance, they “utterly dislike the stage at Christ Church, and above all, the place appointed for the chair of

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4 Thomas Campion and Inigo Jones staged The Lord’s Masque (cf. Nichols 97) on the wedding night and that since Inigo Jones introduced perspective in England after 1605 (cf. Orgel 1975, 10), the king’s seat was probably arranged with due consideration to the royal perspective.
Estate, because it was no higher, and the King so placed that the auditory could see but his cheek only.’ The university’s vice-chancellor undertook to explain ‘that by the art of perspective the King should behold all better than if he sat higher.’ But the courtiers remained adamant, and ‘in the end, the place was removed, and sett in the midst of the Hall, but too far from the stage […] the king complained that he could not hear the play. (Orgel 1975, 14)

If, as this anecdote suggests, placement of “the State” sometimes conflicted with the King’s ability to hear the play, it was important, particularly when the King was away from Court, that the King be positioned where he could best be seen. So there seems to have been two possible viewing dynamics at entertainments the King attended: a location where the King could best hear the play and where the other spectators could best see him.

These dynamics – especially James’s complaint at Oxford that he could not hear the play – suggest that the King was not a disinterested observer. It is a common misperception that James was, at best, an uninvolved spectator at plays and entertainments. We know otherwise. Eyewitness accounts show that King James was of two minds about attending theatrical performances. He seems to have been uninterested in shows that had no direct bearing on issues of concern to him. That James was often boorish during a play’s production seems understandable, especially if the circumstances were oppressive: for example, a five-hour “performance of a Latin play, Ajax Flagellifer, performed at Christ Church Hall, Oxford, on the evening of August 28, 1605, ‘The king was very weary before he came thither, but much more wearied by it and spoke many words of dislike’” (Kernan 189; Nichols 550). The very next night the king fell asleep at a performance of the comedy Vertumnus, which did not end until one o’clock in the morning. When he awoke, he showed his disapproval by saying, “‘I marvel what they think me to be!’” (Kernan 189; Nichols 552). These anecdotes suggest that if the entertainment was of little interest to him or the physical circumstances of the Hall were uncomfortable, the King paid little or no attention to it.

But when he attended plays that addressed topics of interest to him, as reports indicate, James was fully engaged, and even enthusiastic, even if the performance ran for five hours. The Ignoramus by George Ruggles, for example, which included a caricature of Sir Edward Coke, who defended the Common Law against the King’s prerogative, drew roars of laughter from the King, and even though this play lasted for five hours, the King shouted “Plaudite” to congratulate the author on his satirical depiction of Coke (Kernan 191–92). This eye-witness evidence suggests that James enjoyed entertainments that addressed his own concerns, not necessarily Shakespeare’s concerns or those of any other playwright.

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5 See Kernan (188–201) for a synopsis of James’s varying responses to entertainments.
So what issues raised in *The Tempest* might engage the King? By posing this question, I am not suggesting that *The Tempest* was composed, or re-composed (see Kermode xvii ff.), for the occasion of Elizabeth’s betrothal. At this time, we cannot know this. Nor am I suggesting that the King was particularly enthused about the play. We have no record of his response, and we only suppose he attended its performance; we only know it was played twice at Court, once during the betrothal festivities. And, after all, *Othello* was also performed during the 1612-1613 season, and except for the coincidence of James’s and Iago’s name or the contemporary threat of Turks, *Othello* seems to have little to do with James’s interests.

What I am suggesting is that the King’s interests and the play’s topics may share a resemblance, and perhaps the 1613 production of the play even elicited a ‘Plaudite’ from the King if he were present and particularly engaged.

**A political milieu: James and the commons**

At the time *The Tempest* was performed at Court, King James was avidly engaged in a dispute over the extent of his monarchical prerogative. During the 1610 Parliament, especially, debate in the Commons about the King’s “imposition” of tariffs to raise funds for his household expenses (which included money to pay for Courtly entertainments such as *The Tempest*) “led to questions about command of the King and assent of Parliament” (Wormald 37). This ideological conflict between a subject’s liberty and King James’s prerogative raged through the rest of James’s reign. In 1610 James Whitelocke, a skillful rhetorician who opposed impositions, granted, from the floor of Parliament, that the “king out of parliament” exercised many prerogatives, but, he added, the “king in parliament” exercised even greater powers, such as, the “power to make laws,” the “power to judge without appeal,” and, to the point, “this right of imposing” tariffs (Christianson 80–81). On the other hand, in 1610 Lancelot Andrewes complained that things were so bad that every “tongue is walking and every pen busy, to touch them and their rights which they are to have, and their duties they are to do [...] men [Puritan preachers] indeed of tumultuous spirits [...] taking every opportunity to attack and insult over the rights of princes” (Lake 120). This dispute about impositions, among other such matters, rested on two essential questions: Who had the original claim to rule – the people or the king? And,

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6 See Sommerville (1994, xv–xxviii) for a incisive reassessment of this topic and the “revisionist” approach to it.

7 This dispute, among other disagreements, culminated in the 1649 beheading of Charles on a scaffold set up in front of James’s rebuilt Banqueting Hall, where *The Tempest* had been performed in 1611 and 1613.
its attendant question, if the king derived his powers directly from God, and not from old laws [or the people/Parliament], could the king then infringe any purely human law if he judged it to be necessary? (cf. Sommerville 1991, 57). King James’s position on these two questions can be ascertained in his speeches to Parliament, especially his Speech of 1610 (KJ 179–202).

If the main purpose of this speech was to secure funds “for supporting of my state and necessities” (KJ 180), James justified his request for this money within the context of his notion of a king’s double prerogative. That is, James assured Parliament, especially the Commons, that on this matter he had no “Intention” of exercising his absolute kingly power, and that he planned “to continue still my gouernment according to [...] the Lawes of this Kingdome” (KJ 180). To explain why he would choose to limit the extent of his prerogative, James employed, what I shall call, the “settled state” topos (KJ 182):

As wee liued in a setled state of a Kingdome which was governed by his owne fundamentall Lawes and Orders, that according thereunto, they were now (being assembled for this purpose in Parliament) to consider how to helpe such a King as now they had; And that according to the ancient forme, and order established in this Kingdome: putting so, a difference betweene the general power of a King in Diuinity, and the settled and established State of the Crowne, and Kingdome” (KJ 182).

Essentially, James means that in a “settled” state, the king governs according to his own fundamental laws. There is, however, a difference between a king’s exercise of his prerogative in this “settled state” and the king’s exercise of his power “in Diuinity” (KJ 182). That is, while in a “settled state” the king rules according to his own law; in “Diuinity,” the king rules with extraordinary, god-like powers:

And the like power [God’s] haue Kings: they make and vnmake their subjectes: they have power of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death” (KJ 181).

Here it is important to note that James reminds Parliament that, acting “in Diuinity,” he, alone, may condemn a man to death. Although he feels it necessary to assert his god-like power, James reiterates his willingness to rule according to his own laws. But before repeating the “settled state” topos, James reminds Parliament of his antecedent, “the state of kings in their first originall”:

But now in these our times we are to distinguish betweeene the state of kings in their first originall, and betweeene the state of settled Kings and Monarches, that do at this time govern in civill Kingdomes [...] in the first originall of Kings, whereof some has their beginning by Conquest, and some by election of the people, their wills at that time serued for Law; Yet how soone Kingdomes began to be settled in civilitie and policie, then did kings set downe their minds by Lawes, which are properly made by the king onely; but at the rogation of the people, the Kings grant being obtained thereunto [...] euery iust King in a setled Kingdome is bound to
observe that paction made to his people by his Lawes, in framing his gouernment agreeable thereunto (KJ 183).

If “in their first originall,” kings’ “wills at that time serued for Law”; the king in a “settled state” is bound by those laws of his own making. Here, James reassures Parliament that despite the “great difference betweene a Kings gouvernement in a setled State, and what Kings in their originall power might doe” (KJ 183), he is, as “evemy just King in a setled Kingdome is,” “bound to obseure that paction made to his people by his Lawes” (KJ 183). James’s use of this “settled state” topos, in contrast to the concept of a king in his “originall state,” appears in several of James’s speeches.

It can be found in James’s earlier “The Trew Law of Free Monarchies” (1598), which was reprinted in London on the occasion of his coronation (1603). In “Trew Law” James used the “settled state” topos to counter the “seditious writers” (Continental Catholics), who “would perswade vs, that the Lawes and state of our countrey were established before the admitting of a king” (KJ 73). According to James, in its “originall state,” Scotland was “scantly inhabited, but by very few, and they as barbarous and scant of ciuilitie”(KJ 73):

A wise king comming in among barbares, first established the estate and forme of gouernment, and thereafter made lawes by himselfe, and his successours according thereto (KJ 73).

In his “originall state,” the king uses his extraordinary powers to “forme a gouernment” and to make “lawes by himselfe.” However, in the “settled state,” according to James, “a good king will not onely delight to rule his subiects by the lawe, but euen will conforme himselfe in his owne actions thervnto” (KJ 75). “Trew Law,” then, contains an early, though fully formed, version of the “settled state” topos.

This topos also appears in a speech James delivered in Star Chamber in 1616. Arguing against Coke about the relationship between royal power and the Common Law, James used the “settled state” topos to explain the origins of the office of judges:

In all well seteld Monarchies, where Law is established formerly and orderly, there judgement is deferred from the King to his subordinate Magistrates; not that the King takes it from himselfe, but giues it vnto them. (KJ 205)

As he did in 1610, James uses the “settled state” topos to counter Coke’s claim that the King’s prerogative was defined by the Common Law of the land (cf. Sommerville 1986, xxii).

These iterations of the “settled state” topos, to whatever purpose James puts it, comprise three parts: first, in the “originall state” the King’s will is law; second, in situ, the king creates his own laws and policies; third, in a “settled state” the just king is delighted to choose to rule according to his
processors’ laws. In these speeches, when James makes a distinction between “originall” and “settled” States, he defines his prerogative as limited only by his own and his ancestor’s Laws; and, in this way, he rejects the Commons’ complaint that he has placed himself above the Law. There was much dissen- tion in the Commons regarding James’s conception of the monarchy. For example, Chamberlain reports that it “strained so high and made so transcendent” the royal prerogative, that it “bred generally much discomfort,” so much so that he wished that “this speech might never come in print” (Thomsan 1.303). Just prior to The Tempest’s performance at Court, and because of political fallout from this dispute about impositions between James and the Commons, James prorogued the Parliament he had called five months earlier, in July 1610. Within this tumultuous political context The Tempest was composed and was performed twice at Court (1611–1612, 1612–1613). In light of James’s view of a king’s prerogative, as it is delineated in his political writing and speeches – (Trew Law 1598), “A Speech” (1610), and his Speech to the Star Chamber (1616) – how would James receive Shakespeare’s The Tempest, as performed at Court, 1612–1613?

From his elevated “state” in the Banqueting House, James might have recognized in Prospero’s use of his “art” an exemplar of a King in his “originall power.” Prospero’s exercise of his “so potent art” (5.1.50) and his abjura- tion of it (cf. 5.1.51) compare to James’s notion in his Speech to parliament of 1610 that “it is a great difference betwenee a Kings gouernment in a settled State and what kings in their originall power might doe” (KJ 184). But what, according to James, might a king do in his “originall power”? Similarly, what might “a Kings gouernment in a settled State” look like? In this next section of my essay, I shall compare the attributes of James’s conception of a king’s power with that of Prospero’s “so potent art” (5.1.50).

James’s “Kings in their first originall power”: kings “are called Gods”

In his 1610 Speech to parliament, James identifies “three principall simili- tudes that illustrate the State of MONARCHIE” (KJ 181). Pertinent to this paper are the first similitude, that Kings “are called Gods” (ibid.); and the second, that Kings are also compared to “Fathers of families” (ibid.). It is the purpose of this section of my essay to suggest that The Tempest reflects James’s conception of a king in his “first originall”: that “Kings are not onely Gods Lieutenants vpon earth, and sit vpon Gods throne, but euen by God himselfe they are called Gods” (ibid.); further, in their “resemblance of Divine power vpon earth” (ibid.), kings share the Attributes to God” (ibid.). That is, like God, Kings have the power to
make and vnmake their subiects: they have pouver of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death: judges ouer all their subiects and in all causes, and yet accountable to none but God onely. They haue power to exalt low things, and abase high things (ibid.).

In addition, because of the likeness of a king’s power to God’s, the king can require from his subjects his “due”: both the affectation of the soule, and the seruice of the body of his subiects” (ibid.). This similitude between God’s attributes and a king’s has three main elements. Kings are Gods on earth, King exercise God-like power over their subjects, and Kings are “due” the affection and service of their subjects. This, then, is James’s conception when a king’s power is “in Abstracto,” when it is “most trew in Diuinitie” (ibid.), or when a king is in his “first originall power.”

When, in 1613, James and his Court viewed The Tempest, could they have heard in the play’s speeches the King’s notion of the “state of Monarchie”? Does Prospero’s use of his “art” compare to James’s first similitude: that kings “exercise a manner or resemblance of Diuine power vpon earth” (ibid.)? To answer these questions, I shall juxtapose relevant speeches from The Tempest with James’s statements about the “state of Monarchie”.

In The Tempest, Prospero’s magical “art” (5.1.50) seems to parallel James’s notion of a king’s “Divine power on earth.” On viewing a ship foundering in Prospero’s sea-storm, Miranda complains that only a “god of power” (1.2.10) could abate the storm. Similarly, Prospero reminds Ariel that his “art” “did free thee” (1.2.251) from the “torment” inflicted on him by the supernatural “foul witch Sycorax” (1.2.258): “mine art, / When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape / The pine and let thee out” (1.2.291–93). In addition, Caliban – although he claims that “This island’s mine by [the supernatural] Sycorax, my mother” (1.2.332) – reluctantly admits that Prospero’s “art is of such power / It would control my dam’s [supernatural] god Setebos, / And make a vassal of him” (1.2.373–75). Ferdinand too speculates that the music played by Ariel, Prospero’s deputy, is that of “Some god o’th’island” (1.2.390) and that “This is no mortal business nor no sound / That the earth owes” (1.2.407–08). Gonzalo describes the conspirator’s “preservation” as a “miracle” (2.1.6). Warning King Alonzo and Gonzalo that Sebastian and Antonio had attempted to kill them, Ariel comments, “My master through his art foresees the danger” (2.1.298). And the “good” Gonzalo hears Ariel’s warning the efficacy of supernatural aid, “Now, good angels preserve the King!” (2.1.308). The play’s characters, except for the cynical Sebastian and Antonio, attribute their strange experiences to a “god of power” (1.2.10).

Indeed, Prospero’s “art” – like James’s God-like powers – is effected by his “brave spirit” Ariel (1.2.206) to amaze and perturb his enemies. When, for example, Prospero asks Ariel about the effect of the sea-storm on the ship’s
passengers, “Hast thou, spirit, / Performed to point the tempest that I bade thee?” (1.2.193–94), Ariel’s response details how he amazed the passengers:

I boarded the King’s ship: now on the beak,
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin
I flamed amazement. Sometime I’d divide
And burn in many places – on the topmast,
The yards and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,
Then meet and join. (1.2.196–201)

Further emphasizing Prospero’s god-like power, Ariel compares his own flame – “I flame distinctly” (1.2.200) – to that of the Roman deities, Jove and Neptune:

Jove’s lightning, the precursors
O’ th’ dreadful thunderclaps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks
Of sulphurous roaring, the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread trident shake. (1.2.201–206)

Ariel’s awesome display of Prospero’s ‘art’ causes the passengers to react in amazement:

Not a soul
But felt a fever of the mad and played
Some tricks of desperation. All but mariners
Plunged in the foaming brine and quit the vessel;
Then all afire with me, the King’s son Ferdinand,
With hair up-staring (then like reeds, not hair)
Was the first man that leapt, cried ‘Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here’. (1.2.208–14)

Fever, madness, and desperation comprise the passengers’ terrified reaction to Ariel’s dreadful enactment of Prospero’s ‘art.’ And Prospero’s God-like capacity to cause wonder in other characters recurs through the play.

Prospero’s supernatural power amazes other characters in his second spectacle, the Banquet/Harpy scene (3.3). As in the storm scene, Prospero and Ariel’s conjuration amaze Alonzo, Gonzalo, Antonio, and Sebastian. At this time, Ariel accomplishes a triple vanishing. First, the “strange shapes” “vanished strangely” (3.3.18, s.d.; 3.3.39); second, “the banquet vanishes” (3.3.52, s.d.); and, finally, the Harpy “vanishes in thunder” (3.3.82, s.d.). Just as the ship’s passengers react desperately to the play’s opening storm, so Alonzo, Antonio, and Sebastian – according to Gonzalo – “All three of them are desperate” (3.3.105). In a speech that recalls how Ariel “flamed amazement” (1.2.198) aboard the foundering ship, Prospero similarly asserts: “My high charms work, / And these, mine enemies, are all knit up / In their dis-
tractions. They now are in my power; / And in these fits I leave them” (3.3.88–91).

As in the opening storm scene, Gonzalo describes Prospero’s display of his “art” in divine terms. Later in the play, Gonzalo asks Alonzo, “I’ th’name of something holy, sir, why stand you / In this strange stare?” (3.3.93–94). Finally, Prospero’s “powers” (3.3.73) take on the connotations of divine retribution: the usurpers are “three men of sin” (3.3.53) guilty of “Ling’ring perdition” (3.3.77).

This pattern emerges again when Prospero, through his extraordinary art, ‘amazes’ his potential assassins, Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo. When Ariel reports that the drunkards – Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo – are “So full of valour that they smote the air / For breathing in their faces, beat the ground / For kissing of their feet” (4.1.172–74). Prospero recalls his ironic depiction of the subverters Alonzo, Antonio, and Sebastian, men “of such-like valour” (3.3.59); they who “may as well / Wound the loud winds, or with bemocked-at stabs / Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish / One dowle that’s in my plume” (3.3.62–65). While Prospero distracts the aristocratic usurpers with an elaborate series of magical appearances and vanishings, he instructs Ariel to decoy the drunken conspirators with worthless clothing, “[t]he trumpery in my house: go bring it hither, / For stale to catch these thieves” (4.1.186–88).

Like the overtones of divine retribution in Ariel’s “three men of sin” speech (3.3.53–82), Prospero’s “Spirits” (4.1.254, s.d.) punish the drunkards:

Go, charge my goblins that they grind their joints
With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews
With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them
Than pard or cat o’ mountain. (4.1.258–61)

With Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano punished – “hunted soundly” (4.1.262) – now does Prospero’s “project gather to a head. / My charms crack not; my spirits obey” (5.1.1–2). Prospero’s supernatural power, then, distracts his enemies: “The King, / His brother and yours abide all three distracted […] / Your charm so strongly works ‘em” (5.1.11–12; 17), and amazes his friend Gonzalo: “All torment, trouble, wonder and amazement / Inhabits here. Some heavenly power guide us / Out of this fearful country.” (5.1.104–06). Through the play, then, Prospero’s art is similar to divine power. Viewing Prospero’s art producing amazement may have reminded the 1613 Jacobean Court audience of King James’s similar claim to a quasi-divine authority.

If Prospero’s art amazes his prisoners, it also requires them to ‘follow’ his ducal governance. In addition to an embedded stage direction, the word ‘follow,’ as used in the play, may connote a political meaning congruent with James’s idea that his subjects are “like men at the Chesse” (K) 181. Prospero’s art requires Ariel to be “correspondent to command” (1.2.297) and Caliban to acquiesce, “I must obey” (1.2.373). In addition, when the royal
audience first hears Ferdinand asking, “Where should this music be?” (1.2.388), he has been following Ariel’s “sweet air” (1.2.394): “Thence I have followed it / (Or it hath drawn me, rather)” (1.2.394–95). Aware that Prospero deputizes Ariel to lead Ferdinand, the audience also knows that Prospero himself requires Ferdinand to “Follow me” (1.2.460) and “Follow!” (1.2.465). Ferdinand has no choice but to follow Prospero because, as Ferdinand laments, “Mine enemy [Prospero] has more power” (1.2.467). Just as Prospero’s art leads Ferdinand to follow, so it leads the usurpers and the good Gonzalo to “Follow, I pray you” (3.3.110). Thus Prospero’s God-like ducal power controls all other characters.

In this way, Prospero’s magical art enthralls the play’s other characters. The servant Ariel is “correspondent to command,” (1.2.297) and the slave Caliban “must obey” (1.2.373); the lovers, Ferdinand and Miranda, are, by Prospero’s devise, “in either’s power” (1.2.451); and Gonzalo, Adrian, and the conspirators – King Alonzo, Sebastian, and Antonio – are “now in my [Prospero’s] power” (3.3.90). By Act 3, Prospero declares that “mine enemies [...] are all [...] in my power” (3.3.89–90). Through Acts 1 to 4, Prospero, like James’s “originall” (KJ 183) king, exacts obedience from his enemies.

King in a settled Kingdome (KJ 183)

Transcendency of either side unknowne
Princes with men usinge noe other artes

But by good dealing, to obtaine good heats. (Greville, Treatise, 1.2.4–6)

The action of the first four acts of the play might be seen to resemble James’s conception of “Kings in their first original.” Prospero’s “roaring” against his enemies compares to the “roaring” of the royal Jacobean lion with a terrible and quasi-divine authority (McIlwain 39). Even to his own daughter, Prospero seems irascible. And only twice in the play does Prospero temporarily relinquish his God-like power. Both occur when he shows affection for his kin. First, he responds to his daughter’s piteous distress at the sight of those aboard the foundering ship: “Lend thy hand / And pluck my magic garment from me. So, / Lie there my art” (1.2.23–25). In Act 5, too, Prospero’s affections lead him to abjure “my so potent art” (5.1.50).

Act 5 opens with what seems a catalog of the successes of Prospero’s “so potent art” (ibid.): “my project gather[s] to a head. / My charms crack not; my spirits obey” (5.1.1–2). Ariel echoes Prospero’s accomplishments: the conspirators “cannot budge till your release” (5.1.11) since Prospero’s “charm so strongly works ‘em” (5.1.17). These speeches at once demonstrate the dynamic capacity of Prospero’s art to regain his dukedom and to quell sedition; and, at the same time, they presage Prospero’s abjuration of his ‘rough
magic’: “The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further” (5.1.29–30).

In Act 5, a pivotal moment in the play, Prospero is moved by Ariel’s affection for the prisoners – “if you now beheld them, your affections / Would become tender” (5.1.18–19) and “Mine [affections] would, sir, were I human” (5.1.19). Prospero, “kindlier moved” (5.1.24), responds, “And mine [affections] shall” (5.1.20). Ariel’s “feeling / Of their afflictions” (5.1.21–22) is the impetus for Prospero’s abjuration. First, Prospero identifies with his prisoner’s suffering – “and shall not myself / (One of their kind, that relish all as sharply, / Passion as they) be kindlier moved than thou [Ariel] art?” (5.1.23–24). Then, when Prospero abandons his vengeance – with “my nobler reason ‘gainst my fury / Do I take part” (5.1.26–27) – he chooses rather the “rarer action” which is “In virtue” (5.1.27–28). If the word ‘virtue’ here connotes clemency, Prospero’s mercy seems prompted by his affection for his kind, a feeling which is only possible because, at this point in the play, Prospero’s realpolitik permits it: “They being penitent, / The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel” (5.1.28–30).

Prospero’s clement gesture compares to James’s conception of a king’s mercy (Speech to parliament 1610):

To winke at faults, and not to suffer them to bee discouered, is no Honour, nor Mercy in a King, neither is he euer thanked for it; It onely argues his dullness: But to forgie faults after they are confessed, or tried, is Mercie (KJ 200).

Prefacing his abjuration of his art, Prospero delivers a spectacularly dramatic rendering of the awesome power of “Kings in their first original,” the “Ye elves” speech (5.1.33–50). In this valedictory speech to his ministering spirits, Prospero “roars”: “I have bedimmed / The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, / And ‘twixt the green sea and azured vault / Set roaring war” (5.1.41–44). This roar recalls other instances when Prospero employs his “art” (5.1.50): the roar of the opening storm (1.1), the lion’s roar (2.1.313), and the roaring (4.1.261) of Caliban and his fellow conspirators.

And in what seems a celebration of his art, Prospero recalls his magical capacity to employ the spirit world to serve his ends:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
And ye that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; You demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight-mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew, by whose aid –
Weak masters though ye be – I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And ‘twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war; to the dread-rattling thunder
Have I given fire and rifted Jove’s stout oak
With his own bolt: the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, ope’d and let’em forth
By my so potent art. (5.1.33–50)

It has been argued that this speech is a “skillfully managed piece of Renaissance imitation” of Ovid’s Medea speeches, and that, as such, it is an allusion to the pagan world of white and black magic (Bate 251–252). But this speech’s source does not necessarily determine its meaning. For the purposes of this paper, the pertinent question is: What might the 1613 royal audience have heard in this speech?

We may compare the topics of this speech – Prospero’s commanding spirits and raising sea-storms – to King James’s idea that Kings “make and vnmake their subiects: they have pouer of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death: Iudges over all their subiects and in all causes” (KJ 181).

In light of Prospero’s magnificent oral display of princely power, what accounts for his ‘abjuration of his art’?

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and when I have required
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 (5.1.50–57)

Certainly, Prospero’s speech abjuring his art is not the speech of “Kings in their original”; rather, it seems to mark the transition from the power of “Kings in their first originall” to that of a King in a “settled state.” Unlike the “original” King, “whereof some had their beginning by Conquest and some by election of the people, their wills at the time serued for Law; yet how some Kingdomes began to be settled in civilitie and policie, then did Kings set downe their minds by Lawes which are properly made by the King onely; but at the rogation of the people, the Kings grant being obtained thereunto” (KJ 183). A king in a “settled state” is “bound to obserue that paction made to his people by his Lawes” (ibid.). And that “paction” defines those “points of Meum and tuum” : “either concerning the Kings Prerogative or the possessions of Subjects” (KJ 185). In a “settled state,” then, there is a pact between James and his subjects, which both must attend to.

In The Tempest, too, the governance of a king in a “settled state” resembles Prospero’s attitude toward and treatment of other characters during Act 5. Once Prospero relinquishes his magical art, he no longer occupies his privi-
leged stage position. In fact, when Prospero observes Ariel leading with “solemn music” the “charmed” courtiers into a circle (5.1.57, s.d.), it is the final time in the play Prospero has used his art against any of the other characters. Once the courtiers have followed Ariel into the circle, Prospero’s “Charm dissolves apace” (5.1.64) and “Their understanding / Begins to swell” (5.1.79–80). If in Acts 1–4, Prospero, by the power of his art, controls the conspirators; now, in Act 5, Prospero, having abjured his art, reveals himself to his enemies: “I will discase me and myself present / As I was sometime Milan” (5.1.85–86).

Here, a resemblance emerges between Prospero’s revealing himself to his enemies and James’s *Cor Regis in oculis opuli*: “a Mirror, or Christall, as through the transparantnesse thereof, you may see the heart of your King” (KJ 179). James reveals his “heart” because he is a king “gouerning in a settled state.” But without the coercive power of his “art,” Prospero chooses to engage his subjects and peers, as he must have when he was in Milan; much as James spoke to his Parliament “as an Englishman” (KJ 182); and, ultimately, as a “just King in a settled Kingdome… bound to obserue that paction made to his people” (KJ 183).

Like a king governing in a “settled state,” Prospero first embraces King Alonso: “I embrace thy body, / And to thee and thy company I bid / A hearty welcome” (5.1.109–111). He then embraces his “noble friend” Gonzalo: ”Let me embrace thine age, whose honour cannot / Be measured or confin’d” (5.1.121–22). And he ambivalently forgives his usurping brother Antonio:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother  
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive  
Thy rankest fault – all of them; and require  
My dukedom of thee, which perfec’t I know  
Thou must restore. (5.1.130–134)

Through Act 5, Prospero reveals himself to Alonso and Gonzalo; Sebastian and Antonio; the Mariners; and Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano. He comes face to face with his subjects, distinguishing between what is his (*Meum*) and what is theirs (*tuum*). In his 1610 Speech to parliament, King James occupies a similar position to his subjects in the “settled state” of England. At the Banqueting House performance, James and his royal entourage might have noticed this resemblance.

**A royal milieu**

It has been conjectured that Prospero’s masque, which he conjures for Ferdinand and Miranda’s betrothal ceremony, had been added by Shakespeare on the occasion of the 1613 royal nuptials of Elizabeth and Frederick at White-
hall Palace. Whether or not Shakespeare added this scene for this occasion is unknowable, but dramatizing a betrothal masque during the festivities of Miranda and Frederick’s betrothal must have had a special effect on this royal couple. It might also have had a special significance for James. At once King and Elizabeth’s father, James might have had a special view of the play at this occasion. And since James also identified himself as “Parens patriae, the politque father of his people” (KJ 181), his double role – father of Elizabeth and father of his people – compares to Prospero’s double role – Miranda’s father and Duke of Milan.

Early in Act 1, Prospero asserts he is Miranda’s “no greater father” (1.2.21), who was once “Thy father Duke of Milan and / A prince of power” (1.2.54–55). Through the play, Prospero assumes two opposing attitudes toward his daughter. He authoritatively addresses Miranda: “Be collected; / No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart / There’s no harm done” (1.2.13–15); “No harm!” (1.2.15); “Dost thou attend me? (1.2.78); “Thou attend’st not!” (1.2.87); “I pray thee, mark me” (1.2.88); and “Dost thou hear?” (1.2.106). Prospero’s imperative remarks are intermixed with his remarks of affection for Miranda: “I have done nothing but in care of thee, / Of thee, my dear one, thee my daughter” (1.2.16–17); Miranda is “my dear one, thee my daughter” (1.2.17). To Miranda’s worry that “Alack, what trouble was I then to you?” (1.2.151–52), Prospero’s responds lovingly:

O, a cherubin
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile,
Infused with a fortitude from heaven,
When I have decked the sea with drops full salt,
Under my burdened groaned, which raised in me
An undergoing stomach to bear up
Against what should ensue. (1.2.152–158).

Prospero’s tone toward Miranda, then, oscillates between that of ducal authority and fatherly care.

When Prospero actually arranges a royal match between his daughter and Ferdinand, the audience learns that Prospero’s irascibility is a pretense. Prospero is, in fact, gleeful at the prospect of Miranda and Ferdinand’s royal match, “At the first sight / They have changed eyes” (1.2.441–2). But Prospero is also Miranda’s father, and, in order to protract the “swift business” (1.2.451) of Miranda’s infatuation with Ferdinand, he attempts to dispel her wonder: “No, wench, it eats and sleeps and hath such senses / As we have” (1.2.413–14); “Speak not you for him; he’s a traitor” (1.2.461); “My

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8 “Claims such as Dover Wilson’s and Irwin Smith’s that the masque is an addition intended to make The Tempest suitable to the royal wedding are based on pure speculation […] The question is effectively disposed of by Kermode, xxii–xxiv” (Orgel 1987, 44, n. 1).
foot my tutor?” (1.2.470); and, “Silence! One word more / Shall make me chide thee, if not hate thee. What, / An advocate for an imposter? Hush” (1.2.476–78). In these exchanges, Prospero speaks with the imperiousness of a Duke and the care of a father.

From what we know of the relationship among King James, Princess Elizabeth, and Frederick, it was affectionate. Elizabeth was fortunate “in finding against the odds a husband to whom she was affectionately drawn” (Parry 100). There was across England a “general enthusiasm” for the match because “Parliament and the people approved the marriage as a firm sign that James was developing a forward policy of Protestant commitment in Europe” (Parry 95). Even the Catholic Queen Anne, who disapproved of this Protestant match, relented “at the last moment and came to the ceremony of state” (Parry 97). After the nuptials, the King visited the newly-weds:

The next morning the King went to visit these young turtles that were coupled on St. Valentine’s day, and did strictly examine him whether he were his true son-in-law, and was sufficiently assured (Thomsan 74).

Contributing to the Court celebration of a match consummated on St. Valentine’s Day, John Donne offered a sexually explicit “Epithalamion”: “But now she’s laid; What though shee bee? / Yet there are more delayes, For, where is he? / He comes, and passes through Spheare after Spheare, / First her sheetes, then her Armes, then any where” (5.79–82).

Along with such randy imaginings of the royal couple’s nuptial consummation, there was also a “mood of graciousness, more appropriate to the betrothal time” (Parry 100). Suitably, the sentiment of Princess Elizabeth’s letter to her father, written as she left the country with her husband, is what we would expect a newly-married daughter leaving for a strange land to write to her father: “My heart, which was pressed and astounded at my departure, now permits my eyes to weep their privation of the sight of the most precious object, which they could have beheld in the world” (Rosenberg 51).

In this mood of filial affection, made poignant by the recent loss of Prince Henry, it may be that Elizabeth and Frederick may have seen themselves reflected in the mirror of their dramatic counterparts, Miranda and Ferdinand. What effect their speeches may have had on the royal couple is, of course, speculative, but the masque-like interlude must have offered a special pleasure to the royal betrothed, as it did to Ferdinand and Miranda, and as it must have done for those spectators watching the royal audience listen to it. Especially apropos of the occasion, it would seem, is Prospero’s gracious presentation of Miranda to Ferdinand (4.1.1–33).

Prospero’s speech is rich with a diction traditionally associated with the betrothal ceremony. There is the economic vocabulary of the dowry, with words such as, “compensation”; “amends”; “I tender to thy hand”; “ratify”;
“my rich gift” (4.1.1–8). Woven into this economic language of the dowry are other betrothal commonplaces: the necessary curtailment of the couples desire, “All thy vexations / Were but trials of thy love” (4.1.5–6); the father’s giving away his daughter, “I / have given you here a third of mine own life, / Or that for which I live” (4.1.3–4); and the father’s praise of his daughter, “Do not smile at me that I boast her off, / For thou shalt find she will outstrip all praise / And make it halt behind her” (4.1.9–11).

In the second stanza, Prospero asserts that Miranda’s own person is her best dowry. Miranda is a “gift”; “thine [Ferdinand’s] own acquisition / Worthily purchased” (4.1.13–14). The gracious tone of this recounting of Miranda’s worth changes, however, when Prospero requires Ferdinand to “take my daughter” (4.1.14). The sexual overtones of the word ‘take’ (‘raptus’ connoting ‘to seize’ sexually) are Prospero’s warning that, “too light winning / Make the prize light” (1.2.452–53). He admonishes Ferdinand not to “break her virgin-knot before / All sanctimonious ceremonies may / With full and holy rite be ministered” (4.1.15–17); that “No sweet aspersions shall the heavens let fall”; and that “barren hate, / Sour-eyed disdain and discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed with weeds so loathly / That you shall hate it both” (4.1.18–20). Within the discourse associated with the topics of a dowry and pre-marital chastity, Prospero offers Ferdinand, Miranda’s hand in marriage.

We can only imagine the royal couple, and James, caught up in the fatherly concerns of Prospero’s dowry speech. The symmetry of his speech’s two, eleven-line stanzas is enjambed with Ferdinand’s gracious responses, and Prospero’s modulation between austerity and beneficence. This speech may have been heard by the royal audience as an expression of fatherly admonition against impatience and care for his daughter.

A critical milieu

In this essay, I have situated Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in the context of its 1612–1613 Whitehall performance, with reference to its theatrical, political, and royal milieu. In doing so, I have attempted to avoid the pitfalls of an allegorical reading of the play. Prospero is not James; Ferdinand is not the Elector Frederick; and Miranda is not the Princess Elizabeth. Instead, I have attempted to establish a connection between the fictional and actual royal betrothals. In effect, I have extended the critical reach of other historically sensitive readings of the play. One critic, for example, makes the poignant observation that “Alonso’s sadness at having apparently lost his son and married his daughter to a foreign prince might well have seemed a virtual mirror of the [royal] situation” (Kastan 96–97). Surely, Alonzo’s apparent loss
of Ferdinand might have tolled a sad note for the royal family, who had just prematurely lost Prince Henry.

While I agree that “it is naïve to understand every contemporary echo as either singular or deferential” (Palfrey 6), I think that too often this critical stance engages what we cannot know, and, in so doing, dismisses what we can know as “privileging the court over the more popular and populous franchise” (ibid.). That kind of reading neglects the play’s theatrical provenance.

We know that the play was performed before the King at Whitehall during the 1612–1613 betrothal celebrations of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, the Elector of Palatine. From this fact, I think it is reasonable, even instructive to ask what might the royal audience, and those viewing the royal audience, have understood on the occasion of that performance of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. 
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