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"The Elements so Mix'd": Empedoclean Cosmology in *The Tempest*

Abstract

This article examines the manner in which the elemental images that constitute a recurrent motif in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* evolve in accordance with the cosmic cycle propounded by the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles, and how this serves to adumbrate the psychological process undergone by the protagonist Prospero in the course of the events depicted in the play. Prospero is a character who, dedicating himself exclusively to his arcane studies in Milan at the expense of his practical duties as a prince, has implicitly repudiated what he considers to be the inferior elements in his own being in favour of the more elevated aspects of his personality, this schism in the self being represented symbolically in the contraposition between Ariel and Caliban, associated respectively with air and fire, and earth and water. This corresponds to the phase in which Strife (*neikos*) gains ascendancy in the Empedoclean cycle, and in which the elements are segregated out from a primal unity and set in opposition to one another. The phase in the Empedoclean cycle in which the process reverses itself and Love (*philia*) begins to assert its sway is what appears in the here and now of the drama, as the disparate elements both within Prospero himself and in the world surrounding him undergo a process of convergence that eventually makes possible the reunification symbolized in Prospero's charmed circle.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *The Tempest*; Empedocles; cosmic cycle

> . . . and the elements
> So mix'd in him, that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, "This was a man!"
> *Julius Caesar* 5.5.73-5

The Sicilian pre-Socratic thinker Empedocles, in some respects a seminal figure in the history of philosophy and at the same time a poet who exercised a significant influence on such successors as Lucretius and Ovid,[1]

[1] See Hardie 1995 for a discussion of the debt owed to Empedocles by Lucretius and Ovid, as well as by other Roman poets.

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makes his first explicit appearance in English literature as the protagonist of Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*, a dramatic poem published anonymously in 1852. Arnold's poem is loosely based on Diogenes Laertius's account of the suicide of the philosopher by throwing himself into the crater of Mount Etna, a lurid enough anecdote that over the centuries has also inspired a number of other works of art and literature. Diogenes Laertius's story of how Empedocles met his end has the philosopher determining to annihilate his body in the flames of the crater so as to "confirm the report that he had become a god" (2005: 383), a stratagem that fails however when one of the bronze slippers he has been in the habit of wearing, cast up again by the volcano, reveals to the world the real reason for his disappearance. Borrowing the outlines of the story, but construing its significance in terms that are wholly different, Arnold's work represents the suicide not as an act of self-aggrandizement but as the final gesture of a thinker racked by doubts as to the value of the intellectual quest on which he has been engaged throughout his entire life, and yet who precisely because of the obsessive nature of that quest has lost the capacity to lend himself unreflectively to the less complicated pleasures of human existence.

This is the legend of Empedocles as it was adapted for modern consumption. But as an intellectual presence Empedocles haunted English literature long before Arnold enlisted him into his poetry as an emblem of philosophical doubt and disillusionment, and in the following discussion I wish to examine the manner in which his influence can be felt in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. One of the doctrines with which Empedocles is most closely associated is alluded to in Arnold's poem itself, as the philosopher, about to hurl himself into the crater of Mount Etna, contemplates his own imminent extinction:

> To the elements it came from
> Everything will return.
> Our bodies to earth,
> Our blood to water,
> Heat to fire,
> Breath to air. (1922: 122-3)

It was Aristotle who credited Empedocles with originating the distinction between the four material elements of which all things are constituted (1933: 29), a taxonomy which he himself elaborated and transmitted to posterity in so meticulously articulated a form that it is more often attributed to him than to its original author. As proponents of the Elizabethan World Picture have often repeated, the Aristotelian notion of the four elements was one of the central tenets of Elizabethan thinking, however much it was being undermined by the new (or rather recently revived) atomistic

theories that were gathering momentum during this period. While it is not necessarily the case that the ordinary individual in Shakespeare's time was aware of the precise genealogy of the idea, the conception of the world as being constituted by four primal substances was one of the commonplaces of the epoch, as was the concomitant notion that earth and water were the heavy elements that gravitated downward, while air and fire were lighter and tended upwards.[2]

Shakespeare explicitly alludes to this scheme at various points in his work, although there is sometimes a tinge of caricature in his invocation of it that might possibly betray a degree of diffidence as to its validity, as when Sir Andrew in *Twelfth Night* responds to Sir Toby's question "Does not our life consist of the four elements?" with "I think it rather consists of eating and drinking" (2.3.9-12).[3] When the French Dauphin in *Henry V* extols his horse in extravagantly fulsome terms as being "pure air and fire, and the dull elements of earth and water never appear in him" (3.7.21-2), his comments provoke a sardonic response even in those who might be expected to sympathize with his equestrian fervour. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the Queen of Egypt, aspiring to escape the trammels of the world by ending her own life, exultantly exclaims that "I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life" (5.2.287-8), but overlooks the fact that in so doing she is rejecting the very elements upon which her poetic identity as the "serpent of old Nile" depends (1.5.26). In much the same vein is the carefully crafted image pattern based on the four elements found in the companion sonnets 44 and 45, in the former of which the poet laments the fact that the "dull substance" of his flesh is unable to traverse the distance separating him from the person he loves as "nimble thought" would be able to do:

> But that so much of earth and water wrought,
> I must attend time's leisure with my moan;
> Receiving naughts by elements so slow
> But heavy tears, badges of either's woe. (11-14)

The identification of his flesh with the heavier elements of earth and water is a purely poetic conceit, of course, yet it is one which serves the poet's imaginative purposes so appositely that he makes even more extensive use of it in Sonnet 45, which opens with an invocation of the higher elements as well:

> The other two, slight air, and purging fire,

[2] E.M.W. Tillyard makes this one of the foundations of Renaissance orthodoxy regarding the constitution of the universe (1963: 77-83).

[3] All references to Shakespeare's works throughout this discussion are to the single volume Arden Shakespeare *Complete Works* (2001).

> Are both with thee, wherever I abide:
> The first my thought, the other my desire,
> These, present absent, with swift motion slide;
> For when these quicker elements are gone
> In tender embassy of love to thee,
> My life being made of four, with two alone
> Sinks down to death, oppressed with melancholy,
> Until life's composition be recured
> By those swift messengers returned from thee (1-10)

"Life's composition" is re-established, albeit temporarily, only when all four elements are simultaneously present in the same body, and harmoniously balanced among themselves. It may be something of the sort that Mark Antony has in mind as well when, in his eulogy over the dead body of Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, he concludes with the affirmation that "the elements [were] / So mixed in him that Nature might stand up / And say to all the world, 'This was a man'" (5.5.73-5), although, since the word "element" is often used by Shakespeare in the more generic sense of constituent rather than with reference to the four elements as such,[4] this is not necessarily the case.

In the majority of the instances in which it is invoked by Shakespeare, then, the four-elements doctrine is thus recruited more as a metaphor for what is occurring within the self than as a principle of physics as such. It is in this respect closely affined with the theory, originating with Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, and still very much extant in Shakespeare's day, according to which elements absorbed by the body in the form of food are converted into the humours that in their various combinations determine the personal dispositions of individuals and the fluctuations to which their temperaments are subject (Tillyard 1963: 86ff.). Whether he believed that such processes occur in a strictly physiological sense or not, what is often implicit in Shakespeare's allusions to the doctrine of the elements is the idea that the primordial substances of which an entity is composed can be separated from one another at least on the figurative level, segregated into what are hierarchically conceived as being the nobler and the baser categories. The higher two, air and fire, are mobile and even volatile, while the lower two, earth and water, are slow and, in the absence of these others, inclined to sink downwards. Though in the properly constituted organism the elements are in equilibrium with one another, different factors might intervene to precipitate a process of separation. In the case of Cleopatra, as in that of the Dauphin's remarkable horse, this might be the

[4] For the various meanings that the term can convey, see Crystal and Crystal 2002, s.v. "element".

spurning or repudiation of what are disparaged as the "baser" ingredients of being in favour of the higher. In Sonnet 45, on the other hand, the catalyst for the separation of the elements is the poet's yearning for a beloved but absent person, towards whom the more mobile elements of air and fire, associated with thought and desire respectively, are irresistibly drawn, leaving the poet at the mercy of those residual elements that drag him downwards into melancholy and figurative death.

In certain respects such imagery is perfectly congruent with the account of the elements elaborated by Aristotle, who maintained that each element tends to migrate towards its natural position with respect to the others, that – as they align themselves according to the geocentric scheme of things – "Fire and Air form the body which is carried along towards the 'limit', while Earth and Water form the body which is carried along towards the centre" (1955: 277). The stratification of the elements is determined by the inherent properties of the elements themselves rather than by any active principle of division operating either among them or from without. Not infrequently in Elizabethan literature, however, the elements are conceived as being more violently in tension with one another, so that the impetus towards division and separation assumes a more drastic character. When Marlowe's Tamburlaine asserts that "Nature, that framed us of four elements / Warring within our breasts for regiment, / Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds" (1963: 1.2.7.18-20), for instance, he is invoking elemental conflict as a principle endemic to the universe at large, one that constitutes a kind of cosmological precedent for conflict in the human world as well. But it is not the only such principle. Just short of a decade after Marlowe composed the first part of *Tamburlaine* in 1587 or 1588, Sir John Davies issued his *Orchestra* (1596), a long poem celebrating the dance as the reflection in the human domain of the harmony of the spheres. Here Davies, once again alluding explicitly to the four elements,[5] introduces the allegorical figure of Love as the principle that imparts order where previously there was only confusion and enmity:

> *Dauncing* (bright Lady) then began to be,
> When the first seedes whereof the world did spring
> The Fire, Ayre, Earth, and Water did agree,
> By Loves perswasion, Natures mighty King,
> To leave their first disordred combating;
> And in a daunce such measure to observe,

[5] For an analysis of the cosmological scheme involving the four elements in this poem see Manning 1985, esp. 177-83. It is perhaps worth observing that in the course of his discussion Manning draws attention to what would seem to be echoes in Davies's poem of the passage in Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* cited above (181-2).

As all the world their motion should preserve. (1975: 17.1-7)

In the same year, Edmund Spenser published a revised version of his poem "An Hymne in Honour of Love", which contains the following:

The earth, the ayre, the water, and the fyre,
Then gan to raunge them selues in huge array,
And with contrary forces to conspyre
Each against other, by all meanes they may,
Threatning their owne confusion and decay:
Ayre hated earth, and water hated fyre,
Till Loue relented their rebellious yre.

He then them tooke, and tempering goodly well
Their contrary dislikes with loued meanes,
Did place them all in order, and compell
To keepe them selues within their sundrie raines. (1970: 78-88)

This is no longer Aristotelian. As Evelyn May Albright pointed out nearly a century ago in connection with Spenser's poem, what we would seem to have here is, in effect, a partial adumbration of the cosmogony envisaged by Empedocles, who in addition to distinguishing between the four elements also posited the opposed cosmic principles by which these combine to form all the entities existing in the universe (1929: 737, 739).[6] These are the forces of Love and Strife. The most complete enunciation of Empedocles's cosmology in his own words is that found in fr. 17:

I shall tell a double tale. For at one time [they] grew to be one alone

[6] Spenser's indebtedness to Empedoclean cosmology is also discussed in Wolfe 2005. This is not the place to investigate in depth the extent to which Empedocles's philosophy was known in Elizabethan England, nor the avenues through which such knowledge was disseminated. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see Sacvan Bercovitch's excellent account (1968), which maintains that "the Empedoclean cosmology was readily accessible to English poets from Spenser to Milton" (77), and which cites numerous instances of writers of the period who not only evinced considerable familiarity with Empedoclean ideas, but also appropriated them for their own purposes. In a later article Bercovitch (1969) illustrates this by examining the Love/Strife opposition as it informs Thomas Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. For more recent discussions of the influence of Empedocles on Spenser and Kyd on the one hand, and on Christopher Marlowe on the other, see Ardolino 2002 and Steggle 2009. Also relevant in this connection is Drew Daniel's discussion of what he calls the "Empedoclean Renaissance" (2014), which includes Nicholas Breton and John Milton in its purview. It might be mentioned that one important route through which Empedoclean ideas entered general circulation in early modern England was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which as Jean E. Feerick points out "enacts and embodies this elemental philosophy both explicitly and implicitly" (2017: 177), and which opens with a cosmogony similar in many respects to Empedocles's.

> from many, and at another, again, [they] grew apart to be many from one —
> fire and water and earth and the boundless height of air;
> and destructive strife apart from these, like in every respect,
> and love among them, equal in length and breadth.
> And you, gaze on her with your understanding and do not sit with stunned eyes
> For she is deemed even by mortals to be inborn in [their] bodies
> and by her they think loving thoughts and accomplish works of unity
> calling her by the names Joy and Aphrodite. (2001: 16-24)

From such surviving fragments of his work as this, as well as from the summaries and critiques of his thought supplied by later commentators, it is possible to reconstruct with reasonable confidence the salient features of Empedocles's philosophy, although there is no perfect consensus as to some of the details. Empedocles held that the four elements, which he called the "roots of things", were themselves eternal and imperishable, but that the universe as a whole oscillates endlessly between two extreme states. The physical cosmos, and everything in it, are created and destroyed by the influence exerted upon the elements by those forces of attraction and repulsion which Empedocles called Love and Strife. At certain points in the history of the universe all four elements are mingled together in the form of a perfect sphere in which Love reigns supreme, but then Strife enters and initiates a process of differentiation. The elements are separated into the four components of the cosmos within which each predominates, with earth settling at the centre, water and air forming successive layers, and fire shifting towards the periphery. In the course of this progressive process of segregation, things, plants and animals come into being which are composed of compounds of these elements mingled in varying proportions. But as time goes on the elements become increasingly dispersed, until eventually a terminal point is arrived at in which individual bodies no longer exist, but only the ultimate constituents of being. At this stage the process reverses itself: Love begins once again to assert its sway, and material entities come again into existence as the elements are drawn together into different combinations. Finally the original homogeneous mixture is restored with Love again in the ascendant, before the cycle begins anew with the fresh irruption of Strife.

The opposition of Love and Strife is a familiar topos in Renaissance art and literature, and is one which, in various forms, is recurrent in Shakespeare from the beginning of his career to the end. "Here's much to do with hate, but more with love" (1.1.175), remarks Romeo at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet*, establishing what amount to being the thematic coordinates not only of this work but of others as well. In *Macbeth* very much the same opposition appears in different form when Nature is viewed under its

contrary aspects of kindness and nurturing, on the one hand, and of predatory violence on the other, represented symbolically as the "sweet milk of concord" (4.3.98) and blood respectively. But there are numerous other instances to be found in Shakespeare's works. In describing how such a contraposition operates in *King Lear*, A.C. Bradley interestingly invokes Empedocles himself:

> If Lear, Gloster and Albany are set apart; the rest fall into two distinct groups, which are strongly, even violently, contrasted: Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, the Fool on one side, Goneril, Regan, Edmund, Cornwall, Oswald on the other. . . . Here we have unselfish and devoted love, there hard self-seeking. . . . The members of each group tend to appear, at least in part, as varieties of one species . . . and the two are set in conflict, almost as if Shakespeare, like Empedocles, were regarding Love and Hate as the two ultimate forces of the universe. (1971: 215)

The words Love and Hate are of course approximations. Empedocles himself uses the terms *philia* and *neikos* to designate the two forces he sees as operating in the universe. Though the word *philia* does not itself bear erotic connotations – it is most often translated into English by phrases such as "brotherly love" – it is significant that in fr. 17 Empedocles should invest the former with a divine character by associating it with Aphrodite, as Lucretius (who may well be emulating him) would later, notwithstanding his disbelief in the active presence of the gods in the world, make Venus an allegorical representation of the creative forces in nature in *De Rerum Natura* (2006: 3-7). Love is associated with order as opposed to chaos, with what draws things together rather than drives them apart, with what Empedocles calls the "works of unity" in fr. 17. It is Love understood in such terms as these that Davies would seem to have in mind when he describes "Dauncing the child of Musick and of Love, / Dauncing it selfe both love and harmony, / Where all agree, and all in order move" (1975: 97.2-4). Of the role played by music in this process more will be said in due course.

A number of Shakespeare's explicit references to the four-element doctrine have already been mentioned, and there are so few others in the canon that they can be canvassed in a few words.[7] In *Twelfth Night*, which as I have mentioned is a play in which the doctrine of the four elements is overtly, if somewhat derisively, alluded to, the clown remarks that he is refraining from using the word "element" at a certain juncture because "the

[7] There are also of course numerous other instances in which the doctrine is tacitly invoked as a poetic commonplace without mentioning the word "element" itself, as when Horatio in *Hamlet* says that "Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air, / Th'extravagant and erring spirit hies / to his confine" (1.1.58-160) at the crowing of the cock.

word is overworn" (3.1.59), and this might almost be construed as a cunning hint deftly insinuated into his text by the playwright himself. As it happens, there is an earlier reference in *Twelfth Night* to "the elements of air and earth" (1.5.268), which is also a clear allusion to the traditional theory of the elements, but on the other occasions in the same play in which the word is used it is in a more general sense. Indeed, of the thirty-eight occurrences of the words "element" and "elements" in Shakespeare's plays and poetry, the majority refer not so much to the primordial substances of the philosophers as to the constituents of the world in general. There are however notable exceptions, as when Nestor describes a ship "Bounding between the two moist elements" in *Troilus and Cressida* (1.3.41), the description of both water and air as being moist clearly recalling the Aristotelian classification of the elements according to their qualities (Aristotle 1955: 275). In *King Lear* the protagonist is described at one point as "Contending with the fretful elements; / Bid[ding] the wind blow the earth into the sea / Or swell the curled waters 'bove the main" (3.1.4-6), while later, having acknowledged that "Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters", he says that "I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness" (3.2.15-16). A somewhat more studied invocation of the theory of the elements is to be found in *Richard II*, when Bolingbroke, besieging Flint Castle in which the king has barricaded himself, says:

> Methinks King Richard and myself should meet
> With no less terror than the elements
> Of fire and water, when their thund'ring shock
> At meeting tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven.
> Be he the fire, I'll be the yielding water;
> The rage be his, whilst on the earth I rain
> My waters – on the earth, and not on him. (3.3.54-60)

Here the elements are described once again as being in a state of radical conflict, and as thereby – like the ceaselessly competing elements in which Tamburlaine finds a natural sanction for his own relentless ambition – constituting a kind of pattern for conflict in the human world as well. This anticipates some of the imagery of *The Tempest*, in which the symbolic resonances of the four-elements doctrine are orchestrated to maximum effect.

Although there are only three occurrences of the word "elements" in *The Tempest*, none of them making direct reference to the four-elements doctrine as such, it has frequently been observed that implicit allusions to this doctrine constitute one of the most pervasive strands of imagery in the play, although it is seldom the case that Empedocles is mentioned in this

connection.[8] Up to a point, the use of elemental imagery in the drama lends itself to interpretation in terms of Aristotelean physics. As has long been recognized, the character of Ariel is associated with air and fire, and Caliban with earth and water.[9] Caliban, addressed at one point by the unflattering epithet of "Thou earth" by Prospero (1.2.316), is quite obviously "terrestrial" in character – Trinculo first encounters him while he is lying prone upon the ground (2.2.16ff.) – although the subsequent reference to "thou tortoise" (1.2.318), the fish-like aspect that both Trinculo and Antonio make such sport of (2.2.25-8; 5.1.265-6), and his intimate knowledge of "Where the quick freshes are" (3.2.69) link him also with water. The habitually airborne Ariel, on the other hand, is according to the dramatis personae "an airy spirit", and referred to by Prospero as "which art but air" (5.1.21), while he repeatedly describes himself and his activities in an imagery of fire. But there is more in this than a mere delineation of the properties of the elements as they are embodied in the two characters. In Ariel's own description of the role he has played in the storm with which *The Tempest* opens, the elements are represented not only as being qualitatively different from one another, but as being embroiled in a state of violent contention among themselves:

> I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
> I flam'd amazement: sometime I'd divide,
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
> The yards and borespirit, would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors
> O'th'dreadful thunder-claps, 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. (1.2.196-206)

The words "flam'd", "burn", "flame", and "fire" make their own point. Though inverting those Ariel employs in describing himself as a spirit of fire assailing the realm of Neptune, Miranda similarly describes the storm she has witnessed in terms that convey a sense of elemental strife:

[8] An exception is Grace Tiffany's introduction to the Evans edition of *The Tempest* (2012: 29).

[9] One of the first to introduce the idea into English criticism was Coleridge, who remarked that Caliban "is a sort of creature of the earth", and that "Caliban gives you images from the Earth – Ariel images from the air" (1971: 112-13). Coleridge's editor R.A. Foakes points out that Schlegel makes a similar observation (113n). For more recent treatments of the elemental imagery of *The Tempest*, see Marnieri 2013, and Feerick 2017: 179-84.

> The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
> But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,
> Dashes the fire out. (1.2.3-5)

The question of why the imagery of the play should from the very beginning insist so strongly on this dissension among the elements is best addressed by referring once again to what was said earlier about the use of the theory of the elements as a psychological metaphor. In the works that were previously cited, the separation of the elements serves as a figure for a process occurring within individual subjects themselves, whose exclusive identification with what they consider to be the higher elements entails the implicit rejection of the lower. Cleopatra thinks of herself as having been sublimated into air and fire, relegating her other elements to the "baser" life she now scorns, and the Dauphin's horse evidently does very much the same. Latent in this disavowal of the lower elements is the possibility of a more violent antagonism. It is this we see in *The Tempest*, which opens with the most dramatic possible depiction of elemental conflict, in which a spirit of air and fire besieges the god of the sea in his very citadel. We quickly learn, however, through an extended exposition of past events which Prospero delivers for the benefit of Miranda, that the condition of strife long predates the opening of the play, that the real drama of *The Tempest* begins many years before, with the expulsion of Prospero and his daughter from Milan after a rebellion on the part of Prospero's brother Antonio. Indeed, it begins even earlier than that, because what has occasioned this act of usurpation is the ambition kindled in his brother by Prospero himself, who as Duke of Milan was invested with a public function that he failed adequately to perform. The nature of Prospero's responsibility for what occurred many years before in Milan is something that the audience must infer *inter alia*, because Prospero's own version of events is glaringly one-sided. Nonetheless Prospero does, almost despite himself, disclose information that makes it possible to see events in a perspective considerably at variance with his own, and to understand in fact that the magician's persisting failure to recognize his own guilt is yet another symptom of the problem that has led to his exile from Milan in the first place.

Prospero's share in the responsibility for his overthrow in Milan is revealed in the second scene of the play. What we learn in the course of his long retrospective account of events is that he has delegated all executive authority to his brother Antonio in order to devote himself without distraction to what he describes as his "secret studies" (1.2.77). The symptoms of Prospero's estrangement from his political function in Milan are evident enough notwithstanding his attempts to attenuate his own faults. "The government I cast upon my brother / And to my state grew stranger" (1.2.75-

6), he relates, admitting that he looked upon his library as "dukedom large enough" (1.2.110), and that there were books "I prize above my dukedom" (1.2.168). Not only has he been deficient in his role as a prince, fastidiously "neglecting worldly ends" (1.2.89) in order to dedicate himself single-mindedly to his studies, but in psychological terms he has through this same withdrawal been denying an aspect of himself, distancing himself from those aspects of his own humanity which cannot be accommodated within his exalted world of pure intellect. Both as a governor and as a human being he has proven himself inadequate, and is consequently ejected not only from his position of responsibility but also from his place in the human community. The island on which he is now marooned with his daughter is the emblem of the spiritual isolation to which he has condemned himself, and the characters of Ariel and Caliban the projections of the scattered segments of his own riven personality.

Without wishing to imply that Shakespeare is seeking to dramatize philosophical ideas in any overt manner, I would suggest that it is Empedocles's cosmology which lies in the background of the play as a kind of symbolic correlative to the process taking place in Prospero's mind, which has been fragmented by his factitious division of what he calls the "liberal Arts" (1.2.73) from the real world. The four elements which, according to the Empedoclean scheme, make up in their various combinations the composition of all things, are symbolically separated within himself as well, and there is perpetual strife between what he conceives to be the "higher" and the "lower" of them. In his library in Milan Prospero has withdrawn into his studies, into an abstract realm of pure thought, with the consequence that what he repeatedly refers to as his Art, uprooted from its basis in the world, has assumed the ideal form of magic. Ariel, the disembodied spirit of air and fire, is the agent of that magic, which does not seek to negotiate with the world on its own terms but only to dominate it through sheer application of will. The negative facet of this renunciation of the material domain is figured in the subjugation of Caliban, the creature of earth and water, who embodies the anarchic imperatives of the flesh. Though acknowledging perfunctorily that he cannot entirely be dispensed with – "We cannot miss him: he does make our fire" (1.2.313) – Prospero degrades the relation into one of mere servitude, keeping his despised slave "confin'd into this rock" (1.2.363) and subjecting him to regular castigation. Permitting his intellectual faculties to hypertrophy into remote magical virtuosity on the one hand, and his disowned natural aspect to degenerate into a deformed and frustrated monster on the other, Prospero has himself created the schism which is reflected in the various divisions in the world that surrounds him. Prospero may well be Aristotelean in his view of the elements, believing the separation between the higher and lower of them to be the

inevitable consequence of their intrinsic properties, but in a larger perspective it is the Empedoclean principle of Strife that is responsible for such segregation, and he himself who is responsible for its advent. The tempest with which the play opens, in which the elements are depicted as being violently at war with one another, is the tangible emblem of that Strife.

This is the situation at the outset of *The Tempest*. The second phase in the cosmic cycle described by Empedocles commences when the force of Love begins to assert its sway, "love" once again being understood to be that attractive force which draws things together, creating order and harmony where previously there was anarchy. It is just such a process that we see occurring in *The Tempest* as well. If the storm-imagery pervading the play is suggestive of the tendency towards dissolution and chaos, it is music, associated in particular with Ariel, that symbolizes this countervailing movement towards convergence and unification.[10] Music opposes itself to storms within the self no less than in the physical world, and it is to be noted that while it operates throughout the play to reconcile all the elements it is itself associated with the higher of these. Ferdinand remarks of Ariel's songs that "This music crept by me upon the waters, / Allaying both their fury and my passion / With its sweet air" (1.2.394-6), and that "This is . . . no sound / That the earth owes" (1.2.409-10). And as if to leave us in no doubt as to the exact position occupied by music with respect to the elements, the play contains a number of other subdued puns on the word "air" – "Most sure the goddess / On whom these airs attend!" (1.2.424-5) – which associate the musical airs which Ariel ("which art but air") sings with the element of air itself. Later Prospero refers to the "heavenly music" he has conjured up as an "airy charm" (5.1.54), thus fusing once again the two meanings of the word "air". It is this music, operating through the agency of Ariel, that is the force drawing the various characters scattered in groups about the island together.

The musical imagery of *The Tempest* rises to one of its moments of greatest intensity in the third Act of the play. In a scene marked by elaborately choreographed allusions to storm and music, Ariel appears before Alonso and his entourage in the guise of a harpy, and announces to the king that his sufferings are just retribution for the crime he has committed in abetting Antonio in his rebellion against Prospero. Alonso's response to this discovery is notably different from that evinced by Sebastian and Antonio, and suggests that he is genuinely susceptible to the redemptive influ-

[10] For a classic account of the "tempest-music opposition" in *The Tempest* see Knight 2012: 247-66 (this quotation 247). Northrop Frye similarly points out that in Shakespeare "the tempest symbolizes the destructive elements in the order of nature, and music the permanently constructive elements in it" (2010: 116).

ences operating on the island. It is the language in which Alonso expresses the distress provoked in him by Ariel's words which indicates the sea-change that is being wrought in him:

> O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
> Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
> The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
> That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd
> The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass. (3.3.95-9)

This is the moment, then, in which the remorse is kindled in Alonso that will eventually make possible his reconciliation with Prospero, and it is therefore significant that a kind of harmony should at this point assert itself even in the apparent dissonance of a storm. The winds now sing, the thunder becomes an organ pipe, and in Alonso's tormented words, as G. Wilson Knight observes, "the tempests of guilt themselves become music" (2012: 257). It is the workings of this impulse towards concord which predominate in the remainder of the play.

The impetus towards unification, like the tendency towards dissolution imaged in the tempest, realizes itself in all domains at once. Physically the separate groups of men are drawn together, impelled by Ariel's music until they stand at last in a charmed circle of Prospero's devising. Points of view also converge to some extent, as characters as diverse as Alonso and Caliban recognize the error of their ways and repent. Since the symbolic functions discharged by some of the characters are, as I have argued, reflective in their ensemble of a divided condition, it is only to be expected that these personages will to some degree compromise their own symbolic identities as the impulse towards unity begins to prevail: thus in the fifth Act the incorporeal Ariel evinces something suspiciously resembling empathy for the plight of Prospero's enemies, while on the other hand Caliban, hitherto the personification of unregenerate nature, suddenly decides to turn over a new leaf and seek for grace. The climax of this process of encounter and reconciliation occurs only at the conclusion of the play, but it is vividly presaged in the imagery of the fourth-Act masque, in the course of which the "queen o'th'sky" (4.1.70) descends to consort with an earth-goddess, a meeting which, as Stephen Orgel points out, implicates the overcoming of one of the chief oppositions delineated in the drama:

> Goddess of earth and goddess of air, patronesses of agriculture and of marriage, opposites and complements, together they resolve the dramatic tension implicit in Caliban and Ariel. When earth is seen as Ceres, it is no longer intractable, but productive and nurturing; when air is seen as Juno, it is no longer volatile, but universal and majestic. (1998: 48)

There are various other intimations in this scene that the elements are mingling together, and thus that the Empedoclean cycle is entering the phase in which the principle of Love begins once again to assert its sway. The goddess Iris, who presides over the masque, is of course the rainbow, compacted of water and air, and the bridge between heaven and earth.[11] Nymphs are summoned from their watery habitats in order to dance with "sunburn'd sicklemen" emerging from their labours in the earthly "furrow" (4.1.134-8), this once again recalling the image of the elements dancing together under the auspices of Love in Davies's *Orchestra*. Even the cycle of the seasons seems to be subordinate to the general process whereby opposites merge into one another, and spring and autumn to be mysteriously conjoined in Ceres's prayer that "Spring come to you at the farthest / In the very end of harvest!" (4.1.114-15).

The negative aspect of this process of convergence manifests itself however when Caliban, advancing menacingly towards Prospero's cell together with Stephano and Trinculo, obtrudes himself as a challenge that must be confronted once and for all. Prospero abruptly breaks off the masque with the comment that "I had forgot that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates" (4.1.139-40), and it is clear from the angry agitation he displays at this point that the beast with which he must contend is surging up from within him and not only approaching from without. Ferdinand observes that he is "in some passion / That works him strongly", and Miranda corroborates this with the remark that "Never till this day / Saw I him touch'd with anger, so distemper'd" (4.1.143-5). Prospero's summons to Ariel – "We must prepare to meet with Caliban" (4.1.166) – has a portentous ring about it which seems out of all proportion to any tangible danger that the monster presents, and in view of the ease with which the rebellion is suppressed it is not easy to understand why the magician should be so perturbed unless the threat he is dealing with is of a more profound character than the merely material. The abrupt disintegration of the masque that Prospero has aptly described as "Some vanity of mine Art" (4.1.41), and the imminent arrival of "the beast Caliban", would thus appear to be correlated. The Prospero in the grip of this ungovernable fury has in a sense fallen prey to the "beast" he has hitherto kept rigidly confined within himself but which now, during this moment of convergence and unification, can no longer be kept at bay. And it would appear to be for this reason that the palace of Art that Prospero has tried to erect in the disembodied world of pure imagination tumbles to ruins, the masque vanishing "to a strange

[11] Interestingly, though presumably only coincidentally, Iris is mentioned in connection with both elements by Empedocles himself in fr. 50: "And Iris brings wind or great rain from the sea" (2001: 1).

hollow and confused noise" (4.1.138 SD) that reminds us once again of the tempest.

The three conspirators are routed with effortless dispatch, and the threat they represent apparently dispelled definitively. Although the interior aspect of the process is not revealed to us in any depth, but only as it were sketched out in brief outline in the unfolding sequence of external events, it would seem that Prospero himself achieves some sort of inner resolution in consequence of his summary handling of Caliban. The clearest token of such an adjustment appears in the shift in Prospero's professed intentions from revenge to mercy. I am not here concerned to debate the thorny question of whether Prospero has seriously been meditating revenge at any point in the course of the play, though there are moments in which the audience is given every reason to suspect that he has. What is important is that his comments at this juncture of the drama recapitulate, even if they do not actually represent, a process of decision in which revenge does figure as a genuine possibility, and that Prospero is fully conscious of the nature of the alternatives available to him even if his choice has perhaps already been made:

> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th'quick,
> Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
> Do I take part: the rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
> Not a frown further. (5.1.25-30)

This contraposition of "reason" and "fury" might seem to betray a reversion to the old dualistic conception of things that has prompted Prospero to distance himself from those aspects of his own nature which are embodied in Caliban. In fact however an important development is to be discerned in the circumstance that Prospero now recognizes his fury to be no less intrinsically a part of himself than his reason is, and that he possesses at the same time a faculty of conscious volition which enables him deliberately to choose the facet of his own being he will "take part" with against the other. By confronting Caliban directly he has transcended the division within himself that is the consequence of rejection and denial, and achieved the self-knowledge and effective autonomy that makes it possible for him to forgive his enemies.

The overcoming of this inner schism is reflected in the dialogue itself, for when Caliban and his Neapolitan confederates appear to join the group of men gathered before his cell, Prospero makes a remark to the assembled company that has been seized on gratefully by more than one critic anxious to read the play in psychoanalytic terms:

> Two of these fellows you
> Must know and own; this thing of darkness I
> Acknowledge mine. (5.1.274-6)

In this acknowledgement of a component of the self which has hitherto been denied, what the play would seem to be enacting at this point is that phase in the process of individuation described by C.G. Jung as the assimilation of the shadow, "that hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors" (1979: 266). The recognition is in fact a reciprocal one, and Caliban himself, suddenly marvelling at "how fine my master is!" (5.1.262), resolves to "be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace" (5.1.295-6). At the same time Ariel, who except for a momentary lapse has throughout the play been faultlessly "correspondent to command" (1.2.297), is finally granted the liberty he yearns for, and allowed to be free "to the elements" (5.1.320). In their different ways, both Caliban and Ariel cease to function as the symbolic projections of Prospero's divided self.

This release of his ethereal servant marks the final stage in Prospero's abandonment of what he himself admits to be his "rough magic" (5.1.50). In announcing this momentous decision, Prospero recalls the prodigies he has accomplished by means of his "so potent Art" (5.1.50) in terms that are evocative, once again, of a fierce contest between the elements:

> I have bedimm'd
> The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
> And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd 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-bas'd promontory
> Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
> The pine and cedar (5.1.41-8)

It is magic thus conceived as an exercise of brute power that Prospero promises at this point to surrender, and if the language in which he does so continues to allude to the elements it is now in tones suggestive of a resolution of the tension between them:

> 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 fadoms in the earth,
> And deeper than did ever plummet sound
> I'll drown my book. (5.1.50-7)

The staff and the book, symbols of a magic that throughout the play has been associated with air and fire, are now to be incorporated with the elements of earth and water, while the "roaring war" which Prospero boasts he has instigated among the elements is to give way to celestial music of a kind that even the ostensibly obdurate Caliban is fully sensitive to (3.2.137-45).

An important point to be noted about the words with which Prospero renounces his magic is that they not only convey a sense of music emerging out of storm very similar to that discernible in Alonso's anguished response to Ariel's "three men of sin" speech in Act III, but actually echo those pronounced by the king on that occasion:

> Therefor my son i'th'ooze is bedded; and
> I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,
> And with him there lie mudded. (3.3.100-2)

What Prospero's reiteration of Alonso's words would seem to do is establish an imaginative link between his own experience and that of the king, and suggest that he too must somehow expiate the error in the past that precipitated the crime for which the others are now being punished. We have already seen in what that error consists. Prospero's immoderate addiction to esoteric learning has induced him to seclude himself from the world and his responsibilities, and thus divorce the higher from the lower components of his being, a division he has re-enacted on the island by disowning Caliban and working his will exclusively through the disembodied agency of Ariel. Like Cleopatra, in his own way, he has aspired to sublimate himself into air and fire, consigning at the same time his other elements to baser life. The only way that this schism can be healed, and Prospero's psychic equilibrium re-established, is for him to recognize the natural part of himself as an essential ingredient of being and at the same time relinquish his magic, which is precisely what he does when he acknowledges Caliban and releases Ariel. Through his repudiation of those powers that merely separate him from reality, and divide him from his own self as well, Prospero achieves personal integrity and wholeness, and is prepared to resume his place in the world even if this necessarily entails accepting his own mortality (5.1.314). At the same time, and as part and parcel of the same process, it is through his decision to "drown" his book that an enemy's son supposed to be drowned can be symbolically restored to life, and that Prospero, revealing Miranda and Ferdinand intent upon their game of chess, can "bring forth a wonder" (5.1.170) by exhibiting the children of strife united at last by love.

Such a conclusion would appear to be profoundly affirmative, but this is perhaps not all that there is to the matter. In fr. 27 Empedocles asserts

that at that point in the cosmic cycle in which Love has attained complete ascendency, and in which the elements are perfectly blended together "in the dense cover of harmony", the whole of creation exhibits the form of a "rounded sphere, rejoicing in its joyous solitude" (2001: 3-4). In view of this, it is interesting to observe that an image accorded some prominence towards the conclusion of *The Tempest* is that of the circle, one indeed that at moments takes on the properties of a sphere. At a certain point in the final act of the play – though it is not specified in the Folio text exactly where – Prospero traces a circle upon the ground. It is into this circle that, to the accompaniment of "solemn music" (5.1.57 SD), all of Prospero's enemies are drawn, and in which, with greater or lesser degrees of conviction, the magician bestows upon them his forgiveness. On a certain level the circle might be regarded in positive terms as symbolic of a regenerated human community in which the rifts between human beings have been healed, but there are perhaps more ominous overtones to the image as well. On the stage of the Globe theatre the circle would have appeared as a kind of *mise en abyme* in what is described in the Prologue of *Henry V* as the "wooden O" (13) of the theatre itself. Structurally equivalent to a play within a play, the image of one circle enclosed within another recalls the terms of the earlier speech in which Prospero draws an analogy between the melting of his masque into thin air and the dissolution of what he calls "the great globe itself" (4.1.153), a phrase which assimilates the world in its entirety to the circular theatre in which he is standing. The cumulative imaginative effect of such images might seem to be that of a series of spheres radiating outward from Prospero's charmed circle to include what is described in *Antony and Cleopatra* as "the little O, the earth" (5.2.80), and ultimately the whole of Creation itself. But as Prospero himself implies in a speech that concludes with the resonant description of "our little life / . . . rounded with a sleep" (4.1.157-8), the circle he has been at such pains to construct is neither perfect nor destined to endure. Though they too have been admitted into that circle, Antonio and Sebastian show little sign of repentance for their crimes, and Prospero must resort to coercion in order to ensure their good behaviour in the future (5.1.126-9). Caliban will seek for grace, but there is no indication that Stephano and Trinculo will follow his example. The union of Miranda and Ferdinand might seem to constitute the perfect image of concord, but Miranda is already finding occasion to accuse, though very mildly, her future husband of deception (5.1.172). The ascendancy of Love in the Empedoclean cosmology is only one phase in a recurring cycle which must inevitably be succeeded by another, and the suspicion might be that the prospect of Strife irrupting again to destroy the fragile equilibrium that Prospero has established is not in the least a remote one.

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