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Shakespeare's Bookish Rulers: Philosophy and Nature Poetry in the Henry VI Trilogy and *The Tempest*

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Abstract: Shakespeare's early Henry VI trilogy and late *The Tempest* both feature reclusive, bookish rulers who are deposed because their rivals perceive an opportunity in the rulers' trustingness and lack of interest in political affairs. Furthermore, the deposed rulers also share an interest in Platonic philosophies of the Renaissance; they differ, however, in their respective preferences for particular Platonist authors and writings. Henry VI is devoted to Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*. While Prospero, the protagonist of *The Tempest*, may have focused on Boethius and similar authors when he was in Milan, by the time we meet him on his island, he prefers Neoplatonic magic, bequeathed to the Renaissance by Ficino. While the two stories are not often read together, I argue that doing so yields a fascinating contrast in the modes of existence dictated by different streams of Renaissance philosophical thought. While Henry VI's credulity and Boethianism lead him to express a preference for a contemplative life and to adopt an attitude of extreme passivity and surrender, Prospero's suspicion and powerful use of magic associate him with the active life. The ultimate expressions of Henry's preference for the contemplative life and of Prospero's association with the active life both involve nature poetry. Henry expresses yearning for the peaceful lifestyle of a shepherd in a pastoral lyric he delivers in *3 Henry VI*, while Prospero celebrates human labor and achievement in a georgic masque which he produces.

Keywords: Shakespeare; Renaissance; philosophy; Boethius; Ficino; Iamblichus; *vita activa*; *vita contemplativa*

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> "'Miss Eliza Bennett,' said Miss Bingley, 'despises cards. She is a great reader, and has no pleasure in anything else.' 'I deserve neither such praise nor such censure,' cried Elizabeth."
>
> —Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

1. Introduction

At the end of a soliloquy in which he laments the weakness of Henry VI—who, because of his impractical interest in books and religion and insufficient attention to political affairs, had lost a number of territories to France—the scheming Duke of York announces his plan to attempt to usurp the throne, "And force perforce I'll make him yield the crown,/ Whose bookish rule hath pulled fair England down" (Shakespeare 2008b, 1.1.256-57). Henry is finally deposed after he trustingly hands over the reins of office to his erstwhile enemies, one of whom promptly betrays him (Shakespeare 2008c, 5.1.81). In *The Tempest*, a play which Shakespeare wrote at the very end of his career, he reprises the character of a bookish ruler who is perceived as weak and targeted by ambitious rivals. Prospero tells his daughter that, like Henry, he had unsuspiciously assigned all of his political responsibilities to an untrustworthy surrogate, his brother Antonio, "neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated to closeness and the bettering of my mind", because, he explains, "my library was dukedom large enough." (Shakespeare 2008d, 1.2 89-90; 109-10). Also like Henry, Prospero is betrayed by his regent; Antonio kidnaps him and sets him and his daughter adrift in a boat.[1]

Another similarity between Henry VI and Prospero is that they both like to read philosophical books that come from the Platonic tradition. Henry loves quoting from

Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. While it is implied that Prospero probably also focused on the *Consolation* and similarly introspective works when he still lived in Milan,[2] the Platonic books with which he is associated by the time we meet him on his island are the Neoplatonic theurgical writings of late antiquity, translated and commented upon in the Renaissance by Marsilio Ficino. Although the beginnings of Henry's and Prospero's stories are similar, their ends diverge just as their literary preferences do; while York's sons eventually realize their father's ambition in overthrowing Henry and murder him in his prison cell, Prospero uses magic to bring Antonio and his coconspirators into his power, and he eventually returns to his dukedom.

Reading the Henry VI trilogy and *The Tempest* together is an illuminating exercise because all four plays involve an exploration of the old philosophical question of whether the active life or contemplative life is to be preferred.[3] (As will be explained shortly, I am here including medieval credulity as an element of the contemplative life and contrasting it with Renaissance skepticism, which I take to be an element of the active life). Adherence to the teachings of the contemplative *Consolation*—written by Boethius after he had been arrested and demonstrating that things like power and wealth are ultimately of no value—is shown in the Henry VI trilogy to be humorously unsuited to a king who is expected to increase his wealth and territories and keep his nobles in line. Following the active lifestyle of a powerful theurgist, on the other hand, is exactly what Prospero needs to do in order to regain his dukedom. Shakespeare further underscores the association of Henry VI with the contemplative life and of Prospero with the active life by making each ruler the author of a poem in the classical mode of nature poetry which corresponds to his philosophical path. Henry the Boethian delivers a pastoral lyric which expresses his political suffering and his longing for the *otium* of the shepherd,[4] while Prospero the theurgist produces a georgic masque celebrating the successful labor of harvesters.[5] While it is tempting to conclude that, since Henry's fate is death in captivity and Prospero's is reinstatement to his dukedom, Shakespeare's imaginative illustrations of the passive and active lives convey a unified message that the active life is to be preferred; this is not in fact the case. Instead, Shakespeare uses both stories to plumb both sides of the active/contemplative dialectic. Although, just as we would expect, the contemplative life is shown to lead to worldly loss and the active life is shown to lead to worldly gain, the action and dialogue of the four plays do not by any means unequivocally support the thesis, so thoroughly maligned by Boethius, that worldly loss and gain are the sole measures of a life well lived. Indeed, Prospero's decision to abjure his magic and return to the contemplative life at the end of *The Tempest* may in fact be an indication that the contemplative life is to be preferred.

2. The Contemplative Life in the Henry VI Trilogy

Medieval Culture, C.S. Lewis observes, was of an overwhelmingly bookish or clerkly character:

> When we speak of the Middle Ages as the ages of authority we are usually thinking of the authority of the Church. But they were the age not only of her authority, but of authorities. If their culture is regarded as a response to environment, then the elements in that environment to which it responded most vigorously were manuscripts. Every writer, if he possibly can, bases himself on an earlier writer, follows an *auctour*: preferably a Latin one. (Lewis [1964] 2007, p. 5).

In the Renaissance of the fourteenth century, things gradually began to change.[6] There was a cultural shift away from valorization of the bookish or contemplative life towards valorization of the active life. This shift was characterized by a high degree of self-consciousness as well as, in many cases, significant ambivalence on the part of the people in whom it was manifested. Somewhat later, in the early fifteenth century, humanists revived the ancient skepticism of authors such as Lucian, which led them to question the authority of the Church and other authorities in a variety of ways.[7] Altogether, it can be said that the early

Renaissance was characterized by a movement towards an outlook that was more worldly than that which had prevailed in the Middle Ages.

King Henry VI, who, in the three plays which bear his name (c. 1589–1592), fills the dramatic role of the crank or the odd man out,[8] is a throwback, a medieval man[9] surrounded by men and women of the Renaissance. While they, for the most part, ignore virtue in their pursuit of worldly goods, Henry is focused on a life of virtue and is comically incapable of maintaining the wealth and rank which he inherited. He is not only the odd man out, but also (despite his absence from many parts of the sprawling action) the central character who generates the primary, sustained theme of the three plays, which is the tension between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. There are two main ways in which Shakespeare explores this tension. First, he makes characters other than Henry comment explicitly on their preferences for the active mode and their disdain for the contemplative mode. This mainly occurs in Parts 1 and 2, in which, despite Henry's thematic centrality, the tragic action of the plays focuses on other characters (Talbot and Gloucester, respectively). Second, Shakespeare makes the dialogue of Henry himself extremely bookish and medieval. The first aspect of Henry's bookish, medieval orientation is his willingness to rely on authority and his lack of the skepticism or suspicion that was championed by early Renaissance humanists such as Thomas More.[10] The second aspect of Henry's bookishness is the intertextuality which characterizes his dialogue. The sheer quantity of Henry's quotations from various sources is overwhelming—he probably has a higher proportion of intertextual[11] speeches than any other Shakespeare character. While his favorite book to quote from is the Bible (especially the New Testament), Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* (c. 524), which I will be focusing on here, is another important source. This choice of texts—both of which were very popular in the Middle Ages and continued to be taught in and would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience from Renaissance grammar schools (See Nauta 2003, pp. 767–78)—is, as we shall see, very appropriate for a bookish king embodying contemplative medieval ideals. Henry's great pastoral poem in Act 2 of Part 3 can be seen as the encapsulation of all his longing for the contemplative life hinted to in other speeches. In this section, I will first consider the tension between the active and contemplative lives as a uniting theme of the Henry VI plays; then discuss Henry's credulity, contrasting it with the suspicion of his courtiers; and finally turn to Henry's intertextual Boethian speeches, culminating with his lyrical expression of his relation to nature.

When Somerset turns to Warwick, asking him to judge between himself and York on some point of law omitted from the play, Warwick, one of Henry's cleverest and most powerful courtiers, responds by denying his own ability to opine on legal questions[12]:

Between two hawks, which flies the higher pitch,

Between two dogs, which have the deeper mouth,

Between two blades, which bears the better temper,

Between two horses, which doth bear him best,

Between two girls, which hath the merriest eye,

I have perhaps some shallow spirit of judgment;

But in these sharp quillets of the law,

Good faith, I am no wiser than a daw. (Shakespeare 2008a, *1H6*, 2.4.11-18)

There is, of course, one level on which Warwick is smoothly and politely refusing to get involved in York's and Somerset's quarrel. But the terms of his refusal reveal a certain attitude towards the various pursuits which are referred to in his speech; while Warwick is happy to be associated with the active life by claiming some expertise in hunting, fighting, horseback riding, and lovemaking, he does not want to be associated with the intellectual or contemplative pursuit of the law.

Later, when the Bishop of Winchester is presented with the complaints of the Duke of Gloucester, he taunts him for putting those complaints in writing:

Com'st thou with deep premeditated lines,

With written pamphlets studiously devised?

Humphrey of Gloucester, if thou canst accuse,

Or aught intend'st to lay unto my charge,

Do it without invention, suddenly,

As I with sudden and extemporal speech

Purpose to answer what thou canst object.[13]

In this preening speech, the active life is associated with pride. Later in the same scene, the servingmen of Gloucester express the same contempt for writing, this time directed at the bishop, who, as a clergyman (albeit a very belligerent one) is associated by default with literary pursuits:

And ere that we will suffer such a prince [Gloucester],

So kind a father of the commonweal,

To be disgraced by an inkhorn mate

We and our wives and our children all will fight. . . [14]

Here, Shakespeare emphasizes the power of factionalism in the active life, which is an important theme in the play. The servingmen's hatred of Winchester is so strong that they are even willing to recruit their wives and children to fight.

Winchester's and the servingmen's contempt for all things literary is carried onward to the scene in which Suffolk is first overwhelmed by Margaret's beauty and considers writing poetry about her or to her, but ultimately decides against it:

Fain would I woo her, yet I dare not speak.

I'll call for pen and ink and write my mind.

Fie, de la Pole, disable not thyself!

Hast not a tongue? Is she not here?[15]

The contrast implied in this scene is to medieval poets, such as Dante and Petrarch,[16] who merely wrote about their adoration for the women they loved and never made serious efforts to woo them. Again, a person who prefers the active life is implicitly criticized. Suffolk's decision to woo Margaret, who is later to marry Henry, constitutes both a political and a personal breach of faith.

Margaret herself expresses admiration for the *vita activa* as personified by Suffolk and disgust for the *vita contemplativa* as personified by her husband, Henry, in a conversation with Suffolk which occurs towards the beginning of Part 2:

I tell thee, Pole, when in the city Tours

Thou ran'st atilt in honor of my love

And stol'st away the ladies' hearts of France,

I thought King Henry had resembled thee

In courage, courtship, and proportion.

But all his mind is bent to holiness,

To number Ave Marys on his beads.

His champions are the prophets and apostles,

His weapons holy saws of sacred writ,

His study is his tiltyard, and his loves

Are brazen images of canonized saints.[17]

To the audience, the rhetorical picture Margaret paints of Henry contrasts not only with the image of Suffolk in her words and onstage, but also with the earlier rhetorical self-portrait of Warwick. Unlike his active Renaissance courtiers, Henry is devoted to the religious,

contemplative lifestyle. The use of anaphora in this speech serves to further underscore the fact that Henry's contemplative personality is outside of Margaret's expectation.

The acme of the Henry VI plays' portrayal of characters heaping scorn upon the literary or contemplative lifestyle occurs in the outrageous and comical dialogue of Jack Cade and of the other clowns who take part in his rebellion towards the end of Part 2. The real popular uprising of Jack Cade was in fact remarkable for its literacy: it is distinguished for being the first popular rebellion in British history in which the rebels submitted their demands in writing to representatives of the government.[18] Shakespeare was aware of this fact and incorporates into his narrative a stage direction in which the king reads the rebels' demands.[19] However, whatever the details of the historical record might be, a popular revolt is not an opportunity that the playwright, as an artist, can let alone without using it to further invoke the theme of literacy—and invoke it he does, for about two hundred lines over the course of several scenes. A member of the rebellion suggests that, "The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers."[20] Cade assents and, like the servingmen of Gloucester who had scorned Winchester as an, "inkhorn mate," invokes the material culture connected with literacy in order to express his disgust with the people who are associated with the *vita contemplativa*:

> Is not this a lamentable thing, that of the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? That parchment, being scribble o'er, should undo a man? Some say the bee stings, but I say 'tis the bee's wax, for I did but seal once to a thing, and I was never my own man since.[21]

Here and later, when Cade says, "because they could not read thou hast hanged them,"[22] (referring to the law giving the "benefit of the clergy" to the literate, i.e., the upper classes, exempting them from prosecution even for serious crimes such as murder) there is a sense that some of the rebels' grievances might be legitimate. However, most of the rebels' lines are remarkable for their comic ridiculousness and extreme cruelty to the unfortunate literate victims they happen to seize upon, mirroring the cruelty of Henry's courtiers (of both factions) to their bookish king:

> SMITH: The clerk of Chartham. He can write and read, and cast accounts.
>
> CADE: Oh, monstrous!
>
> SMITH: We took him setting of boys' copies.
>
> CADE: Here's a villain!
>
> ...
>
> CADE... Dost thou use to write thy name? Or hast thou a mark to thyself, like an honest, plain-dealing man?
>
> CLERK: Sir, I thank God, I have been so well brought up that I can write my name.
>
> ALL: He hath confessed. Away with him! He's a villain and a traitor.
>
> CADE: Away with him, I say! Hang him with his pen and inkhorn about his neck.[23]

Here, again, people who reject the contemplative lifestyle are portrayed as blindly belligerent and dangerous.

While the first two parts of the Henry VI plays contain ample iterations of the themes of literacy and the opposition of the active and contemplative lives that are not connected to or not exclusively connected to the king, much of the dialogue related to the central themes involves, like the queen's speech to Suffolk, courtiers sneering at or bemoaning Henry's "churchlike humors."[24] York tells him that, "Thy hand was made to grasp a palmer's staff,/ And not to grace an awful princely scepter."[25] Westmoreland, a member of Henry's own faction, tells him that he is, "base, fearful, and despairing",[26] and then says, "Farewell, fainthearted and degenerate King,/ In whose cold blood no spark of honor bides."[27]

Margaret calls him, "unnatural."[28] Richard, York's son and the future King Richard III, avers that the blood in Henry's heart is, "lukewarm."[29] Warwick boasts that he could, "wring the awful scepter from [Henry's] fist,/ Were he as famous and bold in war/ As he is famed for mildness, peace, and prayer".[30]

More interesting and important than what Henry's courtiers have to say about him, however, is what Henry has to say for himself. When he encounters an unsubstantiated claim, instead of greeting it with suspicion, he reacts with credulity. Suffolk, as mentioned above, has fallen in love with Margaret and, because he is married, wants to bring her back to England as Henry's wife so that she can be his, Suffolk's, mistress there. When he tells Henry that the latter should break an advantageous betrothal with another lady in favor of the dowerless Margaret because, "the chief perfections of that lovely dame... Would make a volume of enticing lines/ Able to ravish any dull conceit",[31] Henry believes him and responds by requesting consent for the match from Gloucester, his Lord Protector. Shakespeare underlines Henry's bookishness in this scene by having Suffolk cynically and exploitatively employ a bookish metaphor which then elicits the king's obedience to bookish authority. Gloucester, Henry's skeptical and worldly foil, objects to the match on pragmatic grounds, but Henry overrules him and goes through with the match.[32] After Henry excuses himself to "ruminate [his] grief"[33] (i.e., the grief of love) and exits the stage, Gloucester says, "Ay, grief, I fear me, both at first and last."[34] The audience is left in no doubt as to whether Gloucester's active skepticism or Henry's contemplative faith is better—the ending lines of the play are delivered by Suffolk, who, in a soliloquy, outlines his plan to "rule both [Margaret], the King, and realm."[35] Gloucester is not the only foil for Henry with respect to the latter's credulous love; Edward of York, who becomes king in Part 3, is likewise implicitly compared to Henry when he breaks an advantageous betrothal and makes a politically disastrous match. The difference between the otherworldly Henry and the worldly Edward is emphasized, however, when Edward is inflamed by lust prompted by the physical beauty of a woman who is standing right in front of him and courts her rather vulgarly;[36] very unlike the idealizing Henry who has nothing but words to go on and whose love is expressed in lofty terms.

Gloucester's active skepticism is contrasted with Henry's contemplative faith again in Part 2, when the court hunting party is told about a miracle that has occurred at Saint Alban's shrine—a man who was born blind had been granted the gift of sight.[37] (Appropriately enough, the source for this story is a dialogue written by Thomas More, one of the early humanists responsible for reviving skepticism in the Renaissance. (Shakespeare 1999, 195 n0.1). Henry instantly reacts to the news by saying, "Now, God be praised, that to believing souls/ Gives light in darkness, comfort in despair!"[38] Gloucester is unwilling to praise the miracle right away, and, after interrogating the supposed ex-blind man, reveals that he can identify colors by name.[39] Gloucester concludes by telling the man that he is, "the lyings't knave in Christendom... Sight may distinguish of colors, but suddenly to nominate them all, it is impossible."[40] This scene shows that Gloucester continues to protect the credulous king from being put upon by others even in the latter's majority; thus emphasizing the credulous Henry's vulnerability and the greatness of the loss that Henry later suffers when Gloucester is murdered by ambitious rivals.

Henry's bookishness is manifested not only by his medieval, contemplative naivete, but also by his propensity to quote from the books which inform his worldview. He inhabits a world completely unlike that of his peers, relating everything that occurs to him to his favorite books. Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, one of those books, is a dialogue which reassesses the value of things pursued and envied by those who are involved in the *vita activa*, such as power, fame, wealth, and noble descent. Lady Philosophy, Boethius's interlocutor, teaches him not to set any store by such ephemera, but to cultivate a life of godly virtue in a state of contemplative serenity instead.

Most of Henry's allusions to the *Consolation* occur in Part 3. In the first scene of Part 3, Henry negotiates a truce with York in which he agrees that York and not his own son

will inherit the crown after his death.[41] At the time, he acknowledges that disinheriting his son is "unnatural,"[42] and is heavily reproached for negotiating on terms so prejudicial to himself by members of his own party.[43] Later, he offers a novel defense for the truce:

> I'll leave my son my virtuous deeds behind;
> And would my father had left me no more!
> For all the rest is held at such a rate
> As bring a thousandfold more care to keep
> Than in possession any jot of pleasure.[44]

This speech refers, first, to Lady Philosophy's incomplete refutation of the idea that noble descent has real worth and should be valued by its possessors. She asserts that, "the praise of someone else cannot ennoble you unless you are famous in your own right." (Boethius 1999, p. 59). Nevertheless, she admits that there might be some good in noble descent, "If there is anything good in nobility, I think it is only this: that there is a necessary condition imposed upon the noble not to fall short of the virtue of their ancestors."[45] Just a few pages earlier in the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy had concluded that kingship is not to be desired on the grounds that, "a man who goes about with a bodyguard because he is more afraid than the subjects he terrorizes, and whose claim to power depends on the will of those who serve him",[46] cannot be considered truly powerful or happy. Henry's demonstration that his decision to disinherit his son was actually to his son's benefit is therefore complete. While inheritance through blood of land, rank, and wealth is associated with the realm of action, spiritual inheritance of virtue is associated with the realm of contemplation, and Henry prefers the latter.

Shakespeare exercises restraint in not supplying suspicion of Margaret's infidelity—a suspicion which would have been fully justified on the terms in the rest of the narrative[47]—as the reason for the historical fact that Henry was willing to disinherit his son, who may not, after all, have been his. Not only does Shakespeare stay true to character by refraining from turning Henry into a suspicious husband, but he also embellishes his character while maintaining continuity by supplying a compelling (if somewhat odd) alternative explanation for Henry's behavior. Henry is prepared to disinherit his son not because he is a jealous husband, but because he is a contemplative Boethian philosopher.

When, after he is overthrown the first time, Henry is spied by two gamekeepers who guess at his true identity, he is saying, "Let me embrace thee, sour adversity/ For wise men say it is the wisest course."[48] One of those wise men is Boethius—the *Consolation* begins with Boethius railing against adversity,[49] and involves Lady Philosophy administering "medicine"[50] in the form of showing him gradually, over the course of the book, why he should accept his fate. Towards the end, she demonstrates that fate is ordained by an all-knowing providence, and that whenever someone encounters adversity, it is because the adversity is good for them.[51] In the continuation of his speech, Henry narrates the political situation at the time. When he is confronted by the gamekeepers who ask, "Say, what art thou that talk'st of kings and queens?"[52] Henry responds, "More than I seem, and less than I was born to./ A man at least, for less I should not be;/ And men may talk of kings, and why not I?"[53] While, in the first line of Henry's response, he refers to his political status, in the second line, he refers to his true or philosophical status. In the *Consolation*, Lady Philosophy teaches Boethius that the wicked cannot be called "men" at all, "That [the wicked] used to be human is shown by the human appearance of their body which still remains. . . when a man abandons goodness. . . he sinks to the level of being an animal."[54] Though Henry is consistently ambivalent about his political title, there is one title regarding which he is willing to lay a firm claim: the philosophical title of "man". Again, the contemplative Henry is preoccupied with moral virtue.

After Warwick and Clarence defect from the Yorkist side and restore Henry to his throne, he makes the hair-raising decision to delegate his power to Warwick (and, eventually, Clarence as well) and settle down to a life of retirement, characteristically placing

his trust in people who do not deserve to be trusted. This is, of course, what Henry, with his inclination towards the *vita contemplativa*, has always wanted to do anyway. He had previously delayed taking the staff of office from Gloucester, who had wielded it in his capacity of Lord Protector during Henry's minority, until Gloucester was framed by rial courtiers.[55] The official reason that Henry gives for his decision to relinquish his power, however, is not just that he is doing what he has always desired to do, but that he intends to

> . . . conquer fortune's spite
>
> By living low, where fortune cannot hurt me,
>
> And that the people of this blessed land
>
> May not be punished with my thwarting stars. . .[56]

Henry is here following the teaching of Lady Philosophy in the *Consolation*, who advises against relying on fortune for one's happiness and, in a poem, praises the man who will choose to be "secure on lowly rock" rather than building a home on the open sea or mountain peaks.[57] Despite its excellent source, Henry's speech is extremely ironic. The audience knows that many if not all of the setbacks he has suffered are attributable directly to his weak political maneuvers, not blind fortune or stars, and that surrendering the reins of government to men who have just betrayed him is not a sound strategy for preventing further civil war. Indeed, as already mentioned, Clarence promptly betrays Henry again at the first opportunity. The thick layers of irony accompanying some of Henry's quotations from the *Consolation* provide a good illustration of what Julia Kristeva means when she says that intertextuality involves the "transformation" of texts.[58]

The high point of Henry's intertextual speeches occurs earlier, in the pastoral lyric which he delivers when he creeps away from a battle that is being fought on his behalf. Henry's pastoral poem is far too long to reproduce in full here.[59] Here are the critical passages:

> O God! Methinks it were a happy life
>
> To be no better than a homely swain,
>
> To sit upon a hill, as I do now,
>
> . . . to divide the times:
>
> So many hours must I tend my flock,
>
> So many hours must I take my rest,
>
> So many hours must I contemplate,
>
> So many hours must I sport myself
>
> . . .
>
> So minutes, hours, days, months, and years
>
> . . .
>
> Would bring white hairs unto a quiet grave.
>
> . . .
>
> Gives not the hawthorn bush a sweeter shade
>
> To shepherds looking on their silly sheep
>
> Than doth a rich embroidered canopy
>
> To kings that fear their subjects' treachery?
>
> O yes it doth, a thousandfold it doth.
>
> And to conclude, the shepherd's homely curds,
>
> . . .
>
> . . . [are] far beyond a prince's delicates—

His viands sparkling in a golden cup,

His body couched in a curious bed—

When care, mistrust, and treason wait on him.

There is a pastoral poem with a similar theme in the *Consolation*.[60] Henry's pastoral follows Boethius not only in its mode, but also in the contrast between the freedom of the shepherd and the care of the king at the end, which, as we saw earlier, is lifted directly from the section in the *Consolation* about kingly power.

C.S. Lewis makes a trenchant and provocative claim about the definition of pastoral, which, if we consider it carefully, will help us to think about the significance of the mode for Boethius and for Shakespeare. According to Lewis, pastoral is "a medium originally devised for the purposes of refreshment and escape." (Lewis 1944, p. 132). While "pure" pastoral is, for him, represented by the bucolic poems of Theocritus as well as by those of medieval nature poets who had never heard of Theocritus, "perversion" of pastoral, first perpetrated by Virgil, introduces allegorical and polemical elements which do not properly belong within the mode. Lewis does not claim that the eclogues of Virgil or of Mantuan, an important Renaissance imitator of his, are bad as poetry, only that they are corrupt as pastorals.

Perhaps conveying what Lewis calls the "radical, obvious, and universal pleasures" associated with nature can be understood as the sole purpose of pastoral if the mode is traced back only to Theocritus. If, however, we trace pastoral back to Plato's *Phaedrus*, as many scholars do,[61] a different purpose emerges. Many of the hallmarks of later pastoral poetry can be traced back to the *Phaedrus*; the dialogue takes place in a beautiful natural setting, there are cicadas and references to nymphs, a rhetorical competition, eros as a subject, and even a prayer to Pan. In the course of his "correct" discourse on eros, Socrates attributes both eros and poetic inspiration to "divine madness." (Plato 2002, pp. 26–27). That is, two primary features of pastoral—the composition of poetry and the pains of the lover—are associated with a sort of suffering that is sent to the subject by a divine actor, whether the subject wills it or not. Perhaps, then, Virgil allowed himself to introduce polemical elements into poems such as the first and ninth eclogues because he understood the mode, following Plato, to involve a sort of passive suffering, whether the suffering is erotic, poetic, or political. The next question is why anybody would write pastoral rather than simply writing a lyric having nothing to do with nature expressing erotic suffering or political suffering. In addition to the added refreshment alluded to by Lewis, which is certainly a part of the answer (the pleasure of the scenery mitigating the pain expressed by the speaker), there is also a sense in which the pastoral setting can be seen as amplifying the pastoral speaker's suffering complaint. The pastoral involves shepherds rather than farmers,[62] those who do not manipulate nature but simply exist passively within it.[63] The pastoral setting, then, accentuates the passivity and vulnerability of the sufferer at the same time as it mitigates the pain conveyed by the narrative. Shakespeare understood that, for his suffering, contemplative king, a pastoral which included reflection on political topics was the most appropriate mode of poetry available.

Henry says that he has been suffering since he was crowned when he was nine months old,[64] and this suffering continues till his brutal death. In the end, Richard murders him in his prison cell. But before he dies, Henry makes two prophecies (Boethius, following Plato, says that the virtuous are rewarded by becoming divine[65]). Henry prophesies that Richmond will redeem England,[66] and, just before he is killed, he prophecies that Richard will be universally reviled and have a bloody and miserable end.[67] Though Richard and his older brothers, all valiant participants in the *vita activa*, come out at the end of this play as the winners, this happy ending must have been heavily ironic for Shakespeare's audience, who knew the fate of the three surviving sons of York, and the irony is only underscored by Henry's prophecy. Although it is officially the followers of the *vita activa* who triumph, there is a sense in which Henry, the contemplative, trusting king, emerges from the action of the three plays in a better state than any of the other characters. Though he suffers much,

he is always faithful, just, and merciful. He may not remain a king, but he does remain a man.

3. The Active Life in *The Tempest*

Shakespeare drew clear parallels to Henry VI when he wrote Act 1 Scene 2 of *The Tempest (1611),* in which Prospero narrates the circumstances of his banishment from his dukedom to his daughter, Miranda.[68] Like Henry, when Prospero was still in Milan, he preferred the *vita contemplativa* to the *vita activa*. The liberal arts, he tells Miranda, were all his study.[69] Also like Henry, Prospero is lacking in Renaissance suspicion and unwisely gives the responsibility of his office to someone else, "The government I cast upon my brother/ And to my state grew stranger, being transported/ And rapt in secret studies."[70] Again, like Henry, Prospero's trust and eschewal of the *vita activa* eventually stimulates the ambition of a rival, "I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated/ To closeness and the bettering of my mind... in my false brother/ Awaked an evil nature... He did believe/ He was indeed the Duke... "[71] Finally, Prospero is, like Henry, deposed. Unlike Henry, however, Prospero is not murdered, but set adrift in a leaky boat,[72] and he survives.

By the time we meet Prospero on his desert island, he does not resemble the gentle, suffering Henry at all. As we have seen, Henry had been reluctant to assume the staff of office. Prospero, by contrast, is unafraid to wield his magical staff, which he uses to control other people.[73] Furthermore, Prospero commands a spirit, Ariel, and through him is able to manipulate nature, causing a tempest that shipwrecks his enemies.[74] Another change is that Prospero has given up his medieval credulity in favor of Renaissance skepticism or suspicion. We learn that this development, at least, did not happen right away as soon as Prospero and Miranda landed on the island. Rather, Prospero trusted Caliban at first just as he had trusted Antonio. He reproaches Caliban with a betrayal of his trust:

> I have used thee,
>
> Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee
>
> In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
>
> The honor of my child.[75]

By the time that the shipwreck occurs, however, Prospero's attitude is not one of simply putting faith in others. Although he really wants Ferdinand and Miranda to marry each other, he makes a great show of his distrust of Ferdinand: he tells him that he suspects that:

> Thou dost here usurp
>
> The name thou ows't not, and hast put thyself
>
> Upon this island as a spy, to win it
>
> From me, the lord on't.[76]

His real suspicion is manifested most completely towards the end of the play, when he forgives Antonio (who has not repented or asked for forgiveness). Prospero's words there are:

> Flesh and blood,
>
> You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,
>
> Expelled remorse and nature...
>
> ... I do forgive thee,
>
> Unnatural though thou art. (*Temp.* 5.1.74-79.)

Prospero's forgiveness without forgetting stands in stark contrast to the scenes of forgiveness in Shakespeare's earlier plays, discussed by Robert Grams Hunter in *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*. Hunter traces the origin of Shakespeare's comedies of forgiveness—comedies which culminate in a forgiveness scene—to medieval miracle plays, which

involve people who sin greatly, repent, and are fully forgiven by God, who is a character on stage. (Hunter 1964, pp. 10–41). Since including God on stage was not something that Renaissance playwrights did, Shakespeare adapts the form by having human characters forgive each other at the denouement of many of his comedies. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (c. 1590–1594), Shakespeare's earliest comedy of forgiveness, Proteus, after betraying the love of Julia and the friendship of Valentine, threatens to violently rape Silvia, who is loved by Valentine. After Valentine stops him, Proteus repents and asks for forgiveness (as Hunter observes, "Nothing is more conducive to contrition than getting caught[77]). Like God in the medieval miracle plays, Valentine immediately forgives Proteus:

> Then I am paid:
>
> And once again, I do receive thee honest;
>
> Who by repentance is not satisfied,
>
> Is nor of heaven nor earth. . .
>
> And that my love may appear plain and free,
>
> All that was mine in Silvia, I give thee. (Shakespeare 2008e, 5.4.77-83)

Critical responses to Valentine's forgiveness range from the observation that "there are by this time *no* gentlemen in Verona,"[78] to the comment that Valentine is a "nincompoop."[79] Hunter responds that Valentine is "a *Christian* nincompoop."[80] Immediately after sudden repentance brought about by external circumstances, Valentine is willing to forgive.

Although Shakespeare's audience may have been conditioned by medieval miracle plays to expect and accept quick repentance and instant forgiveness on stage, Shakespeare's later comedies of forgiveness exhibit more psychological realism (or pessimism) than *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* does. One of the many functions of the chorus of Time in the *The Winter's Tale* (c. 1609–1611) is to lend a character of sincerity and depth to the prolonged repentance of Leontes, whose initial and even much later expressions of contrition are rejected as inadequate by Paulina.[81] Paulina's rejection of Leontes's repentances can be read as a kind of suspicion; unlike the relatively medieval Valentine, the skeptical Paulina requires more concrete proof of reformation before she will allow herself (and Hermione) to fully trust Leontes again. The progression of suspicion in the comedies of forgiveness culminates in Prospero's forgiveness of Antonio, which is unaccompanied by even conditional trust or the suggestion of future trust of any kind. Hunter comments that "More than any other of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest* insists strongly upon indestructibility of evil. Only a rigid and unceasing control of the sort that Prospero has exercised over Caliban and will, we assume, exercise over Antonio can keep good in its natural ascendancy."[82] Paul said that, "love. . . believeth all things,"[83] and the forgiveness in miracle plays and early comedies of forgiveness is always accompanied by good Christian belief and trust. Like characters in the early comedies of forgiveness, the medieval Henry instantly trusts Warwick and Clarence as soon as they defect to his side. The later comedies of forgiveness, and especially the character of Prospero, are characterized by classicizing skepticism, and recognize, as Hunter says, that good must always be wary of evil.

Despite Prospero's new association with Renaissance suspicion and the *vita activa*, however, he still continues to be associated with books. He makes a point of telling Miranda that, when the two of them were set adrift, a kind nobleman, Gonzalo, supplied them not only with food and fresh water, but also, "Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me/ From mine own library with volumes that/ I prize above my dukedom."[84] Miranda later tells Ferdinand that, "My father/ Is hard at study. Pray now, rest yourself./ He's safe for these three hours."[85] In the same act, Caliban, a who claims that Prospero is, "a tyrant,/ A sorcerer, that by his cunning hath/ Cheated me of the island,"[86] tells his fellow Stephano and Trinculo that, "thou mayst brain him,/ having first seized his books; or with a log/Batter his skull. . . "[87] He cautions them again, "Remember/ First to possess his books, for without them/ He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not/ One spirit to command. . . Burn but his books."[88]

Shakespeare's emphasis on Prospero's studiousness and the books which he brought with him to his desert island—like his emphasis on the contrast between the active and contemplative lives and the material cultures associated with literacy in the Henry VI plays—points to some significant intertextuality. This time, however, the *Consolation* is an unlikely candidate for a text to which Shakespeare may be pointing. It is quite the opposite of a magic book containing instructions on how to become powerful by securing a "sprit to command." A body of books that was (newly) available in Renaissance Europe and did provide plentiful information about how a mage may command a spirit or spirits and do other types of magic was the Neoplatonic corpus, translated into Latin by Marsilio Ficino.[89] Ficino also authored *Three Books on* Life (1489), a magic book of his own. Some of Prospero's speeches and actions align him with *Three Books on Life*. He is an astrologer: he tells Miranda that:

I find my zenith doth depend upon

A most auspicious star, whose influence

If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes

Will ever after droop.[90]

Ficino devotes significant space in *Three Books on Life* to the art of astrology. (See Ficino 1989, pp. 265–89). Prospero is also capable of using words to put people into magic sleeps and then wake them up again.[91] Ficino discusses aural magic (comprised of special music—a prominent feature of *The Tempest*—as well as special words) and how it may be used to awaken people who lie "half-dead."[92] Although Ficino discusses the demonic magic of his Neoplatonic sources, he (officially, at least (See Walker 1958, pp. 45–53)) repudiates it because he considers it to be incompatible with Christianity.[93]

This incompatibility did not stop him, however, from translating Neoplatonic sources which give instructions regarding demonic magic into Latin. One of these sources is Iamblichus's *On the Mysteries* (published in Latin translation in 1497), which is another important intertext for the character of Prospero. Iamblichus spends several pages advising theurgists who wish to command demons on the efficacy of threatening the demons, who, he says, "are at once stirred up and startled when threats are brandished at them." (Iamblichus 2003, p. 287). Prospero, accordingly, threatens Ariel, assuring him that, "If thou more murmurs't, I will rend an oak/ And peg thee in his knotty entrails till/ Thou hast howled away twelve winters."[94] Iamblichus promotes action over intellection, emphasizing that, "it is not even chiefly through our intellection that divine causes are called into actuality,"[95] and that, rather, action is needed to achieve the goals of the theurgist, and can even be effective when intellection is absent.[96] The primary goal of the theurgist is to become divine; we can, Iamblichus says, "unite ourselves to the gods and transcend the cosmic order, and partake in eternal life. . . "[97]

The divinization promised by Iamblichus for the theurgist is highly relevant to Prospero, who is so powerful that, throughout the play, he is repeatedly confused, conflated with, and compared to a god or gods.[98] When Caliban is dismissed by Prospero after his first appearance on stage, he says in an aside that, "I must obey. His art is of such power/It would control my dam's god, Setobos,/ And make a vassal of him."[99] Ferdinand does not compare Prospero with a god, but assumes that someone with Prospero's powers must be a god. When he hears Ariel's music, he says, "sure it waits upon/ Some god o' th' island."[100] Ariel, who knows what is going on, informs the shipwrecked court party who are responsible for banishing Prospero and Miranda from Milan that, for their:

foul deed

The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have

Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all the creatures,

Against your peace. . .

. . . whose wraths to guard you from—

Which here, in this most desolate isle, else falls

Upon your heads—is nothing but heart's sorrow

And a clear life ensuing.[101]

Prospero then congratulates Ariel for his performance, praising the fact that, "Of my instruction hast thou nothing bated/ In what thou hadst to say."[102] In other words, it is Prospero who has chosen to present himself as a punishing providence.

In the last act, Prospero boasts that he even has power over elements of nature associated with mythical gods such as Neptune and Jove:

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. . .

. . . 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. . .[103]

The theme of Prospero's divinity isn't just reiterated; it is also echoed in the love-worship of Ferdinand and Miranda, as when Ferdinand declares that Miranda must be a goddess,[104] and parodied in Caliban's worship of Stephano.[105]

The ultimate expression of Prospero's power is in his great nature poem, the georgic masque—performed by his spirit servants—which he produces in honor of the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero's georgic is even longer than Henry's pastoral, so I will just quote small parts of it. Invoking Ceres or another god or goddess associated with the harvest is an important element of the georgic mode, and Ceres is duly invoked by Iris right at the beginning of Prospero's masque:

Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas

Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and peas

. . . the queen o' th' sky

Whose wat'ry arch and messenger am I,

Bids thee leave these, and with her sovereign grace,

Here on this grass plot, in this very place,

To come and sport.[106]

Another characteristic of the georgic form is its rejection of sexual passion, whether human or animal, which is seen as disruptive.[107] Passion, after all, is etymologically related to passivity, and the successful farmer must be active and fully in charge. Venus and Cupid are accordingly excluded from the masque. This exclusion involves a bit of a tricky maneuver, since Shakespeare has already written a number of Ficinian love scenes between Ferdinand and Miranda, and the main purpose of the masque is "a contract of true love to celebrate"[108]:

CERES: Tell me, heavenly bow,

If Venus or her son, as thou dost know,

Do now attend the Queen [Juno]?. . .

IRIS: Of her society

Be not afraid. I met her Deity

Cutting the clouds towards Paphos, and her son
Dove-drawn with her. Here thought they to have done
Some wanton charm upon this man and maid,
Whose vows are that no bed-right shall be paid
Till Hymen's torch be lighted. . .[109]

Here Shakespeare successfully negotiates the problem with which he is presented. The banishment of Venus and Cupid, which has to happen because of the mode he is using, is effectively limited to an additional caution to the couple that their marriage should not be consummated before "All sanctimonious ceremonies may/With full and holy rite be minister'd".[110]

The most important characteristics of georgic are its celebrations of the agricultural harvest and of farmers, the first of which is present in the form of a blessing to Ferdinand and Miranda:

CERES: Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty,
Vines with clust'ring branches growing
Plants with goodly burden bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you;
Ceres' blessing so is on you.[111]

The celebration of farmers is present in Iris's injunction to the "sunburned sicklemen, of August weary" to, "Come hither from the furrow and be merry" and be in the dance that follows.[112]

Pastoral is the poetic mode expressing the suffering caused by the divine madness of love or poetry, or, in later pastoral, pain caused by fellow humans. The pastoral speaker is passive in the face of a force that is greater than he is. Georgic is the form which celebrates successful human activity and hard work—untroubled by the irrationality always attendant upon love, poetry, and injustice—culminating in a successful harvest. When he was in Naples and dedicated solely to "the betterment of his mind," or the *vita contemplativa*, Prospero inhabited the pastoral mode—he fell victim to a terrible injustice, and there was nothing he could do about it. On his island, however, he is a poet—both in the literary sense and in the sense of a "maker"[113]—who works in the georgic mode. He has learned his lesson about trust, and proactively relates to those who may not deserve his trust with suspicion. With the divine magic he learned from his Neoplatonic books, he is in control of the action, and he reaps the harvest of the comedy he orchestrates: a happy ending.

*****

At the conclusion of the play, Prospero gives up his magic. He announces hisplan to do so at the end of his "Ye elves" soliloquy:

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.[114]

Prospero's announcement that he will break his staff and drown his book constitutes a declaration that he is giving up the active life in favor of the contemplative life. Later, he says that after attending Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding in Naples, he'll, "thence retire me to my Milan, where/ Every third thought shall be my grave."[115] This is a reference to Plato's teaching about the contemplative life in the *Phaedo*, in which Socrates asserts that, "those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are directly and of their own accord preparing themselves for dying and death." (Plato 1963a, p. 46). Prospero's resolution to retreat from his ruling position furthermore implies that he intends to once again put his trust in a regent. Northrop Frye drily comments that Prospero's resolution, "doesn't sound like much of a prospect for Milan."[116] He is certainly right—the three Henry VI plays clearly convey the message that when rulers completely renounce the *vita activa* and suspicion in favor of the *vita contemplativa* and trust, the results can be disastrous for the commonwealths for which they are responsible. On the other hand, the Henry VI trilogy and *The Tempest* equally imply that when rulers—or even just people—entirely neglect the *vita contemplativa*, there is not much of a moral prospect for themselves as individuals. By considering both sides of the active/contemplative dialectic, Shakespeare exposes the benefits and drawbacks of each.

As we have seen, another similarity shared between *The Tempest* and the Henry VI trilogy is that some form of Platonism is incorporated into both narratives by the playwright. In all four plays, Shakespeare confers philosophical interest on the central character by assigning him speeches which quote or refer to his favorite philosopher as well as a special nature poem which is aligned with the teachings of that philosopher. Shakespeare also amplifies the philosopher character's association with his preferred type of philosophy by assigning relevant dialogue to other characters. Although both stories involve the Platonic trope of the divinization of the philosopher, the trope plays out very differently in each. In the Henry VI plays, the king, who has spent most of the action being human and entirely vulnerable to suffering, is rewarded for his virtue at the very end of Part 3 with the divine gift of prophecy. At the narrative's conclusion, he becomes divine, but in a characteristically passive sort of way (the prophetic gift is something else which Plato associates with divine madness in the *Phaedrus*[117]). Prospero's relation to divinity and his own humanity moves in just the opposite direction; he spends most of *The Tempest* being divinely powerful, and then, at the ending, gives up theurgy and embraces his own mortality. Unlike Henry, Prospero elects the plane that he will be living on throughout—he chooses both his divinity at the beginning of *The Tempest* and his vulnerable humanity at the end. Although pinpointing didacticism within Shakespeare's complex, multivocal plays can be a difficult and messy business, I believe that Prospero's final renunciation in *The Tempest* may be taken as an indication that Shakespeare does not believe that the dialectic between the active and passive lives ought to remain forever unresolved.[118] Prospero's choices imply that while the vita activa can and should be adopted in times of need, it is the vita contemplativa—enabling its practitioners as it does to "take flight from this world to the other" (Plato 1963b, p. 881)—which remains primary.[119]

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Notes

1 (Shakespeare 2008d, 1.2.146-50.)

2 Geoffrey Miles observes that when Shakespeare characters talk about "philosophy" they are usually referring to Stoic philosophy. See (Miles 1996, pp. 12–13). John D. Cox suggests that the fact that Stoicism is the default meaning of "philosophy" in Shakespeare is a result of the popularity and influence of Boethius's Stoic *Consolation of Philosophy.* See (Cox 2007, 258 n56).

3 For an overview of the debate regarding the active and contemplative lives in Renaissance England and a discussion of the debate's manifestation in a wide range of Shakespeare's plays, including the four on which I will be focusing, see (Curtis 2009, pp. 44–63).

4 *3H6* 2.4.1-54.

5 *Temp.* 4.1.60-138.

6 For a panoramic overview of the tension between the vita activa and the vita contemplativa in the writings of philosophers and poets from early antiquity through the Renaissance, see (Bernard 1989, pp. 12–48). Bernard emphasizes that "Despite some significant fluctuations, the contemplative life is generally held to be superior to the active (p. 12)." One of those significant fluctuations occurred in the early Renaissance. For a discussion of the shift towards placing a higher value on the active life during that period, see (Lombardo 1982).

7 For a discussion of skepticism in the Renaissance and its bearing upon the plays of Shakespeare, see Cox, *Seeming Knowledge*, pp. 1–14.

8 On this dramatic role, which Northrop Frye calls "*idiotes*," see (Frye 1965, p. 93).

9 Although there certainly was a shift towards the active life of civic humanism and away from the contemplative ideals of the Middle Ages in the early Renaissance, neither period saw unanimity on the question of action and contemplation by any means. For a discussion of the variegated texture of the debate in the Middle Ages as well as in the Renaissance, see (Lines 2019).

10 For the characterization of early Renaissance skepticism as it is received by Shakespeare as "suspicion," see Cox, *Seeming Knowledge*, pp. 9–14.

11 For intertextuality as the dialogue between texts that occurs when one text refers to another, see (Kristeva 1980, pp. 64–66).

12 He is ready enough to decide on a question of law in *2H6* 2.2.

13 Ibid. 3.1.1-7.

14 Ibid. 3.1.99-102.

15 5.3.65-68.

16 See Lombardo, "*Vita activa*," p. 84.

17 *2H6* 1.3.50-60.

18 A number of manuscript copies of the list of demands are still in existence. For a thorough discussion of this and other historical features of the rebellion in relation to its portrayal by Shakespeare, see (Caldwell 1995).

19 *2H6* 4.4.18.

20 Ibid. 4.2.74.

21 Ibid. 4.2.75-80.

22 Ibid. 4.7.41-42.

23 Ibid. 4.2.82-106.

24 Ibid. 1.1.245.

25 Ibid. 5.1.97-98.

26 *3H6* 1.1.178.

27 Ibid. 1.1.183-84.

28 Ibid. 1.1.218.

29 Ibid. 1.2.33.

30 Ibid. 2.1.154.

31 *1H6* 5.5.12-15.

32 Ibid. 5.5.25-102.

33 Ibid. 5.5.101.

34 Ibid. 5.5.102.

35 Ibid. 5.5.108.

36 *3H6* 3.2.69.

37 See the discussion of this episode as an instance of skepticism in Shakespeare in Cox, *Seeming Knowledge*, pp. 2–3.

38 *2H6* 2.1.64-65.

39 Ibid. 2.1.99-116.

40 Ibid. 2.1.129-34.

41 *3H6* 1.1.171.

42 Ibid. 1.1.192.

43 Ibid. 1.1.178-189.
44 Ibid. 2.2.49-53.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 57.
47 See, e.g., *2H6* 3.2.289-413. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin call attention to the absence from the plays of any overt suggestion that Henry's heir might be illegitimate, despite the accusations and dialogue which all imply that Margaret has been unfaithful, in (Howard and Rackin 1997, p. 73).
48 *3H6* 3.1.24-25.
49 Boethius, *Consolation*, p. 4.
50 Ibid., p. 6.
51 Ibid., pp. 103-111.
52 *3H6* 3.1.55.
53 Ibid. 3.1.56-58.
54 Boethius, *Consolation*, p. 94.
55 *2H6* 2.3.23-4. Earlier, Margaret, one of the plotters who frames Gloucester, had complained about the fact that Henry still has a lord protector even as an adult (*2H6* 1.3.42-49).
56 *3H6* 4.6.19-22.
57 Boethius, *Consolation*, p. 32.
58 Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, p. 66.
59 It starts on *3H6* 2.5.1 and ends on Ibid. 2.5.54.
60 Boethius, *Consolation*, pp. 36–37. Boethius's poem contrasts the carefree pastoral lifestyle with the careworn and bloody lifestyles of wealthy civilizations; he does not mention kings.
61 See (Cody 1969), p. 4. Cody discusses the fact that pastoral was a favored poetic form of many later Platonic writers, and he mentions Boethius among them (p. 6).
62 However, poets may choose not to keep the pastoral and the georgic modes distinct. Sometimes they may juxtapose the georgic and the pastoral within one poem. For a very early example, see (Theocritus 2002, pp. 30–33). For a very late example, see "The Ent and the Entwife," in (Tolkien 2007, p. 477). For a discussion of georgic elements blended into English pastoral poetry, see (Fowler 1986, p. 113).
63 Bernard argues that pastoralism is an expression of the vita contemplativa, locating a number of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance writers who make the same association. See *Ceremonies of Innocence*, pp. 37–39. See also Cody, *Landscape of the Mind*, who identifies the Henry VI trilogy as Shakespeare's first venture into pastoral, since "the rejection of the aspiring mind," which can also be termed as the rejection of the vita activa, is a pervasive theme of the three plays (p. 82).
64 *2H6* 4.9.3-4.
65 Boethius, *Consolation*, p. 93.
66 *3H6* 4.6.67.
67 Ibid. 5.6.37-54.
68 G. Wilson Knight notes that Prospero has much in common with a number of other Shakespearean "princes whose depth of understanding accompanies or succeeds political failure," and "is in straight descent from those other impractical governors," including Henry VI. See (Knight 1948, pp. 206–7).
69 *Temp.* 1.2.73.
70 Ibid. 1.2.75-77.
71 Ibid. 1.2.89-103
72 Ibid. 1.2.144-150.
73 Ibid. 1.2.476-77.
74 Ibid. 1.2.189.
75 Ibid. 1.2.347-51.
76 Ibid. 1.2.457-459.
77 Ibid., p. 85.
78 Q quoted by Cody in *Landscape of the Mind*, p. 91.
79 H.B. Charlton quoted by Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, p. 86.
80 Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, p. 86, emphasis in the original.
81 When Leontes tells here to "go on" and remind him of his guilt, while a lord urges her to "say no more," she does go on, sarcastically (Shakespeare 2008e, 3.2.214-32). Even after sixteen years have passed and Cleomenes tells Leontes, "Sir, you have done enough, and have performed/ a saintlike sorrow (Ibid. 5.1.1-2)," Paulina continues to reproach Leontes for having "killed" Hermione (Ibid. 5.1.15).

82 Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, pp. 240-41.
83 Geneva Bible, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.
84 *Temp*. 1.2.167-69.
85 Ibid. 3.1.19-20.
86 Ibid. 3.2.41-43.
87 Ibid. 3. 2.88-90.
88 Ibid. 3.2.91-95.
89 For the identification of Prospero as a Neoplatonic mage, see (Kermode 1969, xl; Yates 1975, pp. 87–106; Curry 1959, pp. 141–215).
90 Ibid. 1.2.182-85.
91 *Temp*. 1.2.186-87, 1.2.306-07.
92 Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, p. 363.
93 Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, p. 399.
94 *Temp*. 1.2.296-98.
95 Iamblichus, p. 115.
96 Ibid. For a recent discussion of the contrast between Ficino's reception of Iamblichus's emphasis on action and the Renaissance Averroists' and other Renaissance thinkers' emphasis on contemplation, see (Giglioni 2022, pp. 56–74).
97 Ibid., 323. The idea of the divinization of the theurgist is repeated often throughout *On the Mysteries*. For a discussion of the meaning of the ethical imperative to become like God which is found scattered throughout various Platonic dialogues, see (Annas 1999, pp. 52–71). Following Plotinus, Annas identifies two distinct strands in Plato's thought on this topic, one strand, found in dialogues such as the *Theaetetus* and the *Phaedo*, promotes purification and withdrawal from the world (corresponding to the vita contemplativa) as a path towards becoming divine, and the other, found in dialogues such as the *Laws* and the *Republic*, promotes civic virtue (corresponding to the vita activa) as the divine path. Plotinus says that practicing civic virtue prepares one for intellectual or purificatory virtue, and that when the latter is adopted the former is left behind. Annas rejects this reconciliation, concluding instead that there is an unresolvable rift in Plato's thought. I would like to suggest that a passage in the *Phaedrus* hints at a third strand in Plato's thought about the imperative to become godlike. Socrates claims there that "it is the job of soul in general to look after all that is inanimate, and souls patrol the whole universe... A complete soul—that is to say, one that is winged—journeys on high and controls the whole world... (Plato, *Phaedrus*, p. 28)." The association between godliness and control of matter in this passage may have been important for theurgists who promoted a kind of intensified vita activa.
98 In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a proliferation of allegorical readings of *The Tempest* which saw Prospero as a stand-in for God. See, e.g., (Russell 1876). Russell is quoted and roundly ridiculed by (Nuttall 1967, pp. 9–10). G. Wilson Knight, approvingly quoting another allegorist who identifies Prospero with God, offers a similar reading as late as 1947 (*Crown of Life*, pp. 226–30). Many later critics, while exhibiting more restraint, have observed that there is something superhuman or divine about Prospero. See, e.g., Hunter, *Comedy of Forgiveness*, p. 67; Frye, *A Natural Perspective*, p. 125; (Beckwith 2011), p. 167 (Beckwith deplores Prospero's efforts to transcend the common state of humanity).
99 *Temp*. 1.2.375-76.
100 Ibid. 1.2.391-93.
101 Ibid. 3.3.72-82
102 Ibid. 85-86.
103 Ibid. 5.1.33-46
104 Ibid. 1.2.425.
105 See Ibid. 2.2.116-18.
106 Ibid. 4.1.60-74.
107 For the rejection of sexual passion as a key element of Virgil's *Georgics*, see (Lyne 1983, p. xvii).
108 *Temp*. 4.1.84
109 Ibid. 4.1.86-97.
110 Prospero's lines in Ibid. 4.1.15-17.
111 Ibid. 4.1.110-117.
112 Ibid. 4.1.134-138.
113 For Prospero as a poet, see (Frye 1986, pp. 172–73). For Philip Sidney's theory of the poet as a divine creator see (Sidney 1970, pp. 9–10). For the Neoplatonic pedigree of this theory, see Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 320, 343.
114 *Temp*. 5.1.50-57.
115 Ibid. 5.1.312-313.
116 Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, pp. 185–86.
117 Plato, *Phaedrus*, p. 25.

118 Among critics who take a philosophical–historical perspective, there is a debate about the ending of *The Tempest*. According to Curry, Prospero's prayer at the end represents the final stage in the divine assumption of the Neoplatonic mage (Curry 1959, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns, pp. 196-99). Theodore Spencer correctly protests at this overreading of a conventional demand for applause, positing instead that Prospero's donning of his ducal costume and statement that he is "content" to return to his dukedom mean that "much of the point of the play is lost if we do not see Prospero returning to worldly responsibility. . . his wisdom makes him return to his rightful place as a governor of himself, and as a governor, through his dukedom, of other human beings as well." (Spencer 1942, pp. 198–99). I do not take the donning of the costume to be symbolic, but as a mere prerequisite of the crucial recognition in the last scene—"Not one of them/ That yet looks on me, or would know me." (*Temp*. 5.1.82-83). I think that Prospero's unambiguous statement about how he intends to spend his time when he returns to Milan is more important than his costume or his request for applause.

119 Bernard observes that "It is axiomatic nowadays that the early North Italian humanists inverted the traditional hierarchy of the estates of life. Yet outside the relatively brief period of "civic" humanism, the medieval (and classical) ranking of the lives remains substantially unaltered," in *Ceremonies of Innocence*, 20. Lines, who similarly concludes that the sixteenth century saw renewed interest in contemplation, also points out in "Action and Contemplation" that the "Renaissance discussion of action and contemplation. . . often regards the two kinds of life as on a continuum". This perspective can illuminate Prospero's choices; he prefers the contemplative life but adopts the active life at need, so he does not exclusively choose one type of life over the other.

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