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# REVIEWS

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John G. Demaray. *Shakespeare and the Spectacles of Strangeness: The Tempest and the Transformation of Renaissance Theatrical Forms*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. 174p.

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John G. Demaray's vast research on the masque has once more engendered a significant work. Readers of his earlier study of *Comus* in *Milton and the Masque Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), will not be disappointed, for again he provides rich historical background for a drama in relation to the masque genre. Scholars have long noted the masque-like elements in *The Tempest*, but in *Shakespeare and the Spectacles of Strangeness*, Demaray convincingly argues that, while not outside the tradition of popular theater, the play as a whole can be viewed as deriving from the masque. Demaray also sees *The Tempest* emerging from a variety of conventions at a time when theatrical forms were in transition: the pastoral, the romance, classical drama, and continental spectacles, such as the French *balet de cour*. It is the masque, however, that Demaray regards as most significant, offering the reader an impressive assemblage of research on Jacobean court performance and its shaping influence, including textual scholarship, Inigo Jones' set designs, and other masques and plays.

Demaray's consideration of structural and generic elements in the play create a strong case for *The Tempest* as masque. While the betrothal banquet and the descent of classical gods are frequently observed masque elements, other masque characteristics in *The Tempest* have escaped notice. For instance, many masques have a figure called a "presenter," who releases performers from the masque world into the actual world of the audience. The presenter, then, stands ambiguously within and without the masque. According to Demaray, Prospero fulfills this function, as he releases Alonso, Antonio, and Ariel near the end of the play, and also in the "Epilogue" as he addresses the audience, acting both within and without the play. "Unmasking," another masque element, occurs throughout *The Tempest*; Prospero again provides the example, when he reveals his true identity to his daughter and, at the end of the play, to his enemies. Most important are the recurring moments of magic and strangeness that create a sense of wonder for the viewer, for these, Demaray suggests, occur at moments of change and function as

“dramatic fulcrums” to shift the drama into new action. Demaray provides a table that charts these visual moments in relation to dramatic shifts in the plot and subplots. He also provides extensive discussion of many examples: one is Prospero’s use of “Spirits in Shape of Dogs and Hounds” to drive off Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano — a “magical, iconographic punishment” (60). Spectacle, more so than dramatic dialogue, thus directs the action of the play, and this phenomenon, above all, is what earns *The Tempest* a place in the masque genre.

In one of his most interesting discussions of genre, Demaray categorizes *The Tempest* within a new form of the masque, one that was moving away from the Jonsonian classical masque to a spectacle with more open symbolism. Still encompassing classical ingredients through figures like Ceres and Iris, *The Tempest* also presents other “spectacles of strangeness,” such as the exotic island, magic, and Prospero as Magus; these visual elements create a more general sense of masque-like wonder that dominates the play. Another distinctive pattern in Jonson’s masques is an “antic” episode and a character that form an “anti-masque,” which acts as a foil to later harmonious visions in the masque. Although the anti-masque is reflected in the opening chaotic storm at sea and in the figure of Caliban, these same elements also function as “visionary shows” that affect the spectator through their very strangeness. Shakespeare joins theatrical writers like Thomas Campion and Samuel Daniel in creating visual images that have no classical associations and that, therefore, evince a wider response. Using what Demaray calls a “looser hinge” to join magical episodes and more original “hieroglyphics,” as Daniel called the visual images, these writers create inventive masques that allow a greater scope of purpose. In *The Tempest*, for example, Shakespeare uses the element of wonder, not only to show magical transformations of characters and events, but also to demarcate the illusionary masque world from the actual world and its imperfections; in contrast, the typical masque melds the magic world and the aristocratic world it serves.

Demaray also asserts that the popularity of the masque at court may have shaped the composition of *The Tempest*. Although the only two documented performances of *The Tempest* are those at Whitehall Palace in 1611 and 1613, most critics have considered the play as a Globe or Blackfriars production, and editors have even altered stage directions to make them suit those venues. The original stage directions, however, fit the Masquing Hall at Whitehall, where readily available stage equipment would have made it easy to create the special effects important to a masque. Considering that the occasion of the 1613 performance was the wedding of King James’ daughter Elizabeth to Frederick, Elector of Palatine, the performance of a masque-like play was certainly appropriate. Less convincing,

however, is the argument Demaray makes for points in the text as local allusions. He highlights lines in scene 9, for example, “This Cell’s my Court: heere haue I few attendants, / And Subjects none abroad: pray you looke in” (17).<sup>1</sup> The “Court” as a reference to a royal Whitehall setting is plausible enough, but two other assumptions based on these lines reach too far: first, a suggested allusion to the seating arrangement at court and, second, a contrast between the “few attendants” (Prospero’s own meager crew) and a number of King James’ sumptuously attired courtiers present at the performance. Another slim connection to masques at court is established through Prospero’s famous farewell, when he comments on the ephemeral quality of “the Clowd-capt Towers, the gorgeous Palaces, / . . . the great Globe itselfe” (15). Demaray sees “palaces” and “towers” in relation to other masques, such as Jonson’s *The Masque of Queenes* (1609), and the “globe” as a reference to a magnificent silver sphere representing the earth in Jonson’s *Hymenaei* (1606). But surely the insubstantial nature of palaces could just as easily refer to performance on any stage, and the “globe” is more likely to have suggested the Globe Theatre to audience members, even at court. These connections and many like them do not further Demaray’s case as much as they provide interesting details about masques at the Jacobean court.

Also problematic is Demaray’s treatment of recent New Historicist criticism. While he acknowledges scholarship that places *The Tempest* within the discourse of colonialism in the early modern world, he finds the approach exclusive and thereby limiting. Certainly, such a focus ignores the significance of genre that Demaray finds important, but no single approach can be all-encompassing, including that of Demaray. Although the tone of his remarks is equable, his subsequent comments disparage the approach of those who see European domination over native Americans in *The Tempest*. A more even-handed approach would allow for a wider range of interpretation — a willingness to incorporate opposing views, much as Shakespeare himself does throughout his plays.

These points, however, do not much vitiate the usefulness of this important scholarship nor its contribution to the field, for it provides a trove of information about the masque and the court of King James, as well as new perceptions of *The Tempest*. ✱

#### Note

<sup>1</sup> Demaray has taken his citations from the 1623 Folio (Chatsworth copy of the Duke of Devonshire).