**The Tempest’s Other Plots**

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One of the most skilled orchestrators of theatrical action on the Shakespearean stage, Prospero successfully directs his revenge plot towards its desired ends in *The Tempest*. Hence it might be surprising that, just when Prospero’s “project gather[s] to a head,” Ariel interrupts his plans by imagining another reality: “Your charm so strongly works ’em/ That if you now beheld them, your affections/ Would become tender.” To Prospero’s subsequent query, “Dost thou think so, spirit?,” Ariel responds: “Mine would, sir, were I human” (5.1.1, 17–20).1 Prospero suppresses this speculation of an alternate mode of being—what “would” happen “were [Ariel] human”—by asserting the fact of his own humanity:

> And mine shall.
> Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
> Of their afflictions, and shall not myself—
> One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
> Passion as they—be kindlier moved than thou art?
> (5.1.20–24)

Prospero’s conclusion has often been read as signaling a conversion for the character, as he finally adopts a “tender” attitude towards his opponents.2 Conversely, we could read this exchange as another instance in which Prospero asserts his absolute power, aborting Ariel’s imagination of a human ontology by directing attention to his own. Both interpretations highlight that Prospero’s use of the indicative mood upstages Ariel’s subjunctive speech act, the spirit’s projection subsumed into the narrative Prospero continues to shape and manipulate. This moment—like the play, which is punctuated by Prospero’s utterance—structurally orients audiences to consider his words as the culmination of the exchange.

Prospero’s assured conclusion reinforces the idea that he is not
only a natural magician or colonizer, but also a plotter: he is both organizer and schemer, to borrow Peter Brooks’s terms. His ability to conclude interactions and redirect desires intimates why, even as new historicist, anti-colonial, and feminist scholarship have taught us to contest early understandings of the character as a symbol of cosmic harmony or authorial order, it is harder to escape the idea that he is the play’s arch-plotmaker. Prospero continually organizes dynamic events and absorbs disruptions into his successful dynastic plot. Thus, to uncover the volatile contingencies that might escape the plot’s grasp, we must look beyond his conclusive statements and attend to intermediary moments such as Ariel’s fleeting speculation, which imagines an alternate sphere of existence that will never be incorporated into the events enacted on stage.

I propose that Ariel’s speech offers the final instantiation of how subjected characters in *The Tempest* use counterfactual projections to fracture the mechanics of staged plotmaking. These imaginings adumbrate instances of extra-ordinary creativity that I term speculative *poiesis*, a mode of creation that never brings a moment into actuality but is predicated on thought’s power to exist only as potentiality. Following Caroline Levine—who argues that “politics was a matter of imposing order on the world” and who terms such “ordering principles” *forms*—I argue that through attentive reading we may recover the formal politics animating *The Tempest’s* speculative *poiesis*. Eluding the “ordering principles” of Prospero’s sphere of control (the staged events on the island-theater) Ariel’s utterance has no responsibility to enacted plots, as it foregrounds the non-actualizable desires of a non-human “spirit.”

I locate speculative *poiesis* in the voices of characters who are presented as having been under Prospero’s control from before the play begins: Ariel, Miranda, and Caliban. By labeling them as “spirit,” “goddess” and “monster” respectively (1.2.193, 1.2.420, 2.2.29), the play delineates them as theatrical, rhetorical, or philosophical “wonders.” The experience of wonder is a vital constituent of Shakespeare’s late plays, which are full of marvelous spectacles. But early moderns also understood wonder as a category of natural history and philosophy that referred to anomalous beings that disrupted ideas of an orderly nature. The play’s three subjected characters are ontologically distinct in their uniqueness: Miranda is human but termed a wonder, rhetorically defined as such by her name and by Ferdinand’s hyperbolic praise; characters
refuse Caliban’s humanity either because he lacks “A human shape” (1.2.284) or based on his actions; in an island full of “spir-its,” Ariel is rendered unique by dramaturgical naming. Shake-
speare’s most unified play turns to this spectrum of exceptionality
in order to intimate disruptions that could hinder a totalizing plot
without being absorbed into its spectacular events. Speculative
poiesis, I argue, foregrounds the expressions of desire that connect
subjected wonders, both human and non-human, thus expanding
what Julia Reinhard Lupton identifies as the play’s struggle
“between (general) Humanity and (specific) Culture.”9 As scholars
grapple with distinct histories (of colonial expansions, New World
discoveries, and Old World geographies) and explore the social,
political, and cultural situatedness of the play’s characters and
locales, they often separate characters according to a “(specific)
Culture,” and by race, religion, nationality, and gender.10 For
instance, a moment such as the one where Caliban has attempted
to “violate/ The honor” of Miranda severs previous affinities
between the two characters (1.2.347–48).11 Yet by attending to the
similar methods of speculation adopted by the two characters, we
uncover unexpected alliances. Their unique positions as anom-
alous beings allow them to momentarily step out of the master’s uni-
versalizing plot and activate provisional forms of existence that
endure beyond what happens on stage.

Speculative poiesis looks beyond what occurs to revisit a vital
worldmaking component of the theater: the connection of plot to
event. Aristotle’s Poetics provides the typical description of plot’s
relation to particular events, a relation we can see manifesting itself
in early modern drama. Plot refers to the “organization of events,”
where “the structure of the various sections of the events must be
such that the transposition or removal of any one section dislocates
and changes the whole. If the presence or absence of something has
no discernible effect, it is not part of the whole.”12 The “organization
of events,” themselves structured by the arrangement of sec-
tions, is the vital engine of plot.13 Speculative poiesis captures the
efficacy of moments that at first glance seem incidental to this rela-
tion between plot and event, the flickering instances that are with-
held from the theatrical present: how may we attend to the creative
force of events that never emerge on stage, but are only glimpsed
as unrealizable desire? Giorgio Agamben’s reversal of the teleology
between Aristotelian potentiality and actuality offers an alternative
way to approach this kind of “eventness” that could arrest narra-
Agamben privileges the “possibility of privation” over presence and actualization. He argues that the power of potentiality lies in its capacity “to not-be” or “not-do,” or in its “potential to not pass into actuality.” The Tempest’s speculative poiesis embraces this “possibility of privation” as a formal constituent of the playworld. An event of unrealizable creativity refuses to “pass into actuality,” instantiating varied forms of counterfactual worldmaking. As I argue below, Miranda’s erasure of the storm, Caliban’s projected dynasty, and Ariel’s curtailed dream are all striking because they are forever at the brink of appearing. Taking us to the precipice of plot’s collapse, they are not disruptions to be recuperated into the “organization of events,” but gaps in the play that reveal playworlds that will never materialize.

This attention to privation highlights theater’s tendency to adumbrate moments that have no obligations to a master plot, suggesting that what we consider a counterplot or a subplot—the ubiquitous theatrical elements that by definition depend on a main plot—might exist not to support a narrative, but instead to interrupt, halt, or erase it. Recent discussions of early modern “possible worlds” consider the philosophical, formal, and historical configurations of lack, counterfactuals, and potentiality, demonstrating how literary writing revels in various kinds of privation. This essay connects such explorations of possible worlds to discussions of theatrical contingency, which range from Michael Witmore’s study of “accidents” to William N. West’s analysis of “confusion” to Richard Preiss’s account of “improvisation.” Speculative poiesis thus offers an enlargement to the variety of actions and events in early modern drama that troubled its neoclassical critics. By focusing on a moment’s capacity to “not-be” or “to not pass into actuality,” we expand our understanding of the formal and ontological boundaries of theatrical worldmaking beyond the accidental and improvisational scenes that characters like Prospero are able to contain: contingency includes the potential event that is on the threshold of occurring but, more radically, will never achieve a “local habitation and a name” (5.1.17, A Midsummer Night’s Dream). At the same time, my approach differs from recent work that treats counterfactuals and possible worlds primarily as a method of critical practice: Amir Khan, for example, provides counterfactual interpretations of tragedy by removing certain scenes of a play to expose the limited knowledge of characters. I argue, by contrast, that counterfactuals are constitutive to Shake-
speare’s theatrical form, rather than solely features elucidating the gaps between character and literary critic. The interpretive practices I follow are the result of The Tempest’s own formal politics.

Discovering the possible worlds dormant in Shakespeare’s only play known for its unified plot, we may expose how concerns about formal unity are inseparable from fantasies of political authority. The potential events imagined by The Tempest’s subjected wonders are its unrealized Other plots. Refusing to delimit theatrical phenomena within the “here” or the “now,” they transform the play into an assemblage of unstageable and staged occurrences, and they demonstrate how the “multiple worlds” emerging from characters’ desires deconstruct the forms of totality—from Aristotelian unities to the ubiquitous figure of the globe—that ostensibly structure fictional worlds. As wondrous characters voice their desires, their multiplying privations intimate that it might be impossible to quarantine speculations from staged events, including the theatrical wonders—such as the opening storm, the vanishing banquet, or the masque—that are characteristic elements of Shakespeare’s final plays. Spectacles must contend with the speculative withholding that underlies all enacted scenes. Deforming fantasies of plot’s unity, The Tempest suggests that to recover the contingency of what could happen, we need to redefine the theatrical event not only in terms of occurrences on stage and in history, but also in terms of acts of wondering that the play never intends to actualize.

Miranda’s name, signifying one who is admired, overdetermines her status as the play’s nominal repository of wonder. Ferdinand employs this terminology when he first sees her, describing Miranda as “O you wonder” (1.2.425). His exclamation is symptomatic of a broader impulse to denote her—the play’s only embodied human female character—as an object of male desires and aspirations. For instance, from the play’s second scene, Prospero tries to define her as his ideal audience, participating yet malleable. Given other characters’ propensity to reduce Miranda into an instrument of dynastic politics, one might overlook the fact that she enters the play not as an object of desire, but as someone whose own wondering introduces a possible world she does not expect to actualize. As Heather James has argued, Miranda’s presence can be quite unstable; she inhabits the role of the “unruly” spectator, whose response of pity after the storm goes against her father’s
ambitions because it “bristles with the imminence of action.” What James identifies as an instance of voracious spectatorship, I propose, marks the emergence of speculative poiesis in the play. Miranda’s creativity “bristles with the imminence of action” that need not occur, but her first words of counterfactual projection possess the capacity to destabilize what Prospero will soon make stable by revealing his role in bringing forth the “direful spectacle” (1.2.26).

Although Miranda’s initial vantage point aligns her with the unsuspecting spectator who might perceive the opening “spectacle” as a natural disaster, her conjectures in the tempest’s immediate aftermath register her skepticism about what she has perceived:

If by your art, my dearest father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch
But that the sea, mounting to th’ welkin’s cheek,
Dashes the fire out. Oh, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel—
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her—
Dashed all to pieces! Oh, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her.

(1.2.1–13)

Beginning with the conjectural “If” and qualifying what she witnesses (“it seems”), Miranda foregrounds the suppositions lurking behind the spectacle. She appeals to the grammatical feature of the potential mood, which was known “bi these signes, maie, can, might, would, shoulde, or ought,” to disturb what the audience has seen and the marooned characters have experienced. Empathizing with the shipwrecked, she speculates how she “would” act if only she “Had” power. Her response reveals an alternate creative force emergent in the play, as her grammar introduces an imaginative model defined by its potentiality, or by its capacity to “not-be” actualized. Miranda proposes a counterfactual action—what she “would” do—that could erase what she suspects her father’s art has brought forth, a disaster at sea. Her wondering allows Shakespeare to direct attention away from the staged event, as her words pressure Prospero to retell immediately his version of their origin.
story. His anxiety manifests itself vividly in his repeated cries of “mark me,” as he attempts to ensure that she embraces his account (1.2.67, 88).

Since Miranda’s utterance responds to a familiar mechanism of Shakespeare’s late plays, a theatrical “spectacle,” we could treat her words primarily as an occasion to introduce Prospero and his “art” (1.2.1). Yet, at this moment, audiences barely know the characters, let alone trust Prospero’s claims to power. Situating Miranda’s brief exposition at a point when the spectators’ relation to the characters is still undefined—they have witnessed what seems like disaster but have not yet learned that Prospero’s “art” has actualized the tempest—the play demands their intellectual and affective engagement with her desires. Her speculation allows audiences to catch up to a plot that is already counterfactual at this point, since she voices what the script will soon reveal. Prospero will acknowledge after her remarks that no ship was “Dashed” into pieces and no “souls” perished. But before he can claim that the ostensibly chance event was planned, Miranda raises the prospect that occurrences which will be retrospectively declared providential seem contingent to those experiencing them. She enacts characters’ capacities to unleash alternate narratives, provoked by their uncertainty about the origins or endings of staged events.

And herein lies Miranda’s linguistic power. Her modality of speech, rooted in the potential “would,” takes her close to Sir Philip Sidney’s poet in the Defense of Poesy, who escapes the “brazen” world of nature to deal with what “may be and should be.” The play, however, is uninterested in Miranda’s actualizing what she imagines; she begins her speech by acknowledging that she is no “god of power.” Actualizing the “If” herself would align her not only with Sidney’s ethical-political aims of “well-doing” but also bring her dangerously close to Lady Macbeth’s darker ruminations about actualizing the “future in the instant” (1.5.56, Macbeth). It would thus connect her speculations to Prospero’s methods of plotting that ensure only certain events happen. Instead, the efficacy of her speech lies in the fact that she cannot make it occur and her desire to intervene cannot be organized in relation to other events that have been or will be performed. We could say that this non-occurrence is the most uncorrupted form of activity imaginable in the politicized sphere of the play-world. Before Prospero begins to visibly direct the expectations of audiences as well as the fates of characters, she offers spectators a way of imagining potentialities that is severed from the “power” to shape the future.
Miranda’s wondering is transgressive because it could—but will not—be the seed of another narrative if, to borrow Viola’s words from *Twelfth Night*, “place, time, fortune do cohere” (5.1.242). From Prospero’s perspective, this state of privation is immensely threatening. While he can bring forth phenomena and incorporate occurrences into the plot he directs, his power does not extend to the deepest longings of characters that have no burden to manifest them. Adopting the ethos of what “may be and should be,” Miranda voices such a desire: her wish to save the “souls” intersects with Prospero’s subsequent explanation of the storm’s outcome, but the play has not yet provided guarantees that their positions will align. The disorienting power of her speculative *poiesis* will again be on display, when, meeting the newcomers, she celebrates the “brave new world/ That has such people in’t,” reversing the ontological status of known and unknown realms (5.1.183–84). This declaration is strikingly impermanent, but the possibility that she will reframe the bounds of knowledge and existence—the world to which she refers is not “new,” after all—forces Prospero to improvise. His famous answer that this “brave new world” is only “new to thee” is dismissive, but it also cedes the truth of the statement from her viewpoint (5.1.184); a response is necessary after such perspective-shifting declarations.29

Miranda’s speculations ask us to see beyond the spectacles on stage, but they also differ from one of the most common sorts of missing moments that Simon Palfrey identifies in Shakespeare’s plays: the “reported but not witnessed, or possible but unconfirmable” scene.30 Instead, Miranda envisions events—and her power over their outcomes—that extend outside the limits of the world she occupies. Perhaps the privation at the heart of her poetics (in addition to her age and gender) has hindered full recognition of her linguistic power. We see such mis-recognition in early editorial practices that suppress her dynamic pre-history of instructing Caliban to “speak”; editors revise the Folio’s speech prefixes in the “Abhorred slave” speech (1.2.350–61) from Miranda to Prospero, presenting her as a “guileless innocent” who would not utter words that could be perceived as vulgar.31 Miranda’s power over language, however, resides in suppositions that take both plotter and audience to the precipice of alternate actions: they are on the verge of leaving this plot and walking into other play-worlds, where characters could adopt another role or inhabit another state. As it “bristles with the imminence of action,” Miranda’s overwriting of the storm
prefigures the fantasies of Caliban and Ariel. Keeping in mind the possible worlds latent in her speeches, we can say that Miranda transforms what characters perceive as a spectatorial role into a poetic one, interrupting what is occurring on stage and taking to its logical extreme Keir Elam’s insight that “[d]ramatic worlds are hypothetical (‘as if’) constructs.”32 By reading Miranda as a poet-figure whose speculations cannot be erased because they never appear, we recuperate the creative force of a character typically seen as an object of desire, subject to and subverted by the play’s dynastic politics, and subsequently, in editorial and critical practices. By turning to the modality of her speech, we also ascribe to her a forcefulness that the play otherwise affords her primarily in her decisions to love and aid Ferdinand (see 3.1.15–91). My focus complements Caroline Bicks’s recent study, which elucidates the “cognitive invention” of adolescent girls like Miranda in order to recover their intellectual and creative powers beyond the domains of sexuality and marriage.33 At its most extreme, Miranda’s speculative poiesis makes one confront the prospect that another narrative might emerge from any voiced event, if the play’s wonders realize their powers as wonder-makers.

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Miranda is not the play’s only wonder, and Prospero is not its only plotter. Caliban too is intent on worldmaking, and his ambition to take “Revenge” against a “tyrant” echoes Prospero’s desire to revenge past wrongs and establish complete authority over the present and the future (3.2.51, 39). Caliban is determined to erase the distance he perceives Prospero has erected between them. He is convinced that “without [Prospero’s books]/ He’s but a sot as I am” (3.2.86–87), even though other characters mark his ontological distinctiveness as a moral liability, and the play demarcates parameters of community and sociability at his expense. I propose that we approach Caliban’s ontological exceptionality as the fulcrum of The Tempest’s formal politics. The play predicates his singularity on an instance of privation—his attempted rape of Miranda—that ensures his path will diverge from Prospero’s. This prevented violation ostensibly shapes the views only of Miranda and Prospero, but their perceptions also serve as the lens through which audiences begin to understand Caliban. By hinging audiences’ first impressions on this failed attempt, the play invites them to read Caliban’s unsuccessful actions in relation to his absolute differ-
ence. The failure of Caliban’s plotting is constructed as a theatrical inevitability, or as a formal refusal to construct a second counter-plot. Severing the outcomes of the two revenge plots, the play uses Caliban’s failed counter-narrative of change to highlight the dangerous logic of plotmaking as an enterprise.

To explicate his failed plot, Caliban imagines an alternate future in language that is extremely similar to Miranda’s speculation after the storm. But even before we note their linguistic affinities, we may observe that the concept of wonders aligns Caliban with Miranda: both are marvels who are defined by their unique status. In *The Tempest* wonder extends beyond associations with nomenclature, literary genre, emotional response, or theatrical effect; the play embraces wonders, marvells, and preternatural beings as ontological categories defined by their states of singularity. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, natural philosophers appealed to various understandings of wonder to describe anomalous beings at the limits of nature’s order. We see a key example of this category in Francis Bacon’s “*Deviating Instances,*” entities that are “errors, vagaries, and prodigies of nature, wherein nature deviates and turns aside from her ordinary course.”34 Situating Bacon’s description alongside numerous examples, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park trace how singular entities moved from the margins to the center of philosophical inquiry. Unclassifiable animals, plants, and objects became spectacles to be admired and exploited for economic gain, social mobility, or colonial expansion. In an era of increased travel and at the cusp of the so-called Scientific Revolution, they also became objects of anthropological and natural inquiry.35

*The Tempest* abounds in marvels, from central characters (such as Ariel and Caliban), to marginal beings (including harpies and nymphs) that are impersonated on stage, to verbal invocations of exceptional creatures, such as “elves,” “demi-puppets” and dead “sleepers” woken up (5.1.33, 36, 49). These entities draw attention to the porosity of ontological boundaries—between the natural and the unnatural, the human and the non-human, the exemplary and the exceptional—in the play-world. In this spectrum of wonders, Miranda is singular not only because she is the only female character on stage, but also because her isolated upbringing makes her a social anomaly. Although her uniqueness is a product of linguistic demarcation and social conditions rather than ontological difference, and while she adheres to European norms instilled in her by
her father, the play does suggest that her seclusion from human contact can generate wonder. Testing what she has learned about humans, she revels in her first “discoveries” of Ferdinand and the other travelers. Her wondrous reactions, the product of her social isolation, would have fascinated early moderns who were intrigued by questions of whether being raised outside civilization destroyed the humanity of “wild” children.36

Caliban and Miranda thus occupy two poles in this spectrum, he not of “human shape,” she the sole embodied woman to be “Admired” (3.1.37) on stage.37 Caliban’s status as a wonder at the border of humanity is fully on display in his initial meeting with Stephano and Trinculo, a scene that parodies Miranda’s first encounter with Ferdinand. Seeing him, Trinculo wonders:

What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fishlike smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish. Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man; any strange beast there makes a man. (2.2.24–30)

The speech begins with category confusions. Trinculo does not know whether he sees “man” or “fish,” “alive” or “Dead.” Perhaps Caliban could adopt any of these roles, but he is almost immediately subsumed into a general category of wonders as the “monster”; his physical difference denotes his deviations from an ideal human form. As the concept becomes synonymous with Caliban, it also begins to commodify him, since “monsters” were crucial to the economy of wonders popular in Europe. And while the category was hardly unique to Europeans, the commodification of monstrosity was vital for European writers distinguishing themselves against other nations, regions, and people.38 The demarcation between humanity and perceived non-humanity is reflected in Trinculo’s varied usages of “man”; his question about Caliban’s humanity is instrumental to Trinculo’s own potential for social mobility (“There would this monster make a man,” my emphasis). We see the same idea adapted in the later locution of “Servant monster” (3.2.2, 3), which further suggests that the hierarchical division between master and servant could be accentuated by invoking the difference between human and “monster.” The distinction between “man” and “monster” stresses Caliban’s unknowable uniqueness,
which must be maintained if he is to function as a spectacle within Europe’s norms of self and other, ideal and monstrous.

It is within this matrix of commodification and otherness that Miranda prefigures Caliban, his spectacular difference oddly echoing the status attributed to the character from whom he seems irrec- oncilably distant. Following a rich tradition of postcolonial and feminist scholarship that documents the incompatible positions of the two characters, even recent accounts that focus on gender and race as related sites of struggle maintain the distance between them.39 But the play repeatedly connects them. Like Miranda, Caliban responds to the newcomers with wonder and reverence in their first meeting, although he eventually seems to recognize what role he is expected to play in these encounters. Like Miranda, he too has not met many of the opposite sex. But another important connection lies in their distinct roles as wondrous beings whose imaginations threaten to bring privation on stage. Thus, they are joined by their speculative poiesis. By arguing that Miranda’s speculative poetics prefigures Caliban’s anomalous presence, I build on Lupton’s argument that “Caliban (not unlike Miranda) is a wonder who wonders.”40 Caliban’s role as “a created thing,” to borrow Lupton’s terminology, “who is himself on the verge of creating,” is an extension of Miranda’s speculative poiesis because it lingers at the threshold of becoming a plot.41

Caliban’s retrospective speculations center on a non-actualized event. In his discussion of a reported but unstaged action in Henry IV, Palfrey suggests “because it is not physically present it’s all the more impossible to wipe it from the record.”42 This statement is even truer for the absent moment that is the reason for Caliban’s ostracism and lies at the core of his complete Otherness: his attempted rape of Miranda.

Prospero

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness. 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.

Caliban

Oh ho, oh ho! Would’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

(1.2.344–49)

Lupton foregrounds the confusions implicit here, arguing that “Caliblan’s response is ambiguous, neither a denial nor a confession,
since his terms for understanding sexuality are at odds with those of Prospero.” While Prospero questions the attempt to “violate/ The honor of my child”—a concern to which he returns elsewhere—and argues this attempted act confirms Caliban’s singular kind of inhumanity, the latter’s language reflects not immediate desire but functions as a reminder of an event that would serve his dynastic future. His grammar foregrounds this counterfactual projection: “Would’t had been done . . . I had peopled else/ This isle with Calibans.” Caliban’s words reflect Miranda’s language of conjecture in her first speech, as he adopts and adapts her use of the potential mood. Caliban and Miranda have different aims. Yet, by focusing on their speculations, articulated in the same grammatical mood, we recover the formal logic undergirding two dissimilar events: Caliban’s imagining is not realized in the past, and Miranda’s desire is one she has no direct power to actualize herself. Outliers of the plot, these wishes underscore how audiences are one absent moment away from entirely other narratives, and wholly different structures of power and plotting.

Caliban’s words open up a space for his ambitions, an act of reproduction that would lead to self-replications. But his wish to have “peopled” the “isle” also reminds audiences of Prospero’s theatrical prowess in peopling the island, and by extension, the dramatist’s ability to populate the stage: Prospero’s power to scatter characters on the island—a “special isolated place” that, as Jonathan Bate writes, is an “experimental place where opposing forces are brought together in dramatic confrontation” is key to his capacity to control their interactions and activities. Caliban’s speech reflects this desire. Unlike Prospero, he does not present the attempted violation as a singular event. Instead, he approaches it as the first instance of a series in the literal act of creation that violently stretches into the future, forcing audiences to grapple with the darker aspects of control and manipulation underlying the machinations of populating the stage. His language allows us to link the act of forcibly populating the island to making characters present in the theater, as it couples the temporal notion of plot (a sequence of events leading to a particular end) to spatial conceptions of the term. Thus, Prospero’s ability to control the place of the island serves as a reminder of the dramatist’s manipulations of theatrical space and time. The ability to create a theatrical plot by organizing events chronologically is inextricable from the power to control the space of the stage. By reminding his interlocutors of his
dangerous scheme, Caliban draws attention to the fact that the particular narrative unfolding on the plot of this island-stage was made possible by the erasure of many other unacted plots.

But what if this missing scene had been staged? This question pushes us to consider the disturbing presence of a plot that cannot be reversed once it has happened; Caliban’s success at having “peopled” the “isle” would have forever inscribed him as the play’s tragic force, perhaps propelling its characters towards the world of a *Titus Andronicus*. The potential would have become actual, leaving no space for the lingering capacities to “not-be”; speculative *poiesis* would have become enactment. Serving as the limit case of how one might populate spaces, Caliban’s speculation intimates how the actualization of desires within the logic of revenge plots could have dire consequences. The permanent projection of this event into the future cannot be undone through other actions, and it would lead us into the realm of early modern revenge tragedy. The play halts Caliban’s attempts to enact his plot in order to foreclose a tragic outcome. Even analogous plots of successful usurpation, such as Antonio’s, are relegated to the play’s prehistory, and the other potential tragedy in progress (in which Antonio actively incites Sebastian to usurp Alonso’s crown) is foreclosed by Ariel’s interruptions. Despite its ability to incorporate generic disruptions (from a storm, the staple of romance narratives, to a masque), the play cannot accommodate tragic actions except as a dangerous other plot.

But Caliban’s unactualized rape and reproduction also underscore why speculative *poiesis* is at the heart of the play’s formal politics of plotting: the future may be managed by ensuring only particular events are actualized. The potential events imagined by *The Tempest*’s subjected wonders, and the unrealizable worlds they construct, are plot’s haunted Others. If political power resides in the ability to organize events into a coherent whole, the play’s speculative *poiesis* stages this power’s interruption and dismantles illusions of totality, as well as the stability, of a conceptualized play-world. Caliban’s imagining in particular unsettles the play’s ideologies of futurity, raising the possibility that all staged actions might have an anterior implied speculation. Caliban is the plot’s Other, severed from characters by virtue of his perceived anomalies, as well as the plot’s remainder, which Prospero has to reclaim when his dynastic narrative has been otherwise resolved. His speech registers privation not as mere delay to be assimilated into
an overarching story; instead, it dramatizes the force of unrealizable desires, suggesting that any ambitious march to the future and any focus on actualizing plot could lead toward tragedy—we would find ourselves in the world of another *Macbeth*, where the titular character is intent on fulfilling his predicted future: the tragedies of that play, after all, result from various imaginative privations unleashed. In *The Tempest*, it is “impossible to wipe” the absent scene of Caliban’s attempt “from the record” because it serves as a permanent reminder that the existing fictional world, with its plots and resolutions, might itself have been an impossible plot if Caliban’s desires had been actualized.

* * *

This prevented tragedy hints at *The Tempest*’s participation in early modern theater’s propensity to create generic mixtures that, as Sidney laments, “be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns.”\(^{47}\) The abundance of cross-generic interplays is nowhere more apparent than in the marvelous spectacles Prospero orchestrates: these scenes are drawn from conventional episodes of non-dramatic romance, masque, utopia, and travel literature. Although the full force of technological wonders such as the storm, the banquet, or the masque is not accessible except in the moments of their performance, these spectacles are not pure presence. Privations erupt within the spectacles, suggesting that the instances of imagined desire voiced by the play’s subjected wonders (the various projections of what they “would” do) cannot exist in isolation from its “staged” scenes; wondrous spectacles dramatize the potential to bring speculative withholding on stage. To show how a spectacle totters at the brink of privation, I turn to the vanishing banquet that Prospero conjures. This staple of pre-modern fiction—popular in myth, folk tales, Arthurian romances, and masques—is perhaps the play’s most multi-generic spectacle.\(^ {48}\) It exemplifies how acts of wondering at unique creatures were essential in shaping the intertwined structures of imperial power and natural knowledge that Daston and Park, among others, have documented. Placing human and non-human marvels on stage as entities to be wondered at, the banquet scene dramatizes how speculative withholding distorts a spectacle that is meant to be experienced in the theatrical present.

Drawing on the relations—between self and other, natural and unnatural, human and non-human—that illuminate the existences
of Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel, this visual spectacle begins by testing the possibilities and dangers of travel:49

ALONSO Give us kind keepers, heavens! What were these?
SEBASTIAN A living drollery. Now I will believe
That there are unicorns; that in Arabia
There is one tree, the phoenix’ throne, one phoenix
At this hour reigning there.

... 

GONZALO If in Naples
   I should report this now, would they believe me?
   If I should say I saw such islanders—
   For certes these are people of the island—
   Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note
   Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of
   Our human generation you shall find
   Many, nay, almost any.

(3.3.21–34)

Encountering the island’s fantastic inhabitants, Sebastian and Gonzalo enact the difficulties in making travels to unknown lands intelligible. Sebastian notes the strangeness of the vision and maintains the gap between the European travelers and the wondrous beings they meet, but Gonzalo incorporates absolute unknowability into knowable frameworks. They grapple with the questions facing writers of “discovery” literature that Mary C. Fuller has documented: how does one represent and verify the existence of traveled realms, especially when the accounts of travelers were haunted by accusations of falsity? How does one maintain the divide between plausible travels and fictional narrations?50

The two characters model conflicting responses to the wondrous beings they encounter. Sebastian’s reference to the “phoenix” marks the singularity of what they witness, and his mention of “unicorns” gestures to yet more nonexistent creatures they might see; the subsequent appearance of the “harpy” confirms that these figures are meant to induce shock and terror. Joining what he sees to myth and fantasy, Sebastian reiterates the absolute otherness he associates with spaces such as “Arabia.” But Gonzalo downplays impossibilities and differences from “Our human generation,” describing the “islanders” in familiar terms. Their “manners,” “gentle, kind,” remove anxieties about the “monstrous shape” by associating unfamiliar forms with European norms. Gonzalo’s
endeavors to accommodate difference attempt to naturalize the unexpected spectacle: understanding human and non-human Others through his own system of value negates not only fear and surprise, but also wonder.

The Europeans’ limited perspectives dramatize the relation of speculation to spectacle when the exhausted group confronts the possibility of a sumptuous meal:

SEBASTIAN  No matter, since
They have left their viands behind; for we have stomachs.
Wilt please you taste of what is here?

ALONSO  Not I.

GONZALO  Faith, sir, you need not fear. When we were boys,
Who would believe that there were mountaineers,
Dewlapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at ’em
Wallets of flesh? . . .

ALONSO  I will stand to and feed;
Although my last, no matter, since I feel
The best is past. Brother, my lord the duke,
Stand to and do as we.

[ALONSO, SEBASTIAN, and ANTONIO approach the table.] Thunder and lightning. Enter ARIEL, like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table, and with a quaint device the banquet vanishes.

(3.3.41–53)

Gonzalo’s aim is practical, as he builds on Sebastian’s invitation: he elaborates why the king should eat the food. Yet, the banquet exists not to fulfill hunger but to prolong the spectacle. It is an impossible meal, one that is not meant for consumption. Alonso’s initial refusal (“Not I”) to consume the food keeps the banquet on stage; when he agrees to eat, the banquet “vanishes.” This refusal dramatizes how an unwillingness to act can dilate the controlled plot. The deferral of consumption produces narrative stasis, as the discussion indefinitely delays the plot’s progression, and by extension its resolution: as long as they do not attempt to consume the food, characters stay fixed in this moment of prospective eating. But as soon as the promise of a banquet vanishes, Prospero’s plot can move ahead. Forcing characters to grapple with the unexplainable qualities and beings of the island, the spectacle culminates in an event whose protracted, indeterminate temporality stages not action but a suspension, or what I have been identifying as a privation, of the forward trajectory of plot.
Indefinitely dilating the temporal fabric of the play, the still-visible banquet brings privation on stage: by refusing the meal, characters unsuspectingly embrace the capacity to “not-do” or even “not-be” in narrative time. The trope of the vanishing meal, introduced by Prospero, ends up halting the progress of his plot for an unforeseeable amount of time, determined by how other characters interact with the impossibility in front of them. Of course, the plot does move on, but this scene presents an occasion when it might not. Suspended in an instance of non-consumption that could stretch out for some undefined time, characters enact what it would mean to be arrested in a moment that may never change. The banquet’s prolonged presence (its length cannot be judged until Alonso utters the words “I will stand to and feed”) enacts a kind of withholding that limits how, or when, narrative progresses. This singular event almost tips over into another kind of worldmaking—perhaps we only recognize such pendant existence in the form of lyric suspension, or as the tableau of a still-life painting—taking us to the brink of what we could encounter if the privation of speculative poiesis were ever to be realized.

Gonzalo’s limited perspective facilitates this instance of narrative withholding. But the dramatization also gestures toward his vital role in furthering the play’s formal politics, reminding us of The Tempest’s most famous instance of speculation, in which Gonzalo imagines what he “would” do. In yet another instance of generic appropriation, Gonzalo indulges in the worldbuilding exercise of creating a “commonwealth.” He states, “I’th’ commonwealth I would by contraries/ Execute all things. For no kind of traffic/ Would I admit; no name of magistrate.” This fictional polity would have “No sovereignty” (2.1.144–46, 151). Sebastian immediately reveals the logical fallacy of Gonzalo’s plan: “Yet he would be king on’t” (2.1.151). This paradox prompts Antonio to exclaim, “The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning” (2.1.152–53). Their mockery underscores Gonzalo’s dual role as creator-manipulator, exposing how the imaginative act of worldmaking is enmeshed with control; one cannot erase trappings of power by verbally negating their presence, since plotting a world is an exercise of authority. Antonio also draws attention to Gonzalo’s linguistic agency in the “beginning” of his creative impulse, where he acknowledges that an authorial “I” must “admit” any creation. Shakespeare’s appropriation of Montaigne’s words not only refers to “Of Cannibals,” but also enacts the originary fantasy of texts
such as Utopia, where a place without a recognizable center always has a hidden, authorial “king on’t.”51 Sebastian and Antonio, themselves scheming against Alonso, grasp the contradictory logic of Gonzalo’s desire and remain suspicious of his “latter end” of “No sovereignty.” They expose the intimacy of creative and sovereign authority, underscoring the fact that plotting a world without power is an absurdity.

Gonzalo counters Antonio and Sebastian, but his answer only reinforces their point:

All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavor. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

(2.1.154–59)

In emphasizing nature’s spontaneous bounty—“nature should produce,” or “nature should bring forth”—Gonzalo ends up foregrounding his own authority. The repeated intrusion of the first person reveals his possessive impulse (“Would I not have,” and “my innocent people”), and it underscores that the wish to acquire is an unavoidable byproduct of his creative desires. His pronouncements also transform what initially seems like a hope, that the natural world provide for humans, into an ominous command: nature “should” bend to human need. Gonzalo’s language cannot support the myth of a rulerless commonwealth, leading his interlocutors to declare “Save his majesty!” and “Long live Gonzalo!” (2.1.163–64). The play gives Gonzalo, Prospero’s ally in the past and in the present, Prospero-like motivations: he desires to control worlds and impose meaning. His impossible fantasy of powerless worldbuilding aims to suppress the origins of authority, but his expression of desires as what the “I” “would” do actually lays bare the politics of plotting.

*   *   *

Speculative poiesis captures the eruption of dormant potentialities that militate against the conclusive orientation of plotting. Unlike studies of theatrical contingency that attend to immediacy and presence—highlighting how the theater was, as Preiss notes, an “instantaneous, polyvocal event,”52 full of improvisation, confu-
sion, accidents—the account of Miranda’s and Ariel’s unrealizable wishes, Caliban’s unfulfilled futurity, or the suspended non-occurrence of the banquet suggest that we need to develop new approaches to capture the contingent nature of events that have not materialized. This essay, then, complements discussions of unrealized and ephemeral aspects of Shakespearean drama—ranging from studies of text and performance that turn to characters like Hamlet’s ghost as resonant exemplars of the bounds between being and non-being, to psychoanalytic accounts that explore the significance of mentioned but non-embodied characters such as Prospero’s wife, to aesthetic and philosophical arguments that ask how plays like Othello create “a character for which no actor lends his body.” The privations in The Tempest expand the scope of these studies on lacuna and lack: we may ask how absent instances, and not only missing or vanishing characters, define, re-shape, and test the boundaries of the play-world.

Foregrounding the efficacy of absent moments, speculative poiesis asks that we rethink the theatrical event not only in terms of what happens, but also in terms of what could but does not happen. Such events serve as the limits of possibilities which thrive as unfulfilled desires within a play-world. Speculation exceeds, even escapes, the incidents unfolding on the stage; gesturing to what lies beyond reach, it reveals how an event always carries within it a potential to “not-do” or “not-be.” Speculations that can never be incorporated into plots also adumbrate a distinct model of theatrical worldbuilding, one that becomes the engine of misincorporation, shock, surprise, and in The Tempest, a temporary escape from being subjected to another’s narrative. The Tempest’s counterfactual or dilated moments extend beyond planned or unplanned episodes to the imagination of other narratives, providing access to plots that would manifest themselves if “place, time, fortune do cohere.”

Seeing speculative withholding as a vital component of Shakespearean worldmaking, we are able to attend to the indefinable temporal gaps—we could say the potentially interminable “middle”—between an instance of disruptive subversion and its eventual containment. We have witnessed one such moment in the banquet scene, but I want to end with the play’s most striking interruption. Prospero is acutely shaken by an event that never materializes. He interrupts his masque when he remembers that Caliban is in the midst of enacting his own revenge narrative. The
on-stage audience, Miranda and Ferdinand, comments on the abnormality of the situation. Ferdinand observes, “This is strange: your father’s in some passion/ That works him strongly,” and Miranda responds: “Never till this day/ Saw I him touched with anger so distempered” (4.1.143–45). They underscore Prospero’s “strange” reaction, noting that such “passion” was seen “Never till this day.” All is not as it should be. Miranda and Ferdinand draw attention to the unprecedented nature of what has just happened. Hitting a temporary pause in action, their words prevent the erasure of the transitory, almost-disappearing gap that emerges between two moments: Prospero’s initial shocked response to an event that never occurs, and the ensuing instant in which he contains this shock. Miranda and Ferdinand capture the fleeting moment of privation that erupts within the spectacle. They are not typical viewers of the late plays, whose “[r]omance anagnorisis” makes them “explore the world’s new shape, linking it together piece by piece.” Instead, they highlight the unbridgeable rift—one whose length is not specified in the play-text—between Prospero’s shock and recovery.

This temporal gap helps us move beyond traditional arguments that approach Caliban as an anti-masque figure whose interruption is an integral part of the masque and is successfully contained. Instead, the innumerable moments that come into being in the immediate aftermath of Prospero’s “distempered” state draw attention to the fact that Caliban has not actually interrupted the masque; Prospero is haunted by the possibility of an event (a successful coup) that never occurs. The protracted temporality of this “middle” underscores that Prospero almost repeats his earlier mistake when he fails to remain vigilant in defending his position of authority, serving as a reminder that a past event can horribly repeat itself. His lack of assurance jolts him, a “passion” one could have missed but for Miranda and Ferdinand’s reluctance to move on from the current spectacle of celebration to the next one of distraction, in which Prospero tricks Stephano and Trinculo with glittery apparel.

Responding to Prospero’s troubled state, Miranda and Ferdinand act as a surrogate audience that draws attention to the unscripted absences persisting within the spectacle. Such speculative events activate broader methodological discussions of Shakespeare’s theatrical worldmaking. They reveal that temporary disruptions are not failed or contained subversions, but experiments of volatile
potentiality. The theatrical medium is perfect to test such volatility, since the play-text is an incomplete, and partially controlled, fictional world to be negotiated by actors and audiences in iterations of performance. While all of Shakespeare’s plays contain multiple narrative threads, *The Tempest*—almost unique in his oeuvre for embracing the Aristotelian unities—turns to events that will never occur in order to put distinct pressure on the fantasy of unity of plot. Each speculative instance undermines the logic of plotted action by gesturing to other narratives that could have been staged, revealing how philosophical discussions of counterfactuals and possible worlds are inescapably ruminations on ideologies of form. Recent studies on form and formalisms have shown that historicist approaches have their own formal logic, one that grounds the consideration of texts in constructed accounts of people, things, or phenomena that are presumed to have existed or happened. These studies encourage, as Levine claims, “reading aesthetic forms as responses to given social realities.” Speculative *poiesis*, however, moves beyond “reading aesthetic forms as indexes of social life,” to add to long-standing conversations on rhetoric in early modern drama: capturing untapped creativity, the potential “would” shows that conditional and subjunctive linguistic elements are intellectual tools that can stretch a play’s ontological limits, in addition to serving as indicators of instabilities in temporality, history, and subjectivity that scholars have documented. Integral to the play’s imaginary, suppressed voices need not speak from a position of restraint. Miranda and Caliban’s utterances are most effective in the potential mood, leaving lingering traces of desire that cannot be erased because they are never fully graspable. Extending Shakespeare’s theatrical form beyond the enacted to possible and non-existent moments, the play’s counterfactual speculations may usher us into a kind of literary criticism that is aptly *in potentia*.

Notes

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The Tempest’s Other Plots


6. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), x. Levine claims that “form” always indicates an arrangement of elements—an ordering, patterning, or shaping.” Since “[i]t is the work of form to make order,” Levine argues, “if the political is a matter of imposing and enforcing boundaries, temporal patterns, and hierarchies on experience, then there is no politics without form” (3).


11. Scholars continually mark the play’s conflicting investments in gender and race. Loomba argues that feminist defiance is hard to locate in the play not only because of the “lack of a strong female presence” but also because of “the play’s representation of black male sexuality” (148). Singh (1991) explores how the “discourse of sexuality underpins colonial authority” (198). Melissa E. Sanchez questions the ways in which “postcolonial criticism” has “consigned[ed] female characters to the status of passive objects within the play’s politics, rather than the active participants they in fact are” (“Seduction and Service in *The Tempest*,” *Studies in Philology* 105, no.1 (2008): 50–82, 52–53). In *New Science, New World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), Denise Albanese demonstrates how discourses of New World and New Science simultaneously work to suppress the role of the feminine in general, and of Miranda in particular.


13. The idea that the event is an essential “part” of a “whole” plot also governs studies of narrative, legacies of Russian Formalist discussions of *fabula* and *sjužet*. Drawing on Paul Ricouer, Brooks “shows the plot’s connecting function between an event or events and the story” by arguing a “story is made out of events to the extent that plot makes events into a story” (13–14).


15. Ibid., 179–82. Agamben concentrates on Aristotle’s notion of “existing potentiality” which describes a condition of having knowledge or ability to act or be. This “having” potential entails the choice of whether or not to bring this knowledge or potentiality to actuality. Potentiality defines a form of existence that “maintains itself in relation to its own privation” (182). In this formulation, actuality is not the teleological fulfillment or destruction of potentiality. It is the full realization and exhaustion of its impotentiality: actuality is a form of potentiality that has the capacity to not not-be. Potentiality thus “conserves itself and saves itself in actuality” (184).

16. For representative recent work, see Simon Palfrey, *Shakespeare’s Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); J. K. Barret, “Vacant Time in *The Faerie Queene*,” *ELH* 81, no.1 (2014): 1–27. For adaptations and applications of possible worlds philosophy in literary studies more broadly, see Lubomír


18. The printer Richard Jones even claimed to have removed elements he considered extraneous to a play. In his address to readers of Tamburlaine, he states, “I have (purposely) omitted and left out some fond and frivolous gestures, digressing (and in my poor opinion) far unmeet for the matter, which I thought, might seem more tedious unto the wise, than any way else to be regarded, though (haply) they have been of some vain conceited fondlings greatly gaped at, what times they were showed upon the stage in their graced deformities: nevertheless, now, to be mixed in print with such matter of worth, it would prove a great disgrace to so honorable and stately a history.” “To the gentlemen readers: and others that take pleasure in reading histories,” in Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II*, ed. Anthony B. Dawson (New York: Norton, 1997).


20. For a recent argument that turns to “multiple worlds” to challenge the totalizing frameworks of globe and globalism, see Brent Dawson, “‘The World Transformed’: Multiple Worlds in *Antony and Cleopatra,*” *Renaissance Drama* 43, no. 2 (2015): 173–91.


22. Heather James, “‘Dido’s Ear: Tragedy and the Politics of Response,’” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52.3 (2001): 360–82, 360, 382. This argument challenges readings of Miranda as “supportive and passive” (Orgel, 1998, 16). For exceptions to such interpretations, see Christopher J. Cobb, *The Staging of Romance in Late Shakespeare: Text and Theatrical Technique* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007); Cobb discusses Miranda’s creativity: “she causes him [Prospero] to fit his own cause for revenge and restoration into the form of her romance story” (219). Sanchez also argues that Miranda is not “an inert vessel” but “an independent agent who voluntarily accepts her subordinate domestic and political status” (65). Also see Caroline Bicks, “Incited Minds: Rethinking Early Modern Girls,” *Shakespeare Studies* 44 (2016): 180–202, which argues that Miranda’s “memory inspires wonder in her father”; she “has a ‘beating’ mind that takes in, assesses and transforms Prospero’s art” (183). Thanks to James Siemon for sharing the pre-publication version of Bicks’s essay; my references are to this version.


26. For the argument that accidents were, or were often interpreted as, providential, see Witmore.


28. Ibid., 29.

29. In *Marvellous Repossessions: The Tempest, Globalization, and the Waking Dream of Paradise* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2012), Jonathan Gil Harris uses moments such as this to argue that the play stages not a fantasy of possessing a new world, or the west, but one of “repossessing an originary plenitude in the east” (45).


33. Bicks, 183.


35. As Daston and Park note, the “preternatural became a central element in the reform of natural history and natural philosophy in seventeenth-century scientific societies” (20).


37. Caliban and Ariel are the two characters who are compared more frequently, as Orgel (1998) notes (26, 45). Their opposition is taken to its logical extreme in postcolonial rewritings such as Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête*.

38. In addition to Greenblatt, Daston and Park, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (New York: Methuen, 1986), for representative works on these relations.
41. Lupton, 13.
42. Palfrey, 172.
43. Lupton, 17.
44. He warns Ferdinand of the dangerous consequences “If thou dost break her virgin-knot before/ All sanctimonious ceremonies may/ With full and holy rite be ministered” (4.1.15–17).
47. Sidney, 67.
50. Discovery literature aimed “to establish certain realities—the possibility of discovery, the lands discovered, the experiences or intentions of oneself or fellow travelers” (Fuller, 11).
52. Preiss, 9.
53. Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld, “Shakespeare’s Nobody,” in *Othello: The State of

54. My thinking on dilation and narrative expansion is influenced by Patricia Parker’s argument that the romance narrative, “which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end” is “all middle,” Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4, 76.

55. I draw on this definition: “Unfamiliar, abnormal, or exceptional to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment; difficult to take in or account for; queer, surprising, unaccountable” (“strange, adj.” OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press. [accessed February 12, 2015]).

56. Bishop, 89–90.


58. Shakespeare also adheres to the unities in The Comedy of Errors.


