

THE TEMPEST

A theatrical stage production of 'The Tempest'. The scene is set on a dark stage with a decorative border of glowing, spherical lights. In the center, a woman with long, curly blonde hair, wearing a long, flowing white dress, is held aloft horizontally by a man in a dark, patterned jacket. To the left, another man in a vest and plaid pants holds a large hula hoop. The background features a large, blue, abstract mural. A floral arrangement lies on the floor in front of the central figures.

DAY 3: THE ENDS OF POWER



ACT III: POWER

- ▶ Almost every character is caught up in the desire for power:
 - ▶ Usurpation (Antonio usurps Prospero, Prospero usurps Caliban)
 - ▶ Prospero over all, but especially Miranda, Ariel and Caliban
 - ▶ Sebastian and Antonio, who plot to usurp Alonso (II, 1)
 - ▶ Gonzalo and the Mediterranean/Atlantic/Caribbean utopia — exposes the utopian impulse as a sham; Machiavellian, but with the desire for something else: magic, romance

“

Had I plantation of this isle, my lord —
And were the king on't, what would I do?

—*Gonzalo*

“

GONZALO: I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things; for no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty—

“

GONZALO:

...and women too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty—

SEBASTIAN:

Yet he would be king on't.

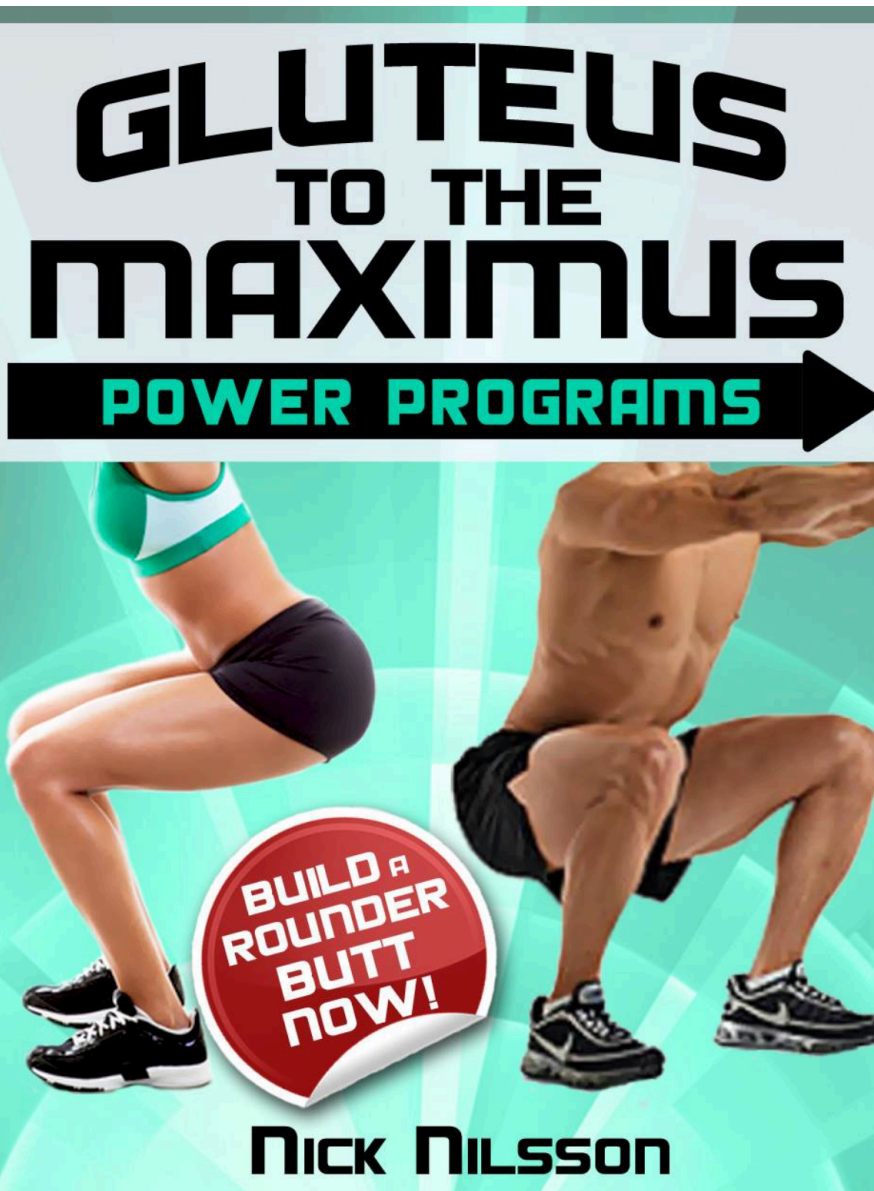
ANTONIO:

The *latter end* of his commonwealth forgets the
beginning.



THE ENDS OF POWER

- ▶ The “latter end” of his commonwealth; we’ve seen this language before, when Trinculo and Caliban form a four-legged monster that has two voices, but two butts
- ▶ Stephano immediately imagines himself in charge of the monster, showing him to an emperor to gain money and favor
- ▶ All men who seek power are asses; they make “foul speeches” with their “other mouths,” the “latter end of commonwealth,”
- ▶ Like Gonzalo, they ask “what would I do if I were king?” This is another sense of end: to what end? What is, after all, the purpose of power?

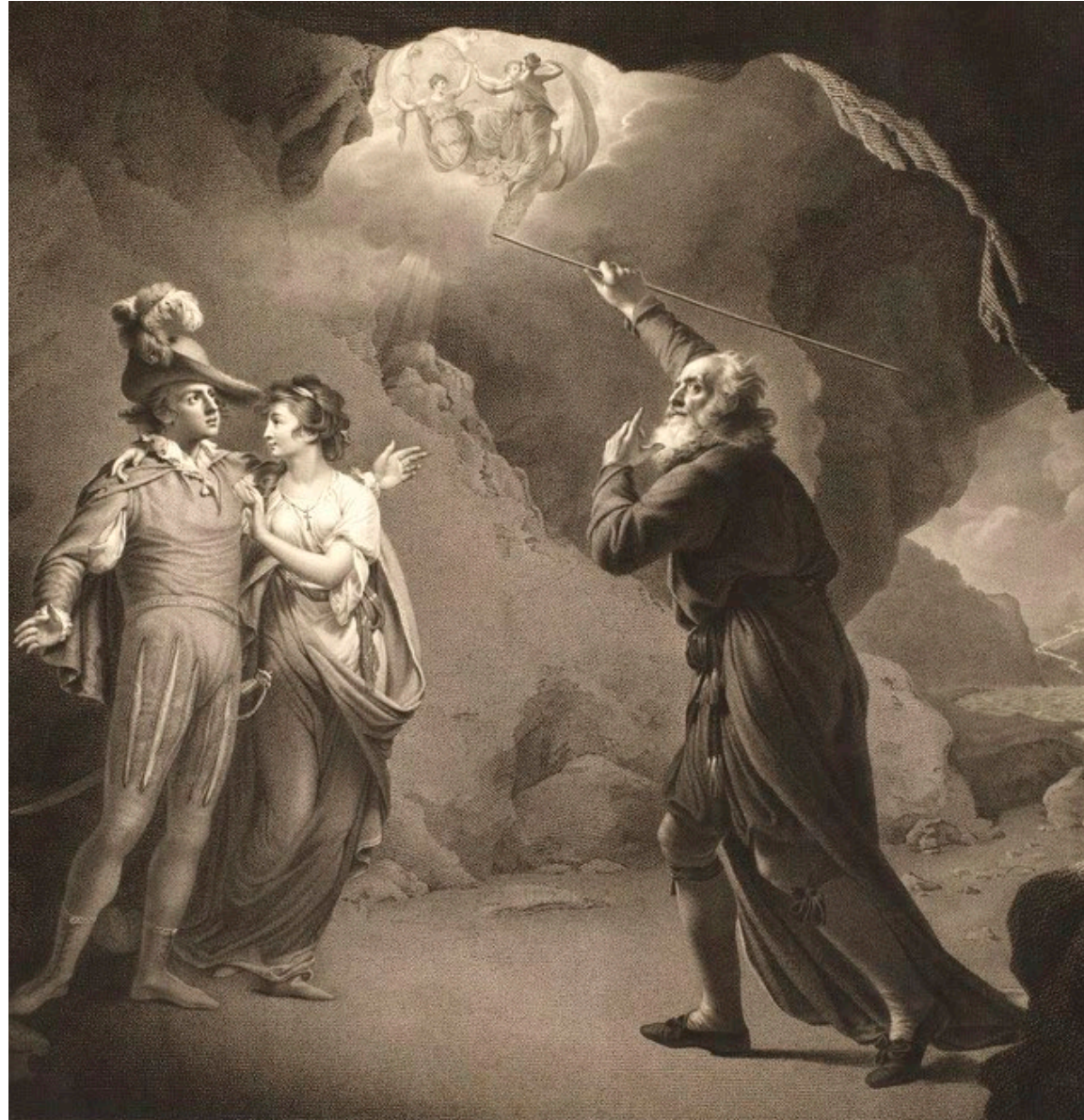


THE ENDS OF POWER

- ▶ That “other mouth” is Trink-culo (Drink-ass, but also ‘triple ass’ — three of them on stage); Shakespeare never forgets body’s ‘lower stratum.’
- ▶ This isn’t just ‘comic relief’ (comedy is never “just comic relief,” but always masks a political or ideological critique): bodies are essential to power (the loss of Ferdinand means Alfonso’s line is at an end; Prospero ignores body in favor of mind and loses power; the power of controlling bodies for (re)production)
- ▶ But don’t just take my word for this cheeky, preposterous, asinine suggestion. Caliban gets behind it, too:

THE TEMPEST

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Act IV





THE MASQUE

- ▶ Prospero becomes the director/author more clearly than ever, elaborating a long mythological (and musical!) masque for the couple's engagement; often *staged* elaborately (2011 film version made it just 2 minutes long, no singing, no dancing, no speeches)
- ▶ It is interrupted by the arrival of Caliban and co., an interruption that leads to one of the play's most famous speeches about the ephemeral character of theater and art (but also Shakespeare)
- ▶ Standard Elizabethan theme: the transitory character of the world, but Prospero particularly invokes his age and the health of his body

“

FERDINAND:

This is a most majestic vision, and
Harmonious charmingly. May I be bold
To think these spirits?

PROSPERO

Spirits, which by mine art
I have from their confines called to enact
My present fancies.







PROSPERO:

You do look, my son, in a movèd sort,
As if you were dismayed: be cheerful, sir.
Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air,
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself...

“

PROSPERO:

...Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

THE TEMPEST

Act V





RESOLUTIONS

- ▶ The action comes “to a head” in a series of re-unifications, reconciliations and transfers of political power
- ▶ Prospero gradually reveals himself to the company, and gradually re-unites all the dispersed characters (Alonso and co., Stephano and co., Ferdinand and Miranda, and the sailors)
- ▶ He forgives his brother, and frees Ariel (after giving him one more task that extends beyond the frame of the play)
- ▶ He gives up his magic



IRRESOLUTE

- ▶ Few underlying issues addressed (Prospero now even less fit to rule than before, brother no less ambitious), and text *emphasizes* this lack of resolution.
- ▶ Some resolutions seem semi-legit (Antonio), others obviously not (Sebastian)
- ▶ The backdrop is Elizabethan “revenge play,” but here, no vengeance; play ends with Sebastian, a traitor who attempted to murder his brother, unharmed and still in the court—his brother unaware of his treachery (Ferdinand and Miranda will inherit this situation upon Alonso’s death)
- ▶ Ariel is explicitly freed, but no word is uttered about the future of Caliban



PERFORMANCE

- ▶ The time of the performing arts is always *now*; they exist only in the present; in contrast to other forms, which last and don't change (each art has own temporality, however)
- ▶ Repeated invocations of *The Tempest* as meta-theater coming to a meta-ending (“our actors... are melted into air”)
- ▶ The epilogue, unusually direct and poignant, imagines Prospero as Ariel, trapped in liminal space by the audience; the island is a holding tank between real life (ours) and “real life” (a return to Italy for Prospero); the audience must perform his freedom, casting a magic spell with ritual gestures (applause) and magic words in a secret language (“Bravo! Bravo!”)

“

PROSPERO:

Flesh and blood,

You, brother mine, that entertain ambition,

Expelled remorse and nature: whom, with Sebastian —

Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong —

Would here have killed your king: I do forgive thee,

Unnatural though thou art.

“

PROSPERO:

Welcome, my friends all.—

[Aside to Sebastian and Antonio]

But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,
I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you,
And justify you traitors: at this time,
I will tell no tales.

“

PROSPERO:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint: now 'tis true,
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not...

“

...Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell,
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands:
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please.



PROSPERO:

But this rough magic
Prospero traces a circle with his staff
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.

“

PROSPERO:

Now I want

Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,

And my ending is despair,

Unless I be relieved by prayer

Which pierces so, that it assaults

Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

As you from crimes would pardoned be,

Let your indulgence set me free.

Awaits applause

Exit



THE END

**THE END
OF POWER?**



THE END OF POWER

- ▶ On one hand, play returns to political *status quo*.
Performance for James I in first month
- ▶ On the other, play imagines a radical end of power — one that transfers power to the community (“release me... with your hands”); this shift is “metafictional”
- ▶ Spectacle becomes reciprocal (Prospero may be the stage manager, but he still lives on applause), not just a transaction as Stephano imagined
- ▶ Like *Quixote*, between comedy and tragedy: all ends well, yet we feel sad; like *Quixote*, touched by death (one of Shakespeare’s last plays)
- ▶ Uncertainty: what happens to Caliban? Ariel? Does Sebastian still plan to kill Alonso? Can Prospero become a good Duke?