Indulgent Representation: Theatricality and Sectarian Metaphor in *The Tempest*

At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero (or, perhaps, the actor playing him) urges the audience, 'As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free' (5.1.337-8).[1] The lines are a plea for applause, for the audience to conclude the drama happily. As the play-world dissolves into the real world, at the threshold between fiction and reality, Prospero appeals to be set free from representation. He strikes an ethical bargain in the mode of the Lord's Prayer ('forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us').[2] But, in speaking of 'pardon' and 'indulgence', he also alludes to a much maligned Catholic practice of purchased remission of sins. Thus the audience's decision over whether or not to applaud the drama is playfully implicated in trying out a confessional attitude. Even so, the status of these 'Catholic' terms as wordplay means that they only flirt with sectarian resonance, rather than declaring a theological message. Taking the play's self-conscious theatricality as a starting point, this essay explores the ambiguity of this dramatic conclusion. It questions what it means for a post-Reformation audience to 'indulge' in metaphorically 'Catholic' behaviour, and how a play that stages forgiveness as a form of revenge negotiates difference ethically. These themes are part of a broader theatrical dynamic, in which representation is constantly destabilised.

Renaissance plays are peppered with Catholic characters, costumes and expressions. Aspects of the old faith that the ongoing Reformation had outlawed from real life, remained integral to the theatrical repertoire, so that pilgrims, nuns and especially friars continued to feature in post-Reformation drama. Characters carried on swearing in terms that Protestantism discredited: 'by the mass', 'by'r lady' and 'by the rood'. Purgatory remained imaginatively available even though reformed theology proclaimed it non-existent. And chantries and convents survived as part of the nation's theatrical, if not actual, terrain. Of course, Catholicism did not only survive in the fictional spaces of the early modern stage. Revisionist historians (including Eamon Duffy, Christopher Haigh and Anthony Milton) have shown that while the Reformation

process might have practically banned the old faith, Catholicism endured in new and varied ways.[3] Recusants declared their faith by not attending mandatory Church of England services (privately accessing hidden priests and smuggled books); Church Papists loyally conformed to the monarch's Protestant customs, but secretly practiced Catholicism; and others, less easily labelled, were nostalgic for facets of the Roman religion (like praying for the dead and using religious images) but broadly followed Reformed theology.[4] Individual subjects proved theologically flexible, converting back and forth with no less conviction than frequency.[5] Which is not to say that Protestantism did not flourish and inspire genuine piety, but rather that the 'religious condition' of early modern England was variegated. Peter Lake identifies a central tension: ongoing Reformation 'produced a level of *de facto* religious pluralism unprecedented in English history' and simultaneously sparked 'ideological polarization between […] adversarily defined confessional identities' (Lake 57-8). There was much doctrinal and practical overlap between Catholicism and Protestantism, similarity Elizabeth used in her 'Settlement' when attempting to consolidate broad-based support. Nevertheless, religious polemic and anti-papist laws asserted an absolute difference between Catholics and Protestants.[6] This complex situation – in which religious difference was paradoxically both porous and polarised – renders the appearance of pre-Reformation content in post-Reformation plays especially meaningful.[7]

Over the last thirty years, scholars of religion in early modern literature have highlighted these messy cultural circumstances. Debora Shuger established the dominance of religion in Renaissance 'habits of thought' (the title of her 1990 monograph), and Brian Cummings brilliantly revealed the mutual influence of Reformation theologies and literary practices, in *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (2002). Alison Shell's *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (1999) rescued Catholicism from the margins of modern literary criticism, illuminating the texts and techniques of Catholic writers, and their mainstream impact. Research into religion in the Shakespearean corpus has been methodologically varied. But critics sensitive to the theatrical function of the plays and the

'hybridity' of early modern religious culture avoid simplistic confessional readings: the drama is found not to advance a denominational message, but rather to engage with the contradictions of the historical situation (Knapp; Mayer; Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*; Streete; Woods). Still, ways of analysing literature's entanglement with religion remains under negotiation. Other critical developments are instructive. Just as feminism now informs interpretations that move beyond a single focus on gender, so too might religiously inflected criticism seek to understand denominational signifiers as they interact with a range of complicating factors, such as gender, race, and class.[8]

The most important complicating factor is, obviously, theatricality itself. After all, how accurate is it to describe dramatic friars and metaphorical saints as 'Catholic'? Elizabethan law forbade dramatists from staging religious controversies. The 'Catholic' contents of 'seen and allowed' plays seem to be incidentally rather than didactically theological; they are the 'accidents' rather than the 'substance' of doctrine. Shakespeare rarely puts religious issues at the heart of his plots, preferring stories about love, grief, family and political authority. Even so, nothing that appears on stage exists in an interpretative vacuum. When Romeo addresses Juliet as a saint who grants prayers (1.4.206-19), the metaphor functions verisimilarly to locate the tragedy in Catholic Italy, but that very location also conditions the tragedy's meaning for its English audience. On the other hand, Catholic features are sometimes anachronistic and incongruous. Aaron's baby is found in a 'ruinous monastery' (*Titus Andronicus* 5.1.21), a type of building that would be ruined in another part of Europe, hundreds of years after the Roman era of the play. *Love's Labour's Lost* features four romantic leads whose names are bizarrely drawn from the French Wars of Religion. Such content is not nostalgic, nor can it be dismissed as semantically neutral, a fossilised remnant of the 'old faith', since it provocatively disturbs the *mise-en-scène*. Dramatic features that have a Catholic aspect create an interpretative challenge: how should we read signs that are only equivocally Catholic? What is the significance of material that resonates with cultural upheaval, but does not directly dramatise it? What are the pleasures of allusions, metaphors, puns and

idioms that draw on, without fully articulating, sectarian difference? Such material makes sense not only through reference to its theological-historical background, but also through a recognition of its fundamentally dramatic condition. This essay thus focuses on the theatricality of *The Tempest*, as a means of showing how ambiguous Catholic signs are more legible when their dramatic situation is foregrounded and their playfulness embraced.

Prospero's 'indulgence' alludes to a sectarian concept while also inviting applause, exemplifying the shiftiness of much 'Catholic' content in Shakespeare. The theological connotations of the term speak to early modern controversy. The Catholic practice of indulgence was a key motivation in the early Reformation, with John Luther famously enumerating ninety-five theses in objection to the system and its abuses in the early sixteenth century. Established doctrine since the thirteenth century, an indulgence was the Church's reduction or removal of temporal punishment for sins (Reynolds 314-15). The Jesuit Peter Canisius cautioned that this doctrine did not offer a blank cheque for forgiveness of past and future guilt; instead, the indulgence was: 'the remission of the Temporall punishemente due vnto sinne already forgeuen: graunted by the Pastours of the Church[…] vnto him which is in Gods grace & fauour' (638). Nevertheless some sinners purchased indulgences in the misapprehension that they bought forgiveness for the guilt of sin (and not merely its punishment) without necessarily feeling any sincere contrition. The lucrative nature of such misunderstandings encouraged certain popes to foster confusion (Reynolds 315). Part of the popularity of the practice stemmed from its close connection with belief in purgatory. Indulgences promised some relief from the hundreds of years Catholics expected to suffer in purgatory before their deceased souls could enter heaven. To reformers purgatory was at best an unscriptural fiction, and at worst a con-trick, designed to inflate the value of the indulgence market.

At a time when maintaining a definite distance between the different branches of Christianity was both difficult and desirable, indulgence also exposed a fault-line between Catholic and Protestant theologies of forgiveness and their alternative accounts of human

agency. Andrew Willet, a late sixteenth-century clergyman, considered it 'blasphemie [to believe] that one may be holpen by another mans merits' because 'it doth derogate from the death of Christ' (669). In presuming to participate in the mechanisms of forgiveness, Catholic clerics downgraded the perfection of Christ's saving sacrifice. Willet explained that Protestants 'grant that we may pray for one another while we liue, but wee can not satisfie one for another' (1108). The Catholic Canisius, asserted the opposite was true: 'for as a man may pray for another: so may he also satisfie for another' (670). The action of saving forgiveness worked differently across the sectarian divide: Protestants celebrated the completeness of Christ's sacrifice; Catholics required the sinner's cooperation in the dynamic of salvation. Indulgences thus helped to accentuate a confessional distinction.

The Tempest, with its magical island and airy spirits, is emphatically removed from the real world; doctrinal distinctions are not of primary interest in this play. But when Prospero draws an analogy between being 'pardoned' and granting 'indulgence', he oddly gestures to a sectarian controversy.[10] This ideologically jarring joke is nevertheless thematically appropriate. The play's denouement concerns forgiveness: when Prospero ostensibly forgives the apparently unrepentant Antonio and Sebastian, the drama invites us to speculate on the efficacy and desirability of forgiveness, as well as its authenticity. Prospero's plea for indulgence mischievously puts a question mark over the play's conclusion. Even the secular meanings of 'indulgence' suggest an unhealthily bloated form of forgiveness. Randle Cotgrave defines 'Indulgence' as '*tender-heartednesse; (ouermuch) mercie, or gentlenesse; too mild intreatie, or vsage; too much libertie giuen; hence, a Pardon from the Pope*' (Zz5v). Indulgence is forgiveness gone wrong, a disproportionate leniency. The existence of Catholic 'indulgence' helps to clarify the negative connotations of the secular sense – '*hence, a Pardon from the Pope*' – and vice versa. Cotgrave's definition uses the same semantic slippage exploited by Prospero's pun: the extravagant significance of indulgence spills into its theological application. While the final lines of Prospero's epilogue have been read as evidence of Shakespeare's Catholic sympathies

(Beauregard), I make a different claim. Primarily dramatic in its purpose, the indulgent pun wins applause and extends the forgiving action of the fiction into the real space of the audience. Furthermore, the very ambiguity of the pun (which is both secular and sectarian), rather than declaring anyone's confessional allegiance, instead shuffles identity categories. Such playfulness is central to the action of *The Tempest* and its ethical meaning.

The story of *The Tempest* is curiously difficult to situate. Since Alonso and his companions are shipwrecked en route from Tunis to Naples, the island is geographically in the Mediterranean. But the sources of the play (such as the 'Strachey Letter' detailing shipwreck in the Bermudas) and its colonial themes give the island an American atmosphere, while African and Irish undertones have been detected in the drama of land appropriation and native subjugation. The situation is culturally hybridised.[11] Furthermore, the island resists definition even as its multiple illusions demand interpretation. It seems to shift according to the perception of individual viewers (what is pleasantly fecund to Gonzalo is hostilely barren to Sebastian and Antonio (2.1.50-55)). Very little of the 'action' actually happens: deaths are announced and mourned, but never take place; a harpy that is really a spirit breaks up a banquet that is not eaten; the titular tempest is merely Prospero's magic trick and not a storm at all. Basic significance is up for grabs in this play.

The unfixed nature of *The Tempest*'s vivid iconography (shipwreck, interrupted banquet, harpy, masque) has generated numerous Christian readings that explain the play in allegorical terms. In the late twentieth century, Herbert R. Coursen read *The Tempest* as celebrating Christian submission as a form of freedom (374-415), and in the twenty-first century Judith E. Tonning detects an eschatological meaning in Prospero's courtly theatrics. Elsewhere, Todd Edmondson finds the play resonating sympathetically with the plight of the persecuted Catholic clergy during the Reformation, whereas Grace Tiffany sees the romance's wondrous outcome as a manifestation of Calvinist grace. The fact that the play can produce confessionally opposed interpretations should perhaps caution us that allegory – with its promise of a coherent, if

obscured, deeper meaning – is not the right lens with which to view this drama.[12] Even so, the impulse to find the dual meaning of allegory does seem to be encouraged by the dramaturgy. Character names suggestively point at abstract conditions: Prospero (fortunate; prosperous); Miranda (wonder) (Vaughan and Vaughan 141-2). It is just that although the drama continually gestures beyond its immediate action, it never clarifies what that extra-significance is. The mechanisms of making meaning are as important as interpretative closure.

The drama of *The Tempest* is in permanent representational flux. Since the majority of the action takes the form of Prospero's illusions, it becomes difficult to distinguish between 'the play' and 'the-play-within-a-play', between theatre and meta-theatre (Nevo 136). Illusion and reality collapse into one another in *The Tempest*. The very first scene, the tempest itself, establishes an ongoing sense of representational uncertainty. This opening, which lacks any narrative exposition, is emphatically 'realistic' (Gurr 95). The Boatswain roars nautical technicalities ('Down with the topmast!' (1.1.34); 'Lay her a-hold! a-hold! Set her two courses off to sea again; lay her off!' (1.1.49-50)), the mariners appear '*wet*' (1.1.50.1) and the '*noise of thunder and lightning* [is] *heard*' (1.1.0). Given that the play was probably first performed indoors at the Blackfriars, and thunder was conventionally an 'outdoor effect' (Gurr 95), Shakespeare starts with a spectacular bang that insists on the fact of the tempest, only to then shock his audience out of their interpretative confidence when Prospero assures Miranda that the storm was merely an illusion. What was pointedly realistic in the first scene is re-categorised as 'art' (1.2.1) in the second. Brian Gibbons contends that the play makes the audience 'question how they interpret what they see and how they interpret the codes by which art reflects reality – whatever level of reality may be in question' (Gibbons 52). Making sense of representations is shown to be difficult.

These interpretative problems also raise ethical questions. As director of the island's strange drama, the wronged Prospero strives to influence his shipwrecked player-spectators, but whether his purpose is vengeful victimisation or moral conversion is unclear. The audience

watch guilty characters being manipulated by a series of theatrical tricks, and are thereby brought to question the semantic and ethical value of what they see. What is the meaning of Prospero's shows? Does theatrical illusion have a real effect? Can it produce any moral change? *Is* it moral to attempt such transformation? By denying the audience a clear understanding of exactly what Prospero is doing and why he is doing it, Shakespeare puts his audience in the middle of these questions. Uncertainty is central to the play's impact.

Even obviously symbolic spectacle lacks a definite meaning. Take the weird presence of a harpy in 3.3. Making a rare appearance on the Renaissance stage, the harpy creates an interpretative task for the audience.[13] The spectacular dimensions of the scene are established before the mythical creature arrives:

> *Enter several strange shapes bringing in a banquet, and dance about it*
>
> *with gentle actions of salutations; and inviting the King, etc., to eat,*
>
> *they depart* (3.3.19.1-3).

Different levels of representation are blurred here. Sebastian exclaims, 'A living drollery!' (3.3.21), a phrase Stephen Orgel glosses as 'either a comic play in real life, or a living caricature'. The distinction between illusion and reality is perceived as elastic. When Ariel appears '*like a harpy*' (3.3.52-2), the audience have to sort through additional layers of magical and theatrical illusions (an actor plays a spirit who plays a harpy). The entrance is dramatically stunning: more indoor '*thunder*' (3.3.52.1) and cunning stage business consolidate the fantastical appearance ('*with a quaint device the banquet vanishes*' (3.3.52.3)).[14] Ariel describes his role in pagan and Christian terms: he and his fellows are 'ministers of fate' (3.3.61), yet he also identifies 'three men of sin' (3.3.53). While the scene is dramatically coherent, emphasising as it does Prospero's dominance and the guilt of Sebastian, Antonio and Gonzalo, it nevertheless complicates rather than clarifies the action. What does this strikingly odd creature signify?

In early modern writings, the harpy's hybrid form (part beautiful woman, part vicious bird) figured deceit, so that Thomas Dekker described 'Politick Bankrupt' as 'a *Harpy* [that]

lookes smoothly' (Dekker, *Seuen Deadly Sinnes* B2v). Such associations cast an uneasy shadow over Ariel's mythological guise. More importantly, harpies were signs of both classical vengeance and Christian repentance. Like other parts of *The Tempest*, this scene recalls Virgil's *Aeneid*, specifically the harpies' disruption of Aeneas' feast with his fellow Trojans on Strophades and the cursing of Aeneas (Book III). In his *Display of Heraldrie*, John Guillim quotes Virgil's description: '*Of Monsters all, most Monstrous this; no greater wrath / God sends 'mongst men; it comes from depbth* [*sic*] *of pitchy Hell*' (Guillim 183). But a little later Guillim provides an alternative significance for heraldic harpies: 'The *Harpey* […] should be giuen to such persons as haue committed manslaughter, to the end that by the often view of their *Ensignes* they might bee moued to bewaile the foulnesse of their offence' (Guillim 183).[15] Thomas Lodge gives the guilty harpy a more explicitly Christian gloss. He writes of one who killed and ate a man, but then, catching sight of her own reflection, 'and remembring the similitude of him whome shee slew, [was] confounded with so much griefe, that shee dieth for dolour.' Maintaining his narrative's reflective connections between self and other, Lodge exhorts his readers to see the harpy as an example for their own 'consciences': remembering that they too 'haue crucified Christ' with 'sinnes' they should penitently 'let fall some teares' (Lodge 6r-v). If both the classical and the Christian readings speak of fault, their interpretations point diversely to punishment and to penitence. The Shakespearean harpy maintains the doubt about Prospero's intentions: will he take vengeance or provoke repentance? Indeed the figure of the harpy also raises questions about Ariel's and Prospero's culpability. (Lodge's harpy acknowledges and dies of guilt.) The dramatic spectacle implicates Prospero and Ariel as well as the more obvious sinners. An excess of symbolised meanings offer pagan and Christian possibilities.[16] In this emphatically ambiguous context it seems misguided to constrain meaning with one confessional reading. The experience of the drama is one of continually shifting perspectives.

So fluid are the boundaries between the magical and the mortal, artistry and actuality, that humanity itself becomes an uncertain category. Caliban is described in terms that de-

humanise him. A bewildered Trinculo asks if he is 'a man or a fish? –dead or alive?' (2.2.24-5), while Prospero declares him a creature 'got by the devil himself' (1.2.319), and Stephano labels him a 'servant-monster' (3.2.3, 7) and 'man-monster' (3.2.11). Such designations indicate the political power attendant on acts of definition, and the anxiety produced by figures that complicate understanding of what constitutes a human 'norm'.[17] However, in the slippery theatricality of *The Tempest* it is not only the colonised 'other' who unsettles human identification. Ferdinand – a European prince – is a confusing sight for the innocent Miranda: 'What is't? – a spirit?' (1.2.410). On this island, the actual can be mistaken for the illusory. Miranda's category confusion articulates a deeper question underpinning the play's investigation of theatricality: what does it mean to be human? The difficulty in distinguishing between representation and reality helps to make humanity a somewhat provisional condition (Ferdinand and Alonso both mistake Miranda for a goddess (1.2.422-8; 5.1.187-8)). As a result, the play scrutinises human (and inhuman) traits by defamiliarising them. Gonzalo observes that the dancers of 'monstrous shape' who bring a banquet have 'manners' that 'are more gentle-kind than of / Our human generation you shall find / Many, nay almost any' (3.3.31-4). The island's spirits are more human than humans. Later Ariel assures Prospero that if he had beheld the imprisoned 'men of sin', his 'affections / Would become tender' (5.1.18-19), for Ariel is sure that 'Mine would, sir, were I human' (5.1.20). Ariel speaks objectively of compassion from outside the human experience of it: he remains at a subjunctive distance from pity ('Mine *would*'), but is nevertheless able to identify the conditions that produce it. Prospero needs this non-human prompt to cue the human reaction:

> 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? (5.1.20-4)

Ariel teaches Prospero to remember his similarity to, and how to feel empathy for, his fellow human beings. Humanity is not a given, but a form of behaviour that requires conscious effort. Likeness, or fellow-feeling, is crucial for Prospero's ethical shift (Cynthia Marshall points out that his 'turn to forgiveness' is his only 'significant internal alteration in the play' (95)), but it is curiously dependent on the sense of difference articulated by Ariel. Through estrangement, the play encourages kinship.

Ultimately, Prospero proves as good as his word and declares mercy:

The rarer action is

In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,

The sole drift of my purpose doth extend

Not a frown further (5.1.27-30).

Christian readings of the play often idealise this moment as an example of Prospero's supreme, even 'Christ-like', virtue (Coursen 406). However, the clause 'They being penitent' creates ambiguity: are these words declarative or conditional, and are the captives really 'penitent'? Materialist interpretations detect political pragmatism rather than piety in Prospero's pardon. Stephen Orgel asserts that Prospero's 'forgiveness' effectively disinherits his brother, since the marriage between Miranda and Ferdinand secures Milan for the kingdom of Naples after Prospero's death. Furthermore, the terms of Prospero's mercy underline the guilt of the conspirators (Orgel 53-4). Prospero tells his brother: 'I forgive thee, / Unnatural though thou art' (5.1.78-9). Later he remarks that to call this 'most wicked sir' a 'brother / Would infect my mouth', but that he nonetheless forgives Antonio's 'rankest fault – all of them' (5.1.130-2). The ambiguity of the ending positions Prospero somewhere between the two critical poles. To afford Prospero a Machiavellian victory is to overlook the moral complexity of the conclusion, while idealising Christian readings elide Prospero's cunning.[18] Shakespeare here interrogates as much as he endorses forgiveness, but that does not mean that he reduces it to a political sleight of hand. This denouement stages forgiveness in all its human imperfection. Prospero grudgingly spells out

the reasons why he might withhold his mercy and Antonio is silent in receipt of it. Earlier in the play Antonio scoffs at the idea of conscience, proclaiming it of less matter than a 'kibe' (2.1.273) or chilblain since he 'feel[s] not / This deity in my bosom' (2.1.274-5). And if Ariel's avenging harpy works to stir up 'guilt' (3.3.104) in the 'three men of sin' (3.3.53), Sebastian and Antonio offer to do physical battle with 'legions' (3.3.103) of fiends rather than meditate on the 'trespass' (3.3.99) like Alonso. The play examines the desirability of forgiveness in the face of potentially unrepentant criminals. Working as a kind of memory theatre, the island restages more significant action that took place before the play's start: Prospero's usurpation is nearly repeated as Sebastian and Antonio murderously scheme to depose Alonso, and Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban attempt to overthrow Prospero. Michael Neill argues that '*The Tempest* seeks in the act of remembrance itself an alternative to revenge's apocalypse' (39). Where revenge tragedies leave viewers glutted with a sense that the devastation of retribution has overtaken the original crime, Shakespeare's generic swerve into comedic mercy questions the theatrical, ethical and even spiritual satisfaction of undeserved forgiveness.

Representational and ethical uncertainty means the play concludes with many characters uncertain about how their drama is ending. Gonzalo is unable to credit Prospero's embrace: 'Whether this be, / Or be not, I'll not swear' (5.1.122-3); likewise, Alonso is unsure whether Prospero is really who he claims or 'some enchanted trifle' (5.1.112), and he demands an explanation to prove 'If thou beest Prospero' (5.1.134), later fearing that his son might be 'A vision' (5.1.176). While the theatrics have shaken the characters' moral senses by disorienting their natural senses, any ethical conversion ultimately remains as provisional as their grasp on reality. Even after Prospero has offered both explanation and forgiveness, he acknowledges that the lords 'scarce think / Their eyes do offices of truth' (5.1.155-6).

The epilogue extends these uncertainties beyond the play's end. The speech is metatheatrically removed from the action, with Prospero both in and out of character when he directly addresses the audience. Easing them out of the fictional space and into the real world,

Prospero does the epilogue's conventional work.[19] However, the concentrated nature of *The Tempest*'s theatricality, and the role that theatricality plays in the ethical movement of the action, lends an extra resonance to Prospero's final speech. The epilogue encourages one last exploration of the possible value of the illusions we have just witnessed. When Prospero pleads for the audience's 'indulgence' (5.1.338), he is metaphorically asking for their applause to give the play commercial value. Tiffany Stern suggests that surviving epilogues from around 1600, with their explicit requests for applause, were spoken only at early performances, since the future of a play depended on a popular reception on its initial outing (*Documents* 81-119). Puns in epilogues usefully provoked laughter and applause at the crucial moment of judgment (*Documents* 87-8). Thus Prospero's reference to 'indulgence' might squeeze a laugh out of a theologically risqué pun. (The fact that this wordplay appears in the vital final line indicates that its sectarian connotations cannot have been unprofitably divisive; the ambiguous nature of the pun sidesteps serious offence.)[20] But securing commercial success for entertainment is only part of what is going on in this epilogue. The audience's indulgence also marks ethical validation, albeit playfully.

Traditionally, epilogues articulated moral lessons: earlier Tudor interludes often spelled out the didactic message of the story just seen. The Epilogue in *Nice Wanton* explains , 'by thys Interlude ye may se / How daungerous it is, for the frailtye of youth, / Without good gouernaunce, to lyue at libertye' (Civ). Later, secular plays more frequently end by deferring apologetically to the audience's judgement, rather than lecturing them on good behaviour. Some of these epilogues are only superficially humble: they cheekily question the audience's powers of discernment while ostensibly identifying them as judges.[21] But it was commonplace for epilogues to request pardon; Prospero's plea fits into a contemporary stage trend. [23] The speech's themes of prayer and forgiveness reflect on the substance of the play as well as urging the audience to provide a successful conclusion:

> And my ending is despair,
>
> Unless I be relieved by prayer

> Which pierces so, that it assaults
>
> Mercy and frees all faults.
>
> As you from crimes would pardoned be,
>
> Let your indulgence set me free (5.1.333-6).

Early and contemporary epilogue conventions are connected in these multivalent lines. Hoping for indulgent approval, Prospero submits the play to the audience's aesthetic judgment, in the mode of later epilogues. Yet in framing this request in terms of mercy, Prospero links this judgment to the ethical concerns of the play. Shakespeare's epilogue avoids the didacticism of Tudor interludes, but as in those dramas, these final words invite the audience to reflect on the meaning of what they have seen. By begging for prayers and indulgence, Prospero announces his own faultiness, only a moment after the equivocal reconciliation scene. In this way, the epilogue emphasises the complexity of that resolution, encouraging us to weigh up Prospero's (lack of?) generosity and culpability. It also includes the audience in the same ethical difficulties that have just been staged. Inviting spectators to show mercy 'as you from crimes would pardoned be' (5.1.337), Prospero moves the onstage action of forgiveness offstage, turning the audience into Prosperos and Antonios who should grant pardon because they are in need of it.

The epilogue is further complicated because of the speaker's dual identities as both Prospero and actor. He acknowledges that his 'charms are all o'erthrown' (5.1.319), since Prospero has finished with his magic and the actor is stepping out of the drama. What happens next depends upon the audience:

> 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. (5.1.322-8)

Applause will enable several actions, some of them contradictory: Prospero will depart for Naples as the actor playing him leaves the fiction; however, since applause also secures the play's renewal, Prospero will return to his island when the actor reprises his role. Prospero (and the actor) figure the island (and dramatic fiction) as a prison in which he is 'confined', so that he finally shares in the captivity he threatened and enforced on others (including Ariel (1.2.294-6), Caliban (1.2.359-61), Ferdinand (1.2.462-5), Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano (4.1.259-62), Alonso and his companions (5.1.7-11), and the ship's crew (5.1.230-4)). This image of incarceration indicates the power shift that takes place at the play's end. The shift is partly theatrical: epilogues close the play by reorganising authority, passing it from actors to audience (Weimann 220-26). At the end of *The Tempest* various forms of authority are under negotiation: in arranging the marriage of his daughter to the Neapolitan heir, and reclaiming his Dukedom, Prospero engages in international power-play; by freeing Ariel and abjuring magic he lets go of his supernatural authority; in figuring himself as the audience's prisoner the all-powerful Prospero redefines himself as a subject, just as the actor hands over authority to the audience. Now granted the power to forgive, the audience take on Prospero's role; but like him, they too will require pardon from a higher power.

As the final lines of the play, couched in the religious terms of supplication, these words may have bled into the prayer for the monarch that often ended plays. Stern suggests that prayers 'about the monarch' were 'regularly spoken on public occasions, though irregularly recorded in playbooks' ('Epilogues' 123). It may be then, that when Prospero delivered the epilogue at the first performance of *The Tempest*, his speech was followed by a prayer for the king. Even if not, the explicit reference to 'prayer' (5.1.334), at a moment when actual prayers were frequently uttered, connects the epilogue to that tradition. The final prayer further ushered the audience into real life, since the conventional intercessions for different sections of society helped to re-stratify the diverse people within and without the theatre.[25] But if prayer marks the

'real world's' replacement of the theatrical fiction, Shakespeare's prayer also puts the ethical dynamic explored in his play into that 'real' hierarchical space. The ethical reciprocity underwriting the plea for indulgence depends on a recognition of likeness between self and other, the same recognition that Ariel's compassion prompted in Prospero.

These last lines are playful rather than trite: the speech is conservatively submissive (to the audience, to God, and to the monarch), but the sectarian pun on indulgence sounds an incongruous note. It is unusual for a play not openly concerned with religion to allude to religious discord at a moment when dramatists sought communal support (no other extant epilogue that requests pardon draws out the term's sectarian associations by linking it with indulgence). Thomas Middleton's *Game at Chess* somewhat untypically exploits sectarianism to whip up applause; but this epilogue maintains the explicitly anti-Catholic tenor of the action. The White Knight (read: Protestant) asserts that 'white Friends hands' will register their support, thus translating religious allegiance into theatrical approval. Somewhat threateningly, this Epilogue states his Queen's hope that 'most of the assembly' are 'white' friends, and labels critical viewers as traitors who will 'soone be knowne by their deprauing worke' ([K4v]). In marked distinction to this divisive strategy, Shakespeare's epilogue teasingly invites the audience to try out confessional otherness by offering 'indulgence'. The confessional flexibility inherent in the indulgence pun admits to the need for a more inclusive form of forgiveness, that accepts others and otherness. The merciful extravagance begged of the audience chimes with the dynamic of the denouement, in which forgiveness is (imperfectly) extended even to those who do not deserve it. Such is the challenge of forgiveness: it is all too easy to forgive the forgivable; true forgiveness is excessive. 'Indulgence' is the right word for such forgiveness because the ideological riskiness of the term seems to hint that there is something questionable and uncomfortable about extravagant mercy.

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[1] All references to *The Tempest* are to Orgel.

[2] On the allusion to the Lord's Prayer, see Cox (40), Frye (186) and McAlindon (340, 349).

[3] See also McLain for an account of 'lived experience' among English Renaissance Catholics.

[4] For 'Church Papists', see Walsham.

[5] See Questier.

[6] For Catholicism's differentiating relationship with English identity, see Dolan.

[7] The religious reach of Shakespearean drama is broad: not only different denominations of Christianity, but also Judaism, Islam and paganism impinge variously on the plays. In focusing on a 'Catholic' metaphor, this essay does not imply that Catholicism is the only or dominant religious material in the canon. Instead, I suggest religious signifiers need to be read in the light of their theological meaning, cultural status and theatrical purpose.

[8] For a related point, see Shell (*Catholicism and Controversy* 24).

[10] The words 'pardon' and 'indulgence' were used interchangeably in theological discourse. Thus a section heading in *A Summe of Christian Doctrine* reads 'OF INDULGENCES, OR PARDONS' (Canisius 637).

[11] For a useful summary, see Vaughan and Vaughan, 39-54.

[12] Excellent (and non-allegorical) readings of religious significance in *The Tempest* include Cox and Poole (168-218).

[13] Only one other instance of 'harpies' in extant printed drama is recorded: Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* (1634) (Berger, Bradford and Sondergard 53).

[14] Egan follows Jowett's suggestion that Ariel might be strapped into a descending 'car' instead of wearing an extravagant costume (65).

[15] See also Rowland.

[16] The interrupted banquet has been read as a sign of Christian Eucharist by Aers and Beckwith (163-5), and Neill (47), though they do not explore the harpy's significance.

[17] Lupton sees Caliban as a means of locating a 'new universalism' in the play, whereby '"all humans are creatures,"' and 'constitute an exception to their own humanity' (21).

[18] See also Cox.

[19] Compare Bruster's and Weimann's description of early modern prologues as 'threshold devices' (viii).

[20] Recent editors of the play note the sectarian associations of the plea for 'indulgence' with varying degrees of scepticism. Stephen Orgel glosses the word as 'playing on the technical sense of remission of the punishment for sin', but not its controversial significance (205). Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan tentatively suggest that the phrase 'perhaps' puns on the 'Roman Catholic practice' (286). David Lindley argues that the sectarian resonance of the term is 'favoured by those who wish to claim Shakespeare as himself a Catholic, but to do so may well be to overload the term in this particular context, which is not about redemption in the next world but release in this.' Lindley astutely parses some of the complexities of this epilogue, and is justifiably suspicious of readings that turn dramatic dialogue into biographical statements of Shakespeare's faith. However, the 'particular context' is not as straightforwardly secular as he suggests. As Lindley himself later points out, the terms of Prospero's bargain allude to lines in the Lord's Prayer and in the previous sentence Prospero refers to 'prayer' (236).

[21] For example, the Epilogue in John Marston's *Sophonisba* manages to sneak an insult into its submission '*To all, saue those, that haue more tongue then wit*' (G3v).

[23] See the anonymous *Arden of Faversham*, Shakespeare's *2 Henry IV* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, Edward Sharpham's *Cupid's Whirligig*, Thomas Dekker's and Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*, and also the epilogues for court in John Lyly's *Campaspe* and Thomas Dekker's *Old Fortunatus*.

[25] See, for example, the end of *Jacob and Esau*, where separate intercessions are made for clergy, Queen, counsellors, nobility and subjects ([G4v]).