

# Progeny:

## *Prospero's Books, Genesis and The Tempest*

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### Technical note

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## I. Introduction

1. Peter Greenaway's film, *Prospero's Books*, has developed a small cult following, but most people who try can't sit through it. If you don't know the book it's based on, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the film is likely to make no sense at all. And if you do know *The Tempest*, this version is likely to seem stiff, obscure and boring, compared to other productions. However, by following its bookish lead and comparing the film both with Shakespeare's play and with a work I believe the play is based on, the Book of *Genesis*, I came upon conversations and couplings which brought the film to life for me.
2. In a whimsical comment included in the published screenplay, Greenaway implies that the film's source is a fictional tome: 'This is the "example-book", the template for Prospero's imaginings...With this book - a primer and textbook of his humanist education - Prospero populates the island...the camera halts before the large *Book of Mythologies* - and the title of the film - *Prospero's Books* - is superimposed'. (14.4) [1](#) (Title image above) Though the Bible is never mentioned in connection with this source book of stories about gods and heroes, it was as much a 'primer and textbook of ... humanist education' as the Greek and Roman classics. And though explicit references to the Bible are rare in the film and in Shakespeare's play, I hope to

show that it in fact has served as just such a generative template.

3. The Book of *Revelation* is the most likely biblical candidate for being the template of *The Tempest* and *Prospero's Books* because of their shared depictions of the dissolution of the world and the dissolution of conventional discursive forms. *The Tempest* and *Revelations* are both capstone pieces - final retrospective works in a large corpus. <sup>2</sup> But in the 1623 Folio, the original collected edition of the plays, *The Tempest* appeared as the first work, Shakespeare's Alpha as well as his Omega.

## II. Creation

4. Like many stories of creation, *Genesis* opens with an image of dark turbulent waters, a stormy sea: 'In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters'. ([Genesis 1:1-3](#)) <sup>3</sup> Upon this shifting, undifferentiated chaos (sounded in the original Hebrew by the word, 'Tohuvavohu'), the speech of the creator first imposes separation: the polarities of light and darkness, then day and night. <sup>4</sup> Most performances of *The Tempest* begin with a god-awful racket, and the stage direction in Shakespeare's script indicates that in the opening sequence static overwhelms signal: 'A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard'. <sup>5</sup> The play itself comes into being for spectator or reader as barely emergent meaning - snatches of desperate shouting amongst the ship's crew and passengers. <sup>6</sup> *Prospero's Books* also begins with the elemental: 'Much magnified and slow motion...a drop of back-lit water splashes into a black pool', (1.1) and then characteristically slips into the textual: 'Pages in a book called the Book of Water are turned - there are drawings of seas, rain, clouds, sleet, snow...illustrations of climate - storms, high winds, hurricanes and tempests'. (1.2, 1.5)

5. As does the opening chapter of *Genesis* and the start of the *The Tempest's* second scene, the film then cuts to an image of the creator who both raises and calms the storm - a nude John Gielgud in a Roman bath - and we hear the sound of his first words. (Fig. 1) Greenaway irreverently



Figure 1

improvises upon his originals here by construing the creation as a form of childish bathtub play - swinging on a trapeze, manipulating a toy boat, peeing into the water and masturbating. <sup>7</sup> This mode of origination soon gives way to verbal invention, first spoken and then beautifully calligraphed with water that turns to ink dipped by the quill pen of a Renaissance humanist scholar-playwright sitting in his compact study. (Fig. 2) Greenaway frequently alternates among different representations of the creative process: divine magic as his Prospero roams the island, make-believe play as he stands in his bath, literary art as he writes at his desk. These alternatives derive from *The Tempest's* characterisation of Prospero's Faustus-like control over nature and spirits, his delight in playing with his toys and his victims, and his absorption with reading books and writing masques. But they also resonate with the Bible's personification of a God who commands the element and the angels, who teases his offspring mercilessly, and who fabricates nature and people out of words:



Figure 2

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

([Psalm 139:14-16](#) [AV])

The creator makes a world in a book by writing words and pictures, but that world only comes alive when it is read by a comprehending reader. The ability to read and to understand his magic

books is, according to Caliban, the source of Prospero's power. Likewise the wisdom and grace of both Hebrew and Christian prophets often derives from what they can read with comprehension, whether it be the handwriting on the wall, the book of the law or the parables of the master. <sup>8</sup> This incarnation of the word into flesh recurs at frequent intervals when Greenaway conjures up his elaborate images of the 24 books that have accompanied Prospero to the island. In both verbal description and through computer animation, plants grow, animals walk off the page, renderings of buildings pop-up into models, engravings turn into cartoons:

*End Plants:* Looking like a log of ancient, seasoned wood...It is a thick block of a book with varnished wooden covers that have been at one time, and probably still are, inhabited by minute tunnelling insects. The pages are stuffed with pressed plants and flowers, corals and seaweeds, and around the book hover exotic butterflies, dragonflies, fluttering moths, bright beetles and a cloud of golden pollen-dust...

(p.21)

The idea of the book itself as a source of life is celebrated with Rabelaisian, Cervantine abandon.

6. The animated books occupy a realm intermediate between print and motion picture. As *Genesis'* god writes his creation of the world within a book of his own creation, and as Prospero produces his world in the books he reads and writes, Greenaway mounts multiple displays of the generation of *Prospero's Books* within the film itself. The opening sequence of production credits conventionally signifies the beginning of a movie, even if it occurs, as it does here, several minutes into the actual projection. As the magically robed Prospero walks with a procession of his minions through Escher-like arcades in an endless horizontal travelling shot, the sets and the characters out of which the fictional story will be constructed appear like Dramatis Personae. Superimposed on them are the titles, which likewise introduce those who have constructed the film. Reminiscent of earlier shots in which the team pulling Prospero's study look like a crew of grips moving a set across a studio floor (12.1) (Fig. 3) and spirits holding mirrors that reflect



Figure 3

Prospero's imaginings look like technicians with light baffles, the bustling crowds of naked helpers surrounding Prospero suggest the characters listed in the credits performing their duties during the actual film shoot. <sup>9</sup>

7. The opening section of *Genesis* tells several different stories of the origin of humans. Male and female are spoken into existence in chapter 1 ([Genesis 1](#)), Adam is moulded from dust and Eve is taken from his rib in chapter 2 ([Genesis 2](#)), and in chapter 5 ([Genesis 5](#)), 'the generations of Adam' make their first appearance on the pages of a prior book. Likewise, Greenaway represents yet another kind of creation in the opening credits of *Prospero's Books*: intertextual reproduction. In the foreground of the marathon travelling shot, books are placed on tables and plinths and are passed from one naked spirit character to another. They open the books, read and reflect upon them briefly and then pass them on, often with an exchange of significant glances, suggesting a transmission of texts across space and through time - the weave implied in the etymology of 'text' itself. (Fig. 4)
- Greenaway ascribes to Prospero intertextual methods of reference, repetition and parody approved in the Renaissance by both the classical tradition of imitation and the biblical tradition of typological repetition:

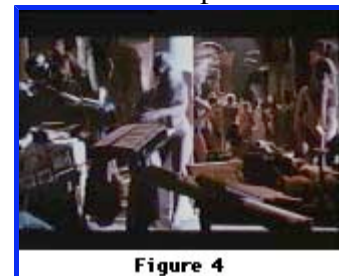


Figure 4

In the building of his palaces, the stocking of his libraries, and in the fashioning of the indigenous spirits into classical allegories, he has quoted extant buildings, paintings and books...

(pp. 12-13)

Greenaway himself practises these methods in thousands of details as well as in the overall plan of making a postmodern version of a Shakespearean classic - a creative offspring that's also a critical commentary on the original. The very use of the film convention of a second start in the credits sequence draws attention to Shakespeare's dramatic device of making the opening shipwreck scene an action-packed but indecipherable prelude to its explanation in act 1 scene 2. And Greenaway quotes as liberally from modern film classics - especially Shakespearean films - as from traditional literature, painting and architecture. [10](#)

8. As the 'auteur' Greenaway breeds his creation from books, so did his sources, the author Shakespeare and the multiple authors of the Bible. *The Tempest* includes a pastiche of quotations from Montaigne, from sea voyage accounts, from Vergil's *Aeneid*. One of Prospero's Books is 'An Alphabetical Inventory of the Dead...It contains all the names of the dead who have lived on earth. The first name is Adam and the last is Susannah, Prospero's wife...' (20) Greenaway's fictional source seems to be modelled on one of the actual sources of *Genesis*, '...the book of the generations of Adam...' ([Genesis 5:1](#)). These sources are discoverable not only through modern scholarly research on the Documentary Hypothesis but in the text's own internal citations. [11](#)
9. Intertextual generation succeeds by breeding as well as inheritance. According to Greenaway, his Prospero is partly modelled upon the Renaissance scientist and humanist, Athanasius Kircher: 'In this film, Prospero is like Kircher a book making machine...turning books into more books....' (12.1) In addition to Greenaway's film, *The Tempest* has spawned stories like Poe's 'Masque of the Red Death' and movies like *Forbidden Planet*. The Bible is the prime example of such book making machines - the source of countless copies, translations, commentaries, interpretations, Testaments, Midrashes, Talmuds and Summae, as well as artistic and literary offspring modelled upon it: illuminated manuscripts, stained glass windows, frescoes and paintings, epics, novels, poems, plays and films. This is why William Blake and, following him, Northrop Frye, refer to the 'Old and New testaments as the Great Code of literature and art'. [12](#) They contain both the genetic 'template' and the key to unlock meanings in their descendants.
10. When Greenaway explicates the generative function of the 'template' in the screen image of *The Book of Mythologies*, he decodes the symbol's encrypted meanings and thereby reproduces more text from it on paper. In doing so, he engages in the dual aspects of textual reproduction exhibited by the book which contains the gloss, *Prospero's Books: A Film of Shakespeare's The Tempest*. This book is not just a screenplay but also a commentary on the film, its child as well as its parent. Richly designed and beautifully manufactured, the book is replete with post production stills as well as preproduction sketches to guide the film producers. While the film is bookish, the book, largely organised as a storyboard sequence of shots, is filmic.
11. The book is also divided into larger sections delineating three parts of the film, derived from Greenaway's reading of a tripartite structure in Shakespeare's script. He calls them Past, Present and Future. Whether or not he was influenced by it, this division resembles that proposed in an essay on *The Tempest* by John Bender:

*The Tempest* divides past, present, and future as clearly as dramatic art allows. In the past Prospero lost his authority through absorption in supernatural arts; in the present he regains his Dukedom by employing those arts at the apogee of their force-only to abandon them in favor of 'nobler reason'; in the future he will contemplate death and final judgement. Having attained Prudence and being an old man, he finds that 'Every third thought shall be my grave'. [13](#)

### III. The Past

12. The section that Greenaway labels The Past '...deals largely with Prospero relating his history both to us, the audience, and to Miranda, his fifteen year old daughter. It represents in a sense "the story so far". As many narrative events happen in this first part as in all the other parts of the script put together. The story is quick-moving and episodic...' (p. 37) This description also applies to Prospero's retrospective exposition of events sunk in 'the dark backward and abyss of time' in the second scene of *The Tempest*, (1.2.1-374) and to [Genesis 2:5-11:10](#), the section labelled by the editors of the New English Bible as 'The Beginnings of History'.
13. The protagonist and chief speaker in these sections is a benevolent ruler whose subjects rebel and threaten him. In *Genesis*, the antagonists are the ambitious Eve in league with the serpent, who convinces credulous Adam to steal forbidden fruit; Cain, a jealous and murderous brother; the violent contemporaries of Noah affiliated with offspring of the sons of god and the daughters of men; and the aspiring citizens of Babel who want to make a name for themselves by building a tower to heaven. In *The Tempest*, Prospero tells Miranda how his lack of vigilance '...in my false brother awaked an evil nature' (1.2.92-3), who then '...new created/The creatures that were mine, I say, or changed them,/or else new formed them' (1.2.81-2) so that in league with Alonso he took control of the state. Prospero also recalls the revolt of Caliban, the island's primitive inhabitant whose brutish nature he had attempted to elevate until the monster sought to retake control of the island by raping Prospero's daughter and peopling it with his own offspring.
14. The second stage of this past history unfolds as the protagonist punishes the rebels, indulging a vengeful rage and threatening to undo his own acts of creation with reversions to disorder. God drives Adam and Eve out of the garden he planted for them into a barren landscape, he sends Cain wandering, and he returns the cosmos to chaos with the Flood, a forerunner of other tempests he'll unleash against those he wants to discipline - at the Red Sea, on the way to Tarsis, at Galilee, and in the final days. He also creates a mental tempest when he renders the universal human language into a babble of incomprehensible dialects. Prospero reestablishes his dominance as 'A God of Power' (1.2.10) and 'a prince of power' (1.2.55), by throwing Caliban out of his home, forcing him to live by the sweat of his brow, and reducing the language that he taught him into profitless cursing, by repeatedly storming at Ariel that he'll be returned to the oak that imprisoned him, and by tormenting his countrymen with the prolonged ordeal of death by drowning.
15. The horror of that ordeal is vividly conveyed in one of the Bible's longest pericopes, the description of flood waters rising and destroying all life on earth. ([Genesis 7:1-23](#)) This horror is relieved by an equally lively and extended description of the chosen remnant's salvation, with its anxious waiting, its raven, dove and olive branch, and its account of debarkation onto dry land. ([Genesis 7:24-8:22](#)) God seals that experience with a vow to all living things never again to send such destruction and with the rainbow, which signals the end of the flood and the blessing of renewed fertility. It also marks the restoration of a link between heaven and earth: 'My bow I set in the cloud,/Sign of the covenant/between myself and earth./ When I cloud the sky over the earth/the bow shall be seen in the cloud'. ([Genesis 9:13-14](#))
16. This language of deliverance is echoed in Prospero's pledge to Miranda, who weeps with compassion for the suffering of those in the wreck: '...there is no soul,/No not so much perdition as an hair/Betid to any creature in the vessel...' (1.2.29-31) His words echo Paul's words of reassurance to the frightened sailors on board ship in a tempest near Malta: 'Remember not a hair of your heads will be lost', ([Acts 27:34](#)) which in turn echo Jesus' words of comfort to a crowd at Galilee: '...even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Have no fear...' ([Luke 12:7](#)) **14** Upon completing the deliverance of Ferdinand and Miranda from his rage in the fourth act, Prospero also presents them with the spectacle of a rainbow and a blessing of fertility in the

wedding masque. In *Prospero's Books*, Greenaway adds a sequence which celebrates the end of the storm with specific allusions to the Noah story. As Miranda awakens from sleep: 'A songbird begins to hesitantly whistle after the rain...below Miranda's bedroom window...water runs along the stems and leaves of tall grasses...water-droplets form at the tip of a leaf and slowly drop into darkness'. (25.2-27.6) He also strengthens Shakespeare's suggestion of a link among the sinking ship, Noah's ark and the 'stinking butt' of a boat which delivers Prospero and baby Miranda to the island, by superimposing her tumbling and turning in sleep with the thrashing of the sailors underwater (18.5-21.1) and by making the grounded vessel land up against the windows of Prospero's library as if it were Mt. Ararat. (22.1)

17. God's shift from vengeance to partial forgiveness of his wayward children also concludes the story of Adam and Eve, as he clothes their nakedness, the story of Cain as he provides the outcast with a protective mark, and the story of Babel, as he refrains from violence against those he punishes. This parallel pattern of modulation from disappointment to rage and then to rescue and reconsideration lead, at the end of the 'beginnings of history' in *Genesis* and of the 'Past' sections of *The Tempest* and *Prospero's Books*, to a new point of view and narrative style. [15](#)

## IV. The Present

18. The next section of all three works reads like heroic romance rather than myth. Human characters come forward and take on individuality while the god figure moves into the background of the story, limiting his direct involvement in events, showing less raw power, and behaving in a more deliberate and controlled manner. God develops amore sophisticated way of carrying out his purposes, perhaps as a result of regret after the flood:

When the Lord smelt the soothing odour [of Noah's burnt offering], he said within himself, 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, however evil his inclinations may be from his youth upwards. I will never again kill every living creature as I have just done'.

[\(Genesis 8:21\)](#)

Rather than creating, destroying and recreating, he begins to work by selective breeding, conditioning, and teaching. To go beyond the accomplishments of the sixth day and improve the strain of humanity, he uses longer intervals of time as the instrument of evolution.

19. In contrast to the asexual and linguistic modes of creation used by God, these next sections present genesis as sexual reproduction. J.P. Fokkelman observes that the first book of the Bible's 'overriding concern [is] life-survival-offspring-fertility-continuity'. [16](#) Appropriate to a nomadic herding culture, the stories of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, involve both God and human in a project of selective breeding to produce a genetic strain that will bring forth a tribe, a nation and eventually an empire based on bloodline. This is the line of David and Solomon, at whose court, most scholars agree, the earliest versions of Biblical texts were codified and written. [17](#) It's likely this Davidic court shared dynastic preoccupations over origins, legitimacy and lineage with the Stuart divine right monarchy for which Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*. [18](#)
20. To develop the right stock, both God and Prospero employ two cultivator's methods. The first is inbreeding. God distinguishes his preferred line of descent with something resembling a genetic marker:

When Abraham was 99 years old, the lord appeared to him and said...I will make you exceedingly fruitful;...I will make nations out of you and kings spring from you...For your part ...you and your descendants after you generation by generation...shall circumcise the

flesh of your foreskin and it shall be the sign of the covenant between us.

[\(Genesis 17:1-11\)](#)

The subsequent stories of the patriarchs centre on the drama of selecting the chosen over the rejected offspring by virtue of consanguinity. Isaac's line prevails over Ishmael's, whose mother Hagar was of different class and family origin from Sarah, Abraham's step sister. [\(Genesis 20:12\)](#) Even though he's the younger brother, Jacob is preferred to Esau who marries a local Hittite woman rather than his own kin. Jacob's mother, Rebekah, steers him northward to mate with a first cousin, daughter of her brother. [\(Genesis 28:1-3\)](#) And the scandalous story of the massacre of Schechem by the sons of Jacob for the rape of their sister Dinah reinforces a warning against exogamy. [\(Genesis 34\)](#) Prospero inflicts rigorous punishment upon Caliban as well as upon Stephano for their attempts to breed exogamously with his daughter. After assurances about the purity of both Miranda's mother and her grandmother, in Ferdinand he finds a scion of close and distinguished lineage, whose sister Claribel's competing claims of inheritance have been disposed of by marriage to the heathen King of Tunis. In *Prospero's Books*, Greenaway depicts the change from Prospero's role of creator to that of breeder at the beginning of the 'Present' section of the film by placing the encounter in a pastoral setting and dressing him in a bishop's outfit, bearing a crozier instead of a wand.

21. Pastoral suggests romance as well as sheepherding, and the Present section of all three texts includes a major love interest. A second criterion for breeding is vigour and fertility. Abraham is tough enough to defeat four kings in battle when he first arrives in Canaan [\(Genesis 14\)](#) and he avoids the allure of Sodom. Sarah is so beautiful that Pharaoh and King Abimelech court her. She's also fiercely jealous, and has a sense of humour. The fact that this couple have their first child together in their nineties not only demonstrates God's miraculous power over nature, it makes their offspring particularly precious as the distillation of a lifelong love.
22. The human tends to supplant the divine perspective on reproduction as the patriarchal stories unfold. Though parents continue to select mates for their children, the moment of encounter, love at first sight, is dramatically emphasised in the texts. With Isaac, the lengthy discovery of the beautiful bride occurs through the eyes of Abraham's anonymous servant [\(Genesis 24:10-60\)](#), but Jacob's first meeting with Rachel at the well immediately conveys the power of physical passion within the framework of family continuity:

While [Jacob] was talking [to the herdsmen] Rachel came up with her father's flock, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, with Laban's flock, he stepped forward, rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered Laban's sheep. He kissed Rachel, and was moved to tears. He told her that he was her father's kinsman and Rebecca's son; so she ran and told her father.

[\(Genesis 29:9-13\)](#)

Ferdinand's first entry into Miranda's presence, accompanied by wondrous music, produces a heavenly sensation in both of them - 'I might call him/A thing divine, for nothing natural/ I ever saw so noble'. 'Most sure the goddess/On whom these airs attend', (1.2.418-22) - before the conversation also quickly turns to fathers. In *Prospero's Books*, this meeting takes place in a setting of vegetative fertility - tall wheat field, soft music and golden light, the air redolent with pollen and seeds - 'whorls of cornchaff'. It begins with a turn of the pages of *The Book of End-Plants* and concludes with *The Book of Love*, featuring Ariel as Cupid.

23. These love-scenes are reminiscent of the innocent sexual encounter of Adam and Eve - 'Now they were both naked, the man and his wife, but they had no feeling of shame towards one another'. [\(Genesis 2:25\)](#) That early experiment in perfecting humanity through male parthenogenesis

aborted in various ways, but it did set the pattern of triangular tension among parents, child and spouse: 'that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and the two become one flesh'. ([Genesis 2:24](#)) In order to compensate the parent for loss, the children must sacrifice. In order to qualify for the benefit, they must pass tests. Though Adam and Eve failed to do both in the patriarchal section of *Genesis*, all three parties to the transaction, parent, child and spouse, learn to deal with this intergenerational problem.

24. The children must subordinate the desires for one another and their procreative urges to their obligations to the parents that fostered them. The aged as they wane thereby retain some control over and protection from the youth who succeed them. God drives this lesson home with Abraham, his first founding father, first by making him wait so long before breeding the promised child, and then by demanding Isaac back after they have bonded. ([Genesis 22](#)) This cruel and risky trick has several beneficial results. It intensifies Abraham's feeling of love for his son, it reinforces his fear of God's authority, it strengthens his gratitude that God didn't follow through on his demand, and it reassures a deity still skittish after what happened in prehistory that he hasn't spoiled his chosen successor.
25. In the case of Abraham's feisty grandson Jacob, God challenges him directly only with a brief wrestling bout, but the young man's father-in-law Laban takes over the role of patriarchal tester. After welcoming his nephew with open arms, he too plays cruelly with his nephew's emotions, demanding seven years hard labour for Rachel's hand in marriage and then substituting his older daughter Leah in the wedding bed. ([Genesis 29:20-28](#)) Jacob works another seven years to get his choice, but Laban cheats him out of the flocks he has rightfully bred for himself. Only by proving that he has the patience and restraint as well as the cleverness, mettle and generative prowess to overcome these obstacles, does Jacob gain his father-in-law's blessing and his right to go home with his beloved to become his nation's founder.
26. Ferdinand too must yield to his prospective father-in-law and willingly perform the servile labour of moving logs to acknowledge Prospero's control. Doing so distinguishes him from the upstart Caliban who carries out the same tasks as a slave. This discipline also corrects Ferdinand's misstep in prematurely anticipating his own father's death and his early, easy accession to the throne. (1.2.429-431) The spectacle of Ferdinand's suffering causes Miranda to transfer her love from her father to him. Like Rachel, who steals her father's gods and escapes with Jacob in secret, Miranda repeatedly violates Prospero's precepts (3.1.36-7; 58-9) and takes the initiative to propose marriage herself. Her father also imposes the ordeal on Ferdinand to test the prince's commitment to the girl he compares to his many previous flirtations, '... lest too light winning make the prize light'. (1.2.453) Like Laban when he catches up with the couple ([Genesis 31:39-41](#)), he expresses concern about the future treatment of his child, but also the bottomless need for compensation that later surfaces in his shared grieving with Alonso for the daughters they both have lost to sons-in-law. (5.1.146-8) Accepting the pain of this loss is a parental test, shared by God with all mothers and fathers in the Bible.
27. God and Prospero both offer those who successfully pass their qualifying tests - the selected or 'chosen' ones - a graphic vision of the future with a promise of fertility and prosperity as a premium for distinguishing themselves from those who are rejected. After Abraham displays his willingness to sacrifice his son, an angel of the lord appears to him:

called...inasmuch as you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will bless you abundantly and greatly multiply your descendants until they are as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the sea-shore.

[\(Genesis 22:15-17\)](#)

Jacob's courtship of Rachel is framed by visions at Beth-El:



He dreamt that he saw a ladder which rested on the ground with its top reaching to heaven and angels of God were going up and down upon it. The lord was standing beside him and said, 'I am the lord the God of your father Abraham, the God of Isaac. This land I give to you and your descendants. They shall be countless as the dust upon the earth....

([Genesis 28:12-18](#))

...Israel shall be your name...Be fruitful and increase as a nation; a host of nations shall come from you/ and Kings shall spring from your body.'

([Genesis 35:10-11](#))

Prospero apologise for his severe treatment of Ferdinand by promising a worthy reward: 'All thy vexations / were but trials of thy love, and thou hast strangely stood the test. Here, afore heaven, I ratify this my richgift'. [19](#) The gift is his daughter but also the vision of deliverance, fertility and prosperity in the masque, linked by a rainbow to Jacob's ladder and Noah's flood.

28. Following the vision of parental acceptance and bounty, the young man wishes to go no further:

Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Truly the Lord is in this place...this is no other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven'.

([Genesis 28:16](#))

Ferdinand: Let me live here ever  
So rare a wondered father and a wife  
Makes this place paradise.

(4.1.122-124)

Ferdinand gives himself over fully to enjoying his father in law's gift - the product of his art that Prospero has been rehearsing with Ariel while carrying out his other projects. Though the playwright-father had insisted on total attention as the curtain went up, Ferdinand's rapt appreciation, along with the 'hollow and confused' noise of the clowns, causes Prospero to interrupt the performance himself. Rather than reinforce the masque's vision of a timeless, winter-free return to Eden, he abruptly dispels it, though with a kind acknowledgement of his son-in-law's discomfiture: 'You do look, my son, in a moved sort./As if you were dismayed. Be cheerful sir....' (4.1.146-7) [20](#) The very success of the project marked by the celebratory masque - establishing a dynasty - signifies not permanence but transformation. While Ferdinand and Miranda take on the world, he must relinquish it. Coming in a flash, this familiar realisation about genesis and generation, fulfilment and completion, nevertheless is disorienting for young and old alike:

Our revels now are ended...  
...the great globe itself,  
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. Sir I am vexed.  
Bear with my weakness, my old brain is troubled.  
Be not disturbed with my infirmity.

The transformation from creator-god-father to prospective grandfather leads to Prospero's abjuring his magic, freeing his slave-spirits, and releasing his hold on the humans under his spell. When he crosses this threshold - what Greenaway calls 'the central platform of Prospero's machinations', (44.14) - he passes from the Present into the Future. In *Prospero's Books*, Gielgud stops writing and saying the parts of the other characters, and for the first time they speak with their own voices. The completion of the Ferdinand and Miranda romance plot in *The Tempest* parallels the conclusion of the patriarchal chapters of *Genesis*. This is the end of Jacob's personal quest, when he is renamed Israel, the progenitor of the future nation. From hereon God recedes further from his creation, removing himself completely from the narrative as speaker and player and standing outside of events as providence. Though Joseph is the protagonist of the longest story in *Genesis*, God never addresses him directly. [21](#)

## V. The Future

29. Parallels between *Genesis*' Joseph and Shakespeare's Prospero are detailed and striking. [22](#) Linguistically they are linked by the roots of 'prosperity' - 'And the Lord was with Joseph and he was a man that prospered...And his master saw that ...the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand'. ([Genesis 39:2-3](#)) [23](#) In *Prospero's Books*, the connection between Joseph and Prospero

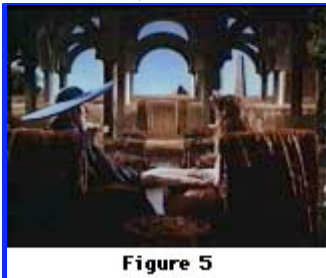


Figure 5

is strongly marked by the otherwise inexplicable insertion of a pyramid and obelisk into the island landscape. [24](#) (Fig. 5) Prospero carries out his plot from the pyramid's balcony as he looks down on his victims assembled in front of its doorway. Thematically, the stories of Joseph and Prospero bring to conclusion a problem repeatedly elaborated in preceding texts: jealousy between brothers. In *Genesis* that topic is introduced with Cain and Abel, further explored in the relationships between Noah's sons, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael and Esau and Jacob. According to Fokkelman:

Finally in the last cycle of the book the psychology of crime, guilt, remorse and compunction among brothers is worked out much more thoroughly, under the direction of the master manipulator Joseph....the theme of brotherhood, a metonymy for the bond that links humanity, is handled with growing complexity from the beginning of *Genesis* to the end.

(53)

That theme, with its Biblical resonances, is also central to many of Shakespeare's plays preceding *The Tempest*, including *As You Like It*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *King Lear* and *Hamlet*. What Claudius calls the 'primal eldest curse' drives Antonio to plot with Alonso to kill the rightful Duke Prospero and drives Sebastian in turn to plot with Antonio to kill his brother Alonso, just as Joseph's brothers plot to kill the distinctively robed brother favoured by his father.

30. Joseph starts out as 'that dreamer' ([Genesis 37:19](#)), a person with true visions but lacking enough prudence to anticipate the resentment of those who don't share his gifts. Like Prospero, who, 'neglect[s]worldly ends, all dedicated/To closeness and the bettering of my mind' 'rapt with secret studies' in the liberal arts. (1.2.89-90) Joseph is at first oblivious to the reality of his political situation. Both he and Prospero 'awaked an evil nature' (91-3) in their brothers and as a result, suffered usurpation, exile and imprisonment. Joseph's brothers steal him from his father's favour, plan to kill him, and end up imprisoning him in a pit and then selling him into slavery and exile in Egypt. Prospero's brother and his cronies remove him from his dukedom, try to kill him and

allow him to be abandoned at sea in a leaky boat which ends up marooned on the island.

31. Rudely awakened from innocence and forced to cope for survival in their places of exile, both Joseph and Prospero learn some practical wisdom. As a convict in Pharaoh's jail, Joseph goes from a dreamer to an interpreter of dreams, using his intelligence as well as his intuition. Though he insists that interpretative power comes from God ([Genesis 40:8](#)), in proclaiming that Pharaoh's two dreams of the fat sheaves and cows being devoured by the lean ones are really one ([Genesis 43:25](#)), he uses human analytical skill to penetrate surfaces by discovering abstractions. By predicting that lean years will consume fat ones he expresses the homespun foresight of the ant to the grasshopper. Prospero has fewer books after his sea voyage, those discreetly selected for him by his counsellor Gonzalo, and once outside the confines of the library, he finds enough applicable information in them to gain some control over his environment.
32. Wearing his robe and consulting his books, Prospero teaches the ignorant Caliban to speak and releases Ariel from imprisonment. At the same time he enslaves them appropriates their power to rule the elements. After Joseph bests Pharaoh's magicians and sages ([Genesis 41:8](#)), he is entrusted to rule over all of Egypt. Dressed in fine clothing and wearing a signet ring, he delivers the people from famine while divesting them of their wealth. By the time fate - in the form of famine and storm - lands their lost brothers in their places of exile, both have exercised their acumen long enough to have risen to the status of 'Prince of Power'.
33. Having attained power, each undertakes the godlike project: to right wrong with vengeance, instruction and forgiveness. Jacob's sons arrive in Joseph's Egypt desperate for grain and disoriented by travel. Prospero's brother and his companions wander the island, waterlogged, bereaved and exhausted. Both parties have been partially rescued by the exiled brother and find themselves at his mercy - that is, within his power. One source of that power is immediate knowledge. He recognises them because he remembers the wrong done him. They don't know him because he's disguised or invisible, but also because they've repressed the memory of their crimes long past.
34. After harshly accusing the ones he spies on of being spies ([Genesis 42:9](#), *The Tempest* 1.2.456), the hidden brother manipulates the others into a replay of their earlier crimes of conspiracy and rebellion, now within his control. Joseph insists they return home and bring him their brother Benjamin who has stayed behind, thereby once again stealing a youngest preferred son away from their father. He does this, one may infer, to enjoy the revenge of inflicting pain on them, but also to determine whether they have killed his mother's other son and to see whether they are capable of repentance. If so, reenacting the old crime can remind them of what they've forgotten and teach them about the pain it inflicted. Prospero similarly works on the lords by setting up a situation in which the treasonous coup which exiled him is now reenacted by Antonio and Sebastian against his brother, King Alonso. The pain of being betrayed by his own brother - though only half-conscious - and of apparently losing a son awakens Alonso's memory of having betrayed his brother monarch.
35. In a comic replay of another element of their crime - selling him for silver and sneaking him into the caravan of the Midianites - Joseph tricks his brothers with an apparent gift of silver in their bags and then has them arrested for theft. Both elements of this trick recur in *The Tempest's* subplot of Caliban and the clowns, who are first manipulated into hatching a new conspiracy to overthrow Prospero to gain wealth and power and then entrapped with the false delights of a royal wardrobe.
36. Joseph's methods of interrogation activate his brothers' consciences and soon elicit a confession that he overhears:

They said to one another, 'No doubt we deserve to be punished because of our brother, whose suffering we saw; for when he pleaded with us we refused to listen. That is why

these sufferings have come upon us'.

[\(Genesis 42:21\)](#)

This encourages him to take the cat and mouse game further with what may be termed a 'banquet trick'. When the brothers return to Egypt with Benjamin as hostage a few years later, he offers them a resplendent meal, and while their defences are lowered he hides a silver goblet in Benjamin's pack.

37. After they depart, 'Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say "'Why have you repaid good with evil? ..You have done a wicked thing.'" Once opened, Benjamin's pack is found to contain the goblet, and he and his brothers must return to Joseph who accuses him of the theft and threatens to keep him as a slave.
38. Similarly, Prospero surprises the hungry nobles with a lavish buffet after having them led blindly around the island in search of the King's lost son. Watching their approach to the meal from an invisible vantage point above, he instructs Ariel to defecate on the food in the disguise of a harpy and to deliver a tirade expressing Prospero's wrath, exposing the lords' original guilt, threatening eternal perdition and demanding full contrition.
39. This stunt produces the desired effect of repentance in both stories. Joseph's oldest brother Judah is willing to sacrifice himself for the release of Benjamin:

Now my lord, let me remain in place of the boy as your lordship's slave, and let him go with his brothers. How can I return to my father without the boy? I could not bear to see the misery which my father would suffer.

[\(Genesis 44:33-34\)](#)

Alonso falls to the ground acknowledging his crime and willing to give up his own life to return the life of the son that he believes has been taken from him as punishment:

Methought the winds did sing it to me; and the thunder...  
The name of Prosper: it did bass my trespass.  
Therefore my son I' the ooze is bedded; and  
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,  
And with him there lie mudded.

(3.3.96-102)

At this turning point in both stories, the focus shifts to the hidden controlling brother. Each has forced his antagonists to experience the suffering of the victim of fratricide. Each now feels compassion for the repentant criminals. After dismissing his servants, for the moment abjuring his royal powers and distance, Joseph breaks down crying, discloses himself to his brothers' wonderment, forgives them fully and arranges for them and his father to take up residence in Egypt where they will be reunited and provided with land and wealth. So too, after Alonso's repentance, Prospero acknowledges his common humanity with those he has dominated and offers them forgiveness:

...shall not myself  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier moved...  
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury  
Do I take part...They being penitent

The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further.

(5.1.22-30)

These revelations, recognitions, restorations and reconciliations produce an ecstatic happy ending. They also produce a retrospective vindication of all previous confusion and suffering as purposeful contributions to the positive outcome - a theological assertion of the fortunate fall:

Now do not be distressed...that you sold me into slavery there; it was God who sent me ahead of you to save men's lives...to ensure that you will have descendants on earth, and to preserve you all, a great band of survivors.

([Genesis 45:5-8](#))

Was Milan thrust from Milan that his issue  
Should become kings of Naples? O rejoice  
Beyond a common joy and set it down  
With gold on lasting pillars...In one voyage  
...Ferdinand...found a wife  
Where he himself was lost, Prospero his dukedom  
In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves  
When no man was his own.

(5.1.206-213)

This purpose involves more than a conventional comic conclusion in marriage and family reunion. In their projects, Joseph and Prospero are completing the project of God chronicled from beginning to end of *Genesis*. From the very start, God's paradoxical purpose and problem with his creatures / subjects / children was the familiar parental one of maintaining their obedience while granting them freedom. This involves taking risks that often fail - risks that they will overestimate that freedom and try to usurp his power, as in the cases of Adam and Eve, the citizens of Babel or Antonio and Alonso, or that they will try to escape it by subjecting themselves to a more binding rule, as do, say, the citizens of Sodom or Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban. These are failures that God, because of his all-powerful and all-knowing nature, is not well equipped to accept and move beyond. He needs to train and appoint a human viceroy, a 'Son of Man', to replace and represent him as he recedes from direct engagement. Joseph is the first of several Biblical characters to play this rôle.

40. Joseph's alternations between cruel manipulateness and warm acceptance stem from the conflicting requirements of the task. So do Prospero's mood swings between crotchety imperiousness and loving concern for his daughter, his in laws and his earthy and airy spirit-servants. Their success as princes, teachers and parents requires both rule and compassion. Such compassion, as Ariel reminds Prospero, is only possible for a fellow human, who understands the frailties of siblings because they are shared. He needs to be reminded by a non-human spirit that mortality is common to leaders and followers, judges and criminals, because like Joseph, while playing God, he's lost that awareness. The ending of both works require that these viceroys join their subjects in finding 'all of us ourselves/when no man was his own'. (5.1.212-213)
41. If, as *Genesis* proceeds, God is replaced by a mortal ruler, the breeding, instruction, and liberation of that ruler's successors is in turn necessary to replace him when he is gone. *Genesis* concludes with an account of the peaceful death and burial of Joseph along with that of his father, Jacob, and

a lengthy chronicle of the births of Jacob's grandchildren and the blessing he passes on to them. As Prospero changes from a 'god of power' (1.2.10) into a man 'whose old brain is troubled' (4.1), Ferdinand and Miranda change from naïve romantics to chess players who can 'wrangle for a score of kingdoms and still call it fair play', (5.1.174-5) while Caliban changes from an 'abhorred slave' who will 'not any print of goodness take' (1.2.350-352) to a freed 'thing of darkness' who 'will be wise hereafter and seek for grace'. (5.1.294-5)

42. However, apart from the transformations of heartfelt repentances, joyful recognitions, dynastic weddings, providential consolations, and predictions of orderly succession stand Antonio and Sebastian. These unregenerate schemers never apologise, and retain their witty cynicism to the last. In his final judgement scene, Prospero distinguishes 'holy Gonzalo/honourable man...a loyal sir' from the forgetful and frail Alonso who is capable of contrition and repentance, and from Antonio, 'most wicked sir, who to call brother/would even infect my mouth...' (5.1.130-1) Though he forgives the mall, he recognizes that there are people in whom self-interest, cruelty and power-hunger remain ineradicable. His forgiveness of Antonio involves no expectation of redemption or improvement. He, and others like him, must be continually watched and controlled with tactics that appeal to their limited motives.
43. Before he relinquishes political power, Prospero appropriately greets each of these three. He embraces Gonzalo, he commiserates with Alonso, and he frightens Antonio with a display of Machiavellian force and fraud:

I do forgive  
Thy rankest fault - all of them - and require  
My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know  
thou must restore.

(5.1.130)

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.

(5.1.124-8)

By retaining the threat to expose their conspiracy to Alonso, he keeps them in his debt, and as a result of marrying his daughter to the prince of Naples, 'his death will remove Antonio's last link with the ducal power'. [25](#) 'The devil speaks in him!' says Sebastian.

44. This discordant note in the conclusion often troubles commentators. Parallels with the close of *Genesis* help to explain it. Following the recognition-redemption scene and the Pharaoh's welcome of Jacob to Egypt, the earlier story ([Genesis 41:46-57](#)) of Joseph's deliverance of the land during the lean years by distributing grain stored in the fat ones is repeated. But this time the account is more detailed, plausible and ironic. After having accumulated a huge surplus by taxing the peasants during the period of glut, Joseph sells it back to them during the famine - first for all their silver, then for their herds. Finally,

...they came to him again and said, 'My lord, we cannot conceal it from you; our silver is all gone and our herds of cattle are yours. Nothing is left for your lordship but our bodies and our lands... Take us and our land in payment for bread, and we and our land alike will be in

bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed corn to keep us alive, or we shall die and our land will become desert'. So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh...Pharaoh set them to work as slaves from one end of the territory of Egypt to the other.

([Genesis 47:18-22](#))

Joseph's ruthless transformation of Egypt from a feudal to a mercantile society makes it possible for his descendants to expand their numbers at a rate that could never be supported by the nomadic subsistence conditions they lived under in Canaan. His centralisation of authority also guarantees the privileges now granted by the Pharaoh, at least for the foreseeable future. [26](#)

45. The last chapter of *Genesis* contains an equally cynical rerun of the earlier story of fraternal reconciliation which illuminates the concluding episode between brothers in *The Tempest*.

When their father was dead, Joseph's brothers were afraid and said, 'What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us out for all the harm that we did to him?' They therefore approached Joseph with these words: 'In his last words to us before he died, your father gave us this message for you; "I ask you to forgive your brothers' crime and wickedness; I know they did you harm"....But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You meant to do me harm; but God meant to bring good out of it by preserving the lives of many people as we see today. Do not be afraid. I will provide for you and your dependants'.

([Genesis 50:15-21](#))

Given their persistent mistrust and the narrator's tacit but unmistakable disclosure of their bad faith, and given Joseph's canny strategy toward the Egyptians, a close reading suggests that his last utterance of forgiveness is just as guarded as Prospero's forgiveness of Antonio, pieties notwithstanding. [27](#)

46. Machiavellian realism goes together with the prophetic vision of an expanded community tracing itself to an originating family. The nation of Italy, which Prospero foresees through the union of his daughter and Alonso's son, is analogous to the nation of Israel envisioned by Joseph and Jacob on the father's deathbed. Jacob's benevolent blessing of his progeny and his projection of their return to the promised land is filled with predictions of the war and fraternal strife chronicled in Exodus and beyond, where the myth and family romance of *Genesis* is replaced by political history, the genre of discourse in which time bears absolute sway. [28](#) In fact, those future power struggles surface at the moment of blessing, as the son unsuccessfully tries to control his father's determination of precedence among his grandsons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ([Genesis 48:17-20](#)) Prospero promises 'calm seas and auspicious gales' for the voyage home, but it is clear that the new kingdom will experience continuing tensions between aristocratic factions and as a result of the class hatred between courtiers and mariners loudly voiced by the utopian socialist Gonzalo, both at the moment of death in the first scene's storm, and at the concluding moment of miraculous resurrection: 'O look, sir, look, sir, here is more of us!/I prophesied if a gallows were on land/This fellow could not drown'. (5.1.216-220)

## VI. Conclusion

47. *Genesis* means beginnings, emergence, movement into time - from creator to creature, eternity to nature, word to flesh, signifier to signified, order to freedom. The divine gives way to the human, textual reproduction to sexual reproduction, omnipotence fantasies to power politics. *Genesis*, *The Tempest* and *Prospero's Books* all tell the story of an old magician creating a world, seeing it is good, and not so good, fixing it as best he can, and then, with difficulty releasing it from his control.

48. The last long shot of Greenaway's film (91.33) distils this story in an emblematic sequence. Divested now of his Duke's costume as well as of his magician's robe, Prospero addresses the audience directly as the camera dollies in to a close-up: 'Please you draw near...' Following cues in the Shakespearean epilogue, the speaker's voice imperceptively shifts its origin from the fictional character to the actor portraying him to the director of the film and the author of the text, all begging the audience for the indulgence that will 'set me free' and will set them free as well. Greenaway figures this final liberation visually by having the newly released Ariel run through an applauding audience toward the camera as it retreats from the full screen image of the speaker shrinking into the background. When the three year old child-spirit catches up with the moving camera, he vaults over it out of the frame, and as the screen image decomposes into successive grainy stills concluding with 'The End', viewers may imagine him falling into our laps. (Fig. 6)



Figure 6

49. Despite this final symbolic birthing, the film still seems to lack the illusion of life that most people expect from the movies. *Prospero's Books* refuses to create that illusion. Even its musical score and its dances are jerky and repetitive - like a music box's. <sup>29</sup> It has the dead quality of a film considered as such, a celluloid 'print' in a metal box set in flickering motion by the mechanical operation of a projector, each copy and each screening a clone of every other. But this asexual mode of reproduction can also be considered a virtue of the cinematic medium. Deifying the creators, it immortalises the director's plan, the actor's performance, the writer's screenplay. Every detail of Greenaway's baroque texture preserved for minute examination. Gielgud's final performance saved. The works of the Bard once again enshrined. <sup>30</sup> This durability makes all films more like books than like plays.

50. So far as we know, William Shakespeare never wrote a book. The quartos were produced without his permission, and the folio was assembled after his death. Shakespeare made plays, scripts for live performance, among them *The Tempest*. A play differs from a film in that its enactment is more like birth than cloning. Each company of players recreates rather than runs the author's original, with unpredictable, sometimes sublime, sometimes ridiculous, results. This nature of his creation is conspicuously excluded from Greenaway's manifold representations of Shakespeare's work. One way he depicts Prospero's liberation - the liberation of his slaves as well as his self liberation - is in the penultimate scene, where 'Ariel passes [his books] to Prospero - who briefly regards them - then...with gestures that are almost non-chalant... hurls them into the sea' as they spectacularly self-destruct. (91.1, p. 161)(Fig. 7) This sequence reverses the opening scenes of creation, as well as the section of the credits noted earlier, where books are passed from one spirit to another symbolising intertextual reproduction. At this point Greenaway may be expressing an impulse to break free from the constraints of bookish scholarship and filmmaking in favour of organic procreation or live theatre.



Figure 7

As the shot continues, Ariel hands Prospero the last two books in his collection - one the large printed folio volume of Shakespeare's plays and the other a thin manuscript of *The Tempest* in Prospero's own hand. The old man holds them to his chest, hesitates, and then dumps them into the water. 'The books land together on the water and Caliban surfaces - spurting and spouting ...he snatches both books and disappears under the surface'. (91.28) (Fig. 7) In voiceover the narrator says, 'While all the other books have been destroyed we still do have these two, safely fished from the sea'. <sup>31</sup> When he first appeared at the end of Act I, Caliban was pissing and shitting on books because they were the source of power by which Prospero held him in thrall. Now that he's been released, Prospero's Book may serve his ruling interest. A journal of post-colonial studies bears his name.













52. Although his film can be viewed as a repudiation of textuality and bibliolatry, Greenaway allows another option. Books after all, like *Mr. William Shakespeare's Tragedies, Histories and Comedies* and the Book of *Genesis*, and bookish films like *Prospero's Books*, are not necessarily cloned in performance any more than are play scripts. In the minds of those who read with imagination, they procreate sexually, unpredictably, wildly. They age, die and return to life as strange and wondrous progeny.


## Notes










[Click on pictures to view short film segments,  
350K to 1.2 M in size]

Thanks to Elizabeth Brunner for help with research, editing and html.

1. References are to the shot numbers in Greenaway's published screenplay (Greenaway 1991). 
2. I hope to complete a companion article, now in process, about *The Tempest*, *Prospero's Books* and *The Book of Revelation*.  
**Update: November 1998:** The companion essay on the connections between *The Tempest* and the Book of Revelations will appear in my book, *Shakespeare and the Bible* Oxford University Press, 2000. That essay can now be found at  
<http://www.multimedia.calpoly.edu/libarts/smarx/Publications/SB/SB7.html> 
3. Unless otherwise noted, references are to *The New English Bible, Oxford Study Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972. 
4. 'Augustine imagines God's Spirit coming as a storm to disturb the darksome deep and raise its spiritual creature to the enlightenment of grace'. (Walter 1983, 63) 
5. Citations of *The Tempest* are to *The Oxford Shakespeare* edition by Stephen Orgel, Stanley Wells, general editor. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. 
6. This observation is owed to Charlotte Putty. 
7. . Donaldson 1996. Although it moves in an opposite direction, my reading is indebted to several of Donaldson's specific insights and his general discussion of textuality and reproduction. 
8. In the Apocalypse of 4 Ezra, 'God calls Ezra out of a bush...and then dictates twenty four books (Hebrew Scriptures) to be made public and seventy to be kept secret until the last day. Ezra deserves this honour because he has devoted his life to wisdom, to studying the law, and to understanding. Likewise, the books contain the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge; they will be received by the wise among the people'. (Thompson 1990, 22) 
9. They also may figure the angelic spirits surrounding God in Michaelangelo's Sistine creation. 
10. For instance, the crowds of spirits, the metamorphoses, the animation blending with photography in Max Rhinehardt's *A Midsummernight's Dream*, the metacinematic explorations of film techniques in Olivier's *Henry V*, the uses of Renaissance paintings as models for sets and costumes in the BBC Shakespeare series and the repeated focus on period books and scientific instruments in Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* and *Otello*. 

11. Examples abound in both old and new testaments, e.g. [Josh 10:13](#) 'And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the book of Jasher?'; [Numbers 21:14](#): 'Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon'; [1Kgs 14:19](#): 'And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred, and how he reigned, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel'; [Mat 1:1](#): 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham'. The Documentary Hypothesis states that most books of the Bible are compounded of several documents produced by different authors and editors over an extended period of time. ☞
12. See Frye 1982. ☞
13. See Bender 1979, 251. ☞
14. These allusions are briefly noted by Battenhouse 1964, 20. ☞
15. The 'beginnings of history' model makes a partial reappearance later in *Genesis* in the story of the catastrophe inflicted on Sodom and Gomorrah and the deliverance of Lot and his daughters ([Genesis 18:16-30](#)), but there the emphasis lies on Abraham's intercessive efforts in a competition between divine and human perspectives as proof of his qualification to carry out God's mission. ☞
16. See Alter and Kermode 1987, 41. ☞
17. See Friedman 1989, 33-50. ☞
18. See Kernan 1995, 77-82. ☞
19. In *Prospero's Books*, this pledge is presented in a beautiful transition linking it to the Alonso plotline, as Ferdinand appears on the steps of the Library atrium, naked except for a loincloth, exhausted and wounded, and Miranda holds him, her dress exposing her shoulders, in the posture of a Pieta. As she purifies his wounds with a sponge, erotically arousing herself and him, he restrains her from touching him further as Prospero demands that he leave her virginity intact until the marriage is solemnised, while animated pornographic books flash across the screen to illustrate his warning against illicit sexuality ☞
20. He similarly qualifies Miranda's admiration at the last demonstration of his orchestrating powers - the recognition scene in 5.2 - when she says, 'O Brave New World that has such people in it', and he answers 'New to you'. ☞
21. The deity's retreat from Joseph and his world is highlighted by God's brief direct address to Jacob, telling him to accept the invitation to join Joseph in Egypt ([Genesis 46:2-5](#)). This pattern is not carried forward in the later books of the Bible. God reenters history as the spirit of the nation in Exodus. ☞
22. To my knowledge, Battenhouse is the only critic to remark upon them. 'Prospero simulating the workings of providence...arranges tempests and trials, deliverances and miracles, in order to teach through his magic-world the truths he has learned from history at large. For how came he to this island in the first place? "By providence divine", he tells Miranda...he was got rid of because his jealous rivals had no sympathy for a studious dreamer. But in faraway Egypt Joseph used his arts to bring benefits - first to inhabitants of that land, and then to his own brother when *The Tempests* of life brought them to Egypt. When these brothers arrived Joseph's strategy, in fact, was much like Prospero's. First he confounded them with tricks, in order to make them remorseful; and then

he revealed himself as miraculously their benefactor. His final message was much the same as Prospero's: Virtue is nobler than vengeance; divine providence has been at work in all that has happened; therefore joye'. (20) 

23. To capture the verbal echo, this passage is cited from the 1560 Geneva Bible, probably the one Shakespeare was most familiar with. 
24. Greenaway doesn't acknowledge the analogy to Joseph; in fact he says the pyramids '...have a much more exaggerated slope than would be expected of true Egyptian pyramids - like pyramids...that have been constructed by an antiquarian like Prospero who obtained his knowledge from books, not first-hand observation.' (44.1) But in the film, they look Egyptian, as does the obelisk. 
25. See Orgel 1987, 55. 
26. Joseph also displays a shrewd enough understanding of the economic and political role of religion not to alienate the priests and to use them to balance the power of the king: '...but Joseph did not buy the land which belonged to the priests; they had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on this, so that they had no need to sell their land'. ([Genesis 47:18-22](#)) 
27. The final forgiveness and suppression of Caliban and the clowns corresponds to the brothers' anxiety after the death of their father and Joseph's assurance that he won't punish them further as long as they stay in line. ([Genesis 50:15](#)) 
28. See Marx 1995. 
29. Donaldson connects this quality specifically with the appearance of computer animation that he sees alluded to throughout the book and film. 
30. Donaldson reads the shrinking image of Prospero on screen as 'a permanent authorising presence', since he 'seems to suffuse the space; he has become one with the point of origin of the image, the point of convergence of a perspectival space that emanates from his unchanging simulacrum'. 
31. Connecting this voiceover with the fact that 'as Ferdinand and Miranda are joined together just before the final shots of the film, the text of the first Folio *Tempest* (not the manuscript Prospero has been writing) unscrolls as an overlay on the screen in large gilt letters', Donaldson concludes that '*Prospero's Books* ends in a series of powerful images that remystify the book as the inscription of an originating discourse that is both artistic and magical'. I experience the artificiality of the film text, like that of the biblical text, neither as self-undercutting nor as authoritarian mystification, but instead, like a puppet show's, as a prompt to interpretative co-creation. 

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