Charisma “doth suffer a sea-change”: Prospero, Max Weber and Routinization in Shakespeare’s
*The Tempest*.

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The subject of authority in The Tempest is well-trod territory. Harold Bloom in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* calls the subject of authority the play’s “mysterious preoccupation.” In the last quarter-century, the great preoccupation for many critics of *The Tempest* has been to describe a number of the play’s elements as arising from recognizable themes of colonialism, in this case the colonial authority of England, whose endeavors in the Americas and elsewhere left their mark on the cultural material of its day, including Shakespeare’s play. In *Power On Display*, Leonard Tennenhouse offers perhaps the most compelling interpretation, suggesting that the romances were influenced by contemporary anxieties about authority felt in the English monarchy. Tennenhouse argues that the romances represent an attempt to contain the subversive notion set forth in Puritan tracts that the natural family (with its *pater familias*) constitutes a sovereign unit wholly outside the influence of the crown. This containment in the romances, according to Tennenhouse, is achieved by showing the disruption of the erstwhile happy family portrait in the opening of the plays to be the result of an overly paternalistic instinct to maintain the harmony of the familial unit. Leontes’ overbearing paternal jealousy in *The Winter’s Tale* results in the loss of Perdita and Hermione, as well as the death of Mamillius. Cymbeline’s paternalism interferes with his patriarchal duties when he banishes Imogen’s worthy suitor, Posthumus. And in *The Tempest*, Prospero, “Like a good parent,” entrusts Antonio with the run of his state, a decision which ultimately precipitates the prospect of the rightful heirs of Milan and Naples—Miranda and Ferdinand—to be disinherited (I, ii, 94). “Disbanding the royal family,” Tennenhouse explains, “thus allows Shakespeare to stage miraculous scenes of recovery” (179). These scenes of recovery, furthermore, are “appropriated as testimony to an authority that is outside of and superior to the natural family,” working to affirm patriarchy rather than paternalism through metaphysical
ordination (179). Excluding *The Tempest*, this theme of recovery is quite clear. Whether it is Diana in *Pericles*, Jupiter in *Cymbeline* or Hermione’s miraculous resurrection in *The Winter’s Tale*, we notice a distinctly metaphysical element, i.e. “an authority…outside of and superior to the natural family,” ordaining the recovery of authority rooted in the monarchy rather than the father.

Tennenhouse seems to be on far less stable ground, however, when trying to make the same claim about *The Tempest*. As evidence of the metaphysical underpinnings of *The Tempest*’s “recovery scene,” Tennenhouse can only offer that Ferdinand’s lines, “…I have/Recev’d a second life; and second father/This lady [Miranda] makes him to me,” declare “a metaphysical logic at work through…the play” (*Temp.* V, i, 194-6, Tenn. 184). ¹ Even alone this statement is unconvincing, but when placed in conversation with the other romances, whose metaphysical qualities steadily increase toward their respective “recovery scenes,” this notion of metaphysical ordination of patriarchy in *The Tempest* becomes even less likely. Instead of working toward the grandest metaphysical display located at the end of the play, *The Tempest* rather tips its hand early, staging Prospero’s tempest in the very first scene. Neither does the final scene seem to be the overt recovery of the monarch/patriarch that Tennenhouse imagines. The marriage of Miranda to Ferdinand, in fact, guarantees that Prospero’s dukedom will be reduced to a fiefdom under Naples after Prospero’s death. Since Prospero’s “Every third thought shall be [his] grave,” that death, moreover, seems close at hand.

By cherry-picking minute details in the play and placing them within the its historical context as Tennenhouse here has done, we are blinded to the fact that a different sociological model, which does not strictly hold to a method of cultural materialism, might better help to

explain the implications about authority made within *The Tempest*. We lose our perception of how the play’s trajectory, while seemingly uneventful, charts the process of a transformation of authority that is, according to the German sociologist Max Weber, at the heart of modern liberal Western society. In Weberian terms, the overarching story of *The Tempest* maps the routinization of Prospero’s charisma. His charisma, or more specifically his charismatic authority must, in effect, “suffer a sea-change” precisely because of its instability, which Weber’s theory predicts.

In his writings about charisma, Max Weber describes three “pure types of legitimate authority,” namely “legal-bureaucratic,” “traditional,” and “charismatic” authority. Weber’s differentiation of these three types is derived from what he identifies as the three basic grounds on which a ruler can legitimately validate his or her authority. Legal-bureaucratic authority depends on an appeal to rational grounds, i.e. the “belief in the legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands” (46). A community living under legal-bureaucratic authority thus must believe in the correctness of the laws and regulations under which they subject themselves and legal bureaucratic leaders are legitimated based on their adherence to those laws. The leaders of modern democracies are perhaps the “purest” example of legal-bureaucratic authority, though indeed ever since the first laws were written down, some form of legal bureaucratic authority has probably been exerted. Traditional authority is validated by what Weber calls “traditional grounds—a belief in the sanctity of traditional practices and the “legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (46). Much like people living under legal-bureaucratic authority, communities living under traditional authority must believe in the correctness of traditional practices under which they are subjected (e.g. hereditary kingship) and traditional leaders must legitimated based on their
adherence to those practices. Finally, charismatic authority finds its legitimacy based on “charismatic grounds,” which Weber defines as a “devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (46).

Weber is interested in charismatic authority chiefly because of what he views as a further distinction between charismatic authority and the other two types. Specifically, he recognizes the uniqueness of how charismatic authority is derived from within the person holding that authority, as opposed to the other two forms which rely on institutions outside of themselves for legitimacy:

Both rational [legal-bureaucratic] and traditional authority are specifically forms of every-day routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis of this. Bureaucratic authority is specifically rational in the sense of being bound to intellectually analyzable rules; while charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules. Traditional authority is bound to precedents handed down from the past and to this extent is also oriented to rules. Within the sphere of its claims, charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force. (51-2)

In some sense, then, we see Weber collapsing legal-bureaucratic and traditional authority under the same heading as being bound by an overriding sense of regulation that must be adhered to. Weber is not trying to suggest here, however, that charisma constitutes a form of fideism. Rather he asserts that the legitimation of charismatic authority depends on the ability of the ruler to produce an immediacy of experience with “exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character” for his followers. This authority is legitimated through the potency of the experience
itself rather than by an outside set of rules that gauges its efficacy. In other words, a group functioning under a charismatic leader is sustained, not by the routine actions of its leadership, which are dictated by notions of rationality, but by its belief in the exceptional attributes of their leader to satisfy all its needs. Weber specifically identifies the making of provisions for economic concerns as being the chief example of routine, rationalized action that is anathema to charismatic authority. As Weber explains, “What is despised, so long as the genuinely charismatic type [of authority] is adhered to, is traditional or rational every-day economizing, the attainment of a regular income by continuous economic activity devoted to this end” (52).

Weber writes that charismatic authority is opposed to the social hierarchical distinctions that are normally made within legal-bureaucratic and traditional societies. There are no officials, careers, or promotions, no appointments or dismissals, “There is only a ‘call’ at the instance of the leader” who “intervenes in general or in individual cases when he considers the members of his staff inadequate to a task with which they have been entrusted” (50). In essence, the charismatic community is defined only by the distinction between leader and followers, and while some followers may be called upon to carry out certain necessary tasks, this call does not imply any sort of hierarchical elevation. In general, Weber recognizes the need for “the holders of charisma, the masters as well as his disciples and followers” to “stand outside the ties of this world, outside routine occupations” characteristic of legal-bureaucratic and traditional authority.

We might first notice that Prospero falls under Weber’s definition as a charismatic leader simply through Weber’s more general definition that personal charisma “is very often thought of as resting on magical powers” (48). While it is certainly Prospero’s magical powers that are the basis of his charismatic leadership (the “exemplary character of an individual” that is characteristic of all charismatic leaders), it is also evident that Prospero’s character falls under
the various other characteristics of charismatic authority that Weber offers. Prospero elaborates multiple times his rejection of worldly connections in his narrative to Miranda in Act I, scene ii. Explaining that in Milan he was “without a parallel” in “the liberal arts,” those being all his study,” Prospero describes how he “cast upon [his] brother” the rule of his government (I, ii, 73-75). Not only does he pass the everyday rule of the government to Antonio, but it is in fact his absorption in “secret studies” which causes him to become a stranger to his state. Prospero establishes a causal link here between the cultivation of his magical arts (what we would term his purely charismatic qualities) and his estrangement from the routine and rule-boundedness of his government. Even more explicitly, Prospero explains how his dedication to “closeness and the bettering of [his] mind” causes him to neglect the “worldly ends” that are earned in the rule of the state.

Furthermore, by saying that he “thus neglect[ed] worldly ends” Prospero is most certainly referring to the rejection of routine economic concerns. Returning to Prospero’s casting of the government on Antonio, we notice that there is an economic implication in the rule of Milan, specifically that in taking on the duties of the rule of government Antonio becomes “lorded/…with what [Prospero’s] revenue yielded” (97-8). Prospero’s revenue while he was duke, moreover, was no mean sum. In fact as Prospero explains, “Through all the signories, [Milan] was the first” (71). The implication of Prospero’s being “transported/And rapt in secret studies,” then, is not merely that he withdraws from the day-by-day occupations of his world, but also, as Weber would predict, that this rejection specifically entails a rejection of economic prosperity garnered through the economic occupations of Prospero’s dukedom. Prospero’s general disregard for economic occupation is also evinced in his account of his exile, where he

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2 The term “liberal arts” in Shakespeare’s time could comprise a long list of occupations, but in subsequent descriptions in the play such as “secret studies” it becomes more clear, as Barbara Mowat points out, that Prospero is referring to specifically magical endeavors (284).
exhibits an ignorance over the economic implication of his usurpation. Though Prospero seems to be intimately familiar with the details of how Antonio orchestrated the usurpation of Milan, Prospero, strangely enough, “know[s] not how much tribute” Antonio offered Alonso for his complicity in the usurpation (I, ii, 124). Though aware that this financial transaction was a central part of Antonio’s scheme, Prospero seems only acquainted with the fact that money changed hands rather than with the specific amount. This ignorance may arise out of Prospero’s fogginess over this one specific detail, but Shakespeare indicates some forty lines later that Prospero would not appreciate the insult of the amount even if he knew it. In the recounting of the moment of his exile, Prospero tells of how Gonzalo furnished him with “volumes” from Prospero’s library that Prospero prizes “above [his] dukedom” (166-8). Within these volumes, we later learn, is the infamous book that serves as his chief reference for his magical studies and thus takes on a metonymic significance as standing for Prospero’s magical art. What we notice here is a value system established by Prospero that ends up having little regard for the revenue that Milan generates and placing greater value on the cultivation of his personally charismatic qualities.

While we might notice how the cultivation of his magical arts as well as his withdrawal from worldly affairs while in Milan are characteristics Prospero shares with Weber’s definition of a charismatic leader, we cannot call Prospero’s leadership in Milan “charismatic.” The authority structure in which Prospero was operating before his usurpation falls much more along the lines of the legal-bureaucratic and traditional. From the context of The Tempest alone we can see that Prospero’s Italy is dominated by a mélange of a legal-bureaucratic and traditional systems in that it is made up of kingdoms, dukedoms and “signories.” These tracts of land have been parceled out by the more-or-less rational process of diplomacy and ruled by the governing
class who inherit the rule of government through traditional authority vested their in families’ succession. If we exclude this piece of contextual information, however, we nonetheless notice that the actions of the other Italians in the play mirror the rationalistic and everyday economizing that is rejected in Weber’s definition of personal charisma. Prospero tells that in carrying out the duties of the duke of Milan, Antonio had become “perfected [in] how to grant suits,/How to deny them, who t’advance, and who/To trash for overtopping” (I, ii, 79-81). In essence, by taking on the rule of Milan Antonio becomes adept at negotiating the system of Milan’s institutional rules that govern commerce.

More important, however, are the overarching motives of nearly all the Italians of the play, namely that nearly all are “dry…for sway” (I, ii, 112). This line, of course, specifically refers to Antonio’s desire to gain more influence in Italian politics by exiling Prospero, yet it is also an apt description for the rest of the royal party as they maneuver through the Italian legal-bureaucratic/traditional system. Much like Antonio, Sebastian is also seen shucking off his “Hereditary sloth” and jockeying for more political sway in his plot to murder his brother Alonso and become the king of Naples (II, i, 224). The occasion for these Italians to be at sea, moreover, is the marriage of Alonso’s daughter to the king of Tunis. This diplomatic gesture not only has implications for the hereditary lines of succession in Naples (and therefore the influence of the crown) but also is an opportunity for the rest of the members of the court to assert their positions within the hierarchy of Italian politics by being present at this stately affair. In short, the figures of Prospero’s Italy are all clearly entrenched within the rational dealings that charisma is alien to.

Gonzalo is in fact the only Neapolitan who embraces a vision of government specifically outside the realm that the rest inhabit. His arrival on the enchanted island prompts him to
expound on how he would rule should he be made king of the island, a vision that takes on some distinctly charismatic characteristics:

I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
…No sovereignty… (II, i, 148-57)

While it has been fairly well established by scholars that this political philosophy is influenced by Montaigne’s “On Cannibals,” its resemblance to Weber’s definition of the charismatic community cannot be mistaken either. With Gonzalo figured as the single autonomous ruler, “there is,” as Weber would say “no hierarchy” (50). The routine occupations to maintain “bourn, bound of land, tilth, [and] vineyard” are equally absent. As far as can be discerned, the members of this community would, in Weber’s words “live in a primarily communistic relationship with their leader” typical of charismatic authority (50).

While Gonzalo can only imagine this theory of government, we see Prospero actually fleshing out this theory, first in a limited sense while still in Milan and then more fully when he arrives on the island. Prospero’s Milan too has no “name of magistrate.” If we remember Prospero’s handing over of the rule of Milan to Antonio, we notice that Prospero does not appoint Antonio to a specific office. Rather, Prospero “casts” the role of governor on him. The distinction here is that Prospero does not give Antonio a new title under which he rules with some authority. Instead, Prospero gives a “call” characteristic of the charismatic leader to tasks
that must be performed.\(^3\) Certainly this example alone is not enough to establish Prospero as a charismatic leader, yet we must also remember that conditions in which he finds himself in Milan are not conducive to charismatic authority. As we have noticed above, nearly all the high-ranking officials in Prospero’s Italy were still firmly entrenched in Italian politics and therefore were dominated by a rationality that could not appreciate his “secret studies.”

This problem obviously disappears once Prospero and his daughter are exiled from rule-bound Milan and arrive on the uninhabited island, a place where Prospero can fully realize his charismatically ruled society. What is first remarkable about the new community Prospero establishes on the island is that it is physically outside the ambit of Western politics. The uninhabited island is not simply a foreign land like Tunis, which as we see can be brought into the sphere of Western politics, but a mystically enchanted country free of attachment to any form of government. This milieu creates the backdrop for the community Prospero could presumably never have had in Italy, a place where he can become the revolutionary force Weber describes. Prospero gains in Ariel a disciple when he first comes to the island, radically altering Ariel’s physical condition by freeing him from the cloven pine. Though Prospero doesn’t gain Caliban’s discipleship explicitly through his magical arts, we notice that Prospero becomes a revolutionary force by bringing Caliban knowledge and language in an attempt to humanize this “Hag-seed.” In addressing Prospero Caliban remembers that because Prospero thus doted over him, “I loved thee/And showed thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle” (I, ii, 336-7). This showing of “all of the qualities o’ the isle,” Caliban’s “voluntary gift” as Weber would term it, is significant because it allows Prospero’s charismatic community (comprising Miranda, Ariel and Caliban) to live without economizing. There is no need for tilth and vineyard when the foison of the island

\(^3\) We might also note that the word “cast” has a connotation with magical practice which, in this instance, neatly links Prospero’s “call” with his charismatic qualities.
provides it freely. Thus Prospero is allowed to rule over his community using only his magic and what the island freely offers to maintain his authority.

Yet to say that Prospero’s failure in Milan and success on the island is dependent only on the fact that Italy did not provide the necessary conditions for his charisma to flourish misses other important aspects of charismatic authority that dictate the structure of The Tempest. Namely, the need for ocular proof of Prospero’s authority becomes a recurrent theme which is also accounted for in Weber’s theory.

One of the important distinctions Weber makes about charismatic authority as opposed to other types of rule is that charismatic authority requires consistent proof for the leader to maintain power. This is not to say that holders of the other two basic types of authority (legal-bureaucratic and traditional) do not have to assert or “prove” their claim to authority to stay in power. Weber rather notes that while the other two types can make their claims to authority through an appeal to institutions outside themselves (e.g. to laws or traditional practices), the charismatic leader can only legitimate his authority through a demonstration to his subjects which satisfies their “belief in his charisma” (47).

Because Weber’s theory attempts to define charismatic leadership in manifestations ranging from the prophet to the warrior hero, he does not go into great detail as to what specific modes of demonstration constitute adequate “proof” of charismatic endowment. One of the most apparent means of demonstrating charismatic authority, however, must be in some sort of visual display that demonstrates the power residing in the charismatic leader. There are, as far as I am aware, no significant figures from Shakespeare’s day who were exercising anything close to this form of purely personal charismatic authority. In fact, Weber himself recognizes that no “pure” form of any of the three legitimate types of authority is to be found in history. It should be
instructive, nonetheless, to notice how the chief authority figure in England during the writing and performing of *The Tempest*, James I, also manipulated display as a charismatic legitimation of his authority.

To take an example roughly contemporary with the writing of *The Tempest*, King James I often used visual display in the assertion of the charismatic qualities of his kingship, most notably as David Bergeron points out, in the pageant leading to his March 1604 speech in Parliament. Because James' coronation in the summer of 1603 coincided with the spread of plague in England and was therefore much more subdued than it normally would have been, this pageant of James’s triumphal entry into London took on the significance of being the first true presentation of the King to his subjects. James did not have a direct hand in selecting the staging and particular symbols that would be displayed in the pageant, items that would work to legitimate his rule by establishing his legal and traditional claims to the throne (e.g. by emphasizing his dynastic right to the crown). More important, however, is how it is James’s mere presence, the display of his person to the people, that becomes one of the most important aspects of the pageant’s success in legitimating his authority. As Bergeron describes, “James’s presence brings life to the pageant; without the king’s presence the pageant remains insubstantial, a body without life” (217). We must notice how this practice of legitimation is markedly different from the speeches and symbols in his pageant that draw attention to his legal and traditional claims to the throne. There is something about the presence of the king himself, a ruler anointed as the lieutenant of God, which is not an appeal to the rules that dictate traditional and legal-bureaucratic authority but which is a legitimating experience nonetheless. In other words, the miraculous display of the king, who was not often glimpsed by his subjects, becomes a legitimating experience in and of itself. This is the essence of Weberian charisma, a
legitimation derived from the heightened degree to which the leader can bring his followers nearer an “exceptional sanctity.” All of the symbolic gestures made to legitimate James’s authority through traditional or legal-bureaucratic means are in fact “insubstantial” unless his charismatic presence brings the pageant to life. Clearly this charisma is not pure since it draws on the fact that James is king. Theoretically, it would not have mattered what man was present at the pageant wearing the royal garb and calling himself “James I” for the power of that presence to work, because the power of his presence does not reside in him personally but in the institution of the monarch. Nonetheless, through this contemporary example of King James we notice not only charisma’s proclivity to be demonstrated through visual display but also its presence within Shakespeare’s cultural backdrop.

These notions of display and visibility in the legitimation of authority are also at work within the structure of The Tempest. One of the apparent contrasts one might make between Prospero and James, at least at the beginning of Prospero’s story as he tells it, is that Prospero does not seem to recognize the power that the visual display of himself entails. While Prospero was reputed for the “liberal arts” and neglected “worldly ends” as we would expect from a charismatic leader, “being so retir’d” his magical endeavors “O’er prized all popular rate” (I, ii, 91-2). Prospero here seems to recognize the delicate balance the charismatic leader must negotiate, the line between withdrawing so far from the public eye that he no longer fulfills his burden of proof to the people and being so openly visible that his presence becomes demystified. This is the same line that Elizabeth I was well known for negotiating. Discussing the representation of the person of the monarch on stage, David Kastan observes that Elizabeth

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4 In Weberian terms, James exercises in this case a form of “lineage charisma,” an amalgamation of traditional and charismatic authority whereby the charismatic experience is institutionalized within the person of the monarch rather than specifically within the personal identities occupying the seat of the monarch. How this form of authority arises will be dealt with later on, where we will notice a similar process at work with Prospero’s charisma.
actively worked to limit the representation of monarchal figures because they indiscriminately paraded the monarch on stage before the public, effectively making the visual presence of the monarch more common that it would be normally. Since what charisma Elizabeth did possess resided in her person (the institution of the monarch) rather than within the individual identity “Elizabeth,” the underlying fear was that there was no difference in practice between the presence of the monarch on stage and the monarch on the throne, and thus their miraculous presence utilized in such events as state pageantry is diminished by the monarch’s readily accessible presence in the theatre. Taking again the example of James, one might imagine that miracle of his visual presence would have been greatly diminished had he been parading up and down the streets of London for two weeks prior to his pageant. The charismatic quality of his displays depends upon that display not being totally accessible to his subjects. In the same way, we see that Prosper maintains his mystique via a controlled invisibility that draws him away from the public eye.

Prospero also recognizes, however, that it was his tendency to disappear from view—that is, his inability to strike a balance between being present to the public eye while avoiding overexposure—that brought about the condition for his usurpation. In the same speech where he acknowledges his disappearance from the public, he also acknowledges it was this essential fact of his withdrawal that caused an “evil nature” to awake in his brother, the opportunistic Antonio (I, ii, 93). The reason Antonio usurped Prospero’s throne is because, as Prospero recognizes, Antonio thought himself “duke out o’ th’ substitution” because he was executing “th’ outward face of royalty /With all prerogative” (103–4, my emphasis). Prospero acknowledges that while there was power to be gained through his secret studies, there was an almost equal power to be had simply by being present, by presenting “th’ outward face of royalty” in Milan. I do not think
this realization shifts the blame from Antonio to Prospero. Rather what is revealed here is a miscalculation by Prospero as to the role of visibility in his rule. The central disruption of *The Tempest*’s plot rests on this miscalculation, that is, on Prospero’s failure to realize the need to be at some level present to the public as well as on his failure to realize that allowing someone to execute the outward face of his royalty can legitimate the authority of the person executing it. If Prospero had any chance to begin a charismatic movement in the already heavily rule-bound Milan, this miscalculation certainly dashed any hope of it coming to fruition.

Moreover, we notice that the play itself becomes Prospero’s opportunity to make up for this miscalculation in his past, for unlike the descriptions in Prospero’s prologue, the vast majority of the action that takes place on the stage consists of displays of his magical prowess. Numerous critics comment that *The Tempest* is one of, if not the most aurally stimulating of Shakespeare’s plays, yet fail to mention that it certainly the most visually stimulating as well. *The Tempest* calls for three displays of pageant-like vision which are conjured by Prospero’s magic. Each of these displays requires elements of theatrical machinery meant specifically to dazzle the eye. In IV, i, Juno must descend triumphantly from above to bless Ferdinand and Miranda in their marriage masque. A “quaint device” in III, iii must make the entire banquet laid out before the King and his retinue vanish (SD 52). And of course there is the tempest scene in I, i, calling for the staging of an entire ship at sea complete with some sense of rigging and sails. Beyond these three instances whose stage devices are clearly meant to be impressive visual displays, the play is riddled with numerous astonishing spectacles. “Certain nymphs” enter the marriage masque, and “reapers” join them for a “graceful dance” which “heavily vanishes” almost as suddenly as it begins (SD IV, i, 138). The trap Ariel sets for Caliban and his fellow conspirators is laid with “glistening apparel,” and when the band is lured to the clothing, they are
promptly scared away by “divers spirits in shape of dogs and hounds, hunting them about” (SD IV, i, 254).

More important than noticing this highly visual quality of The Tempest, however, is to recognize that Prospero utilizes display as his chief means of proving his charisma. Prospero recognizes that his charismatic hold over his subjects depends on his magical display. Just before Ferdinand and Miranda’s marriage masque, Prospero explains to Ariel, “I must/Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple/Some vanity of mine art. It is my promise,/And they expect it of me” (IV, i, 39-42, my emphasis). Prospero is clearly aware that this display is not simply a way to bless the young couple’s marriage, but a means to prove his charismatic endowment. In order to maintain his hold over Ferdinand and Miranda, to remain their “wondered father,” he must use a display of his magic because it is his promise, indeed the promise of charismatic authority to continually prove itself to its followers.

This use of magical display as a charismatically legitimating force is no less articulate in the other two major spectacles, if not so much to the characters of the play themselves as to the audience. It is certainly the case that in I, i, the setting of the tempest is the greatest “vanity” of magic in the play. This characterization is true both in the sense that it is the most spectacular artifice of stagecraft in the play and because it is discovered in I, ii and II, i, that even within the plot that the tempest was only an illusion and that those on board the ship were never in danger. Prospero’s creation of the outward appearance of a tempest serves as the first and most outstanding proof of his charismatic endowment.

While a significant portion of Weber’s work on charismatic authority is to differentiate its legitimating qualities vis-à-vis his definition of the other two forms of authority, the larger
point he makes about charismatic authority is that it cannot sustain itself in its pure form and
must therefore be transformed in order to sustain itself. It is his basic contention, evinced
through history, that pure personal charisma is intrinsically unstable and must “become either
traditionalized or rationalized, or a combination of both” (54). Because personal charisma is not
in the end a form of authority able to sustain itself in the long term, it must necessarily break
down at least partly into one or both of the other two types of authority, i.e. traditional or legal-
bureaucratic. The reasons Weber gives for this intrinsic instability of charismatic authority are
varied. Since all charismatic leaders are mortal, the death of the charismatic leader is one of the
more obvious instances when pure charisma needs to be transformed (or “routinized” as Weber
terms it) into a more rational, institutional practice if authority is to be maintained. The
attribution of charismatic qualities through the hereditary line, as we have seen with Elizabeth
and James in what Weber calls “lineage charisma,” is one of the most common ways we see
charisma transformed into institution after the death of a charismatic predecessor. The
charismatic leader need not die, however, before the routinization of charismatic authority takes
place. The main motivation for charismatic authority to become routinized, according to Weber,
stems from the “ideal and also the material interests of the followers [of charismatic authority] in
the continuation and continual reactivation of the community” (54). Weber elaborates by saying
that it is at the point when personal charisma for whatever reason fails to satisfy the needs of the
charismatic community that some sort of rational, every-day institutionalization must intervene
in the construction of the authority structure.

One of the more contentious propositions Weber makes is that the routinization of
charisma constitutes a drastic transformation in the nature of charismatic authority:
The social relationships directly involved [with charismatic authority] are strictly personal, based on the validity and practice of charismatic personal qualities. If this is not to remain a purely transitory phenomenon, but to take on the character of a permanent relationship forming a stable community of…any sort of political or hierocratic organization, it is necessary for the character of charismatic authority to become radically changed. (54).

Raphael Falco echoes this notion that “routinization suggests a loss of charismatic force, a dilution of that magical heterogeneous power… which [Weber] claimed satisfied all extraordinary demands by breaking routine constraints of society” (Falco 217). Falco advances a reading of Shakespeare’s second tetralogy that is interested in how routinization of pure charisma does not result in the “utterly destructive isolation [of] the protagonist” seen in Shakespeare’s tragedies, but a “newfound stability, a new ideological hegemony, and a new genealogical line” (217). The focus of Falco’s article is not on the apparent disconnect between Henry IV and V’s respective personal charismatic qualities and their subsequent routinization, but in how successful they are at attenuating and transforming their personal charismatic qualities into the rule of their rule-bound state. Falco’s argument is that the relative success of Henry V’s “institution-building” has much to do with his ability (not shared by Henry IV) to convert the power of his personal charisma into a rule based on a lineage charisma, “a transformation of charismatic authority that will enable him to be both…mortal body and body politic, personal bearer of a gift of grace and head of an institution legitimated by…that selfsame gift of grace” (233). Moreover, Falco attributes this characteristic of routinized charisma demonstrated in the second tetralogy to be partly due to a more general trend in Shakespeare’s
histories “where degrees of charismatic authority are much more prevalent than its absolute presence or absence” (221).

It becomes interesting, then, to consider the function of charisma in Shakespeare’s romances, a subject on which Falco is silent. For if “Shakespeare would have had considerable knowledge of charisma because the concept was so much a part of sixteenth-century religious idealism,” then it is reasonable to assume that this knowledge is exhibited in the romances as well, including *The Tempest* (Falco 221). Since we have already seen that Prospero’s description in the opening of the play as well as many of his actions throughout fall under Weber’s description of the personally charismatic leader, it seems hardly unreasonable that the same effect of routinization Falco observes in the history plays are also at work in *The Tempest* as well.

In fact, the very dilemma Weber describes concerning the subsuming of personal charisma into a more routinized charisma is at the heart of *The Tempest*’s plot. As Prospero responds to Miranda’s inquiry about the purpose of the “sea-storm” he conjured in I, i, the event that creates the proper conditions of the plot, he says nothing about exacting the revenge on Antonio, Sebastian and Alonso that nearly all commentators say is the basic trajectory of the play. Rather, he responds,

…by my prescience

I find my zenith doth depend upon

A most auspicious star, whose influence

If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes

Will ever after droop. (I, ii, 180-184)

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5 In the introduction of his book *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy*, Falco mentions romance only in passing, claiming that it is a too “unreflective medium” to consider the charismatic underpinnings of the plays (24).
We might first notice the metaphorical significance of these lines as they apply to the plot in general. Prospero indicates to Miranda that this moment in which we enter into the story represents a critical point or “zenith” in his fate. Since Shakespeare observes the unity of time in *The Tempest*, it may not be so remarkable that the moment we enter into the “present business” of the play is one of critical importance to the central character. Yet it is hard to take these lines purely at face value. Are we to believe that the occasion of this story amounts only to the happenstance of an “auspicious star” whose influence Prospero now courts? Certainly Shakespeare invites more complexity into the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* than the prologue’s indication that Romeo and Juliet are “star-crossed lovers.” In the same way, then, we should be skeptical that the purpose for which Prospero sets his scheme in motion has only to do with fate.

The condition in which we find Prospero’s charismatic community, moreover, confirms that this critical moment we have entered into has much to do with the “ideal and material necessities” of the group that Prospero’s charisma cannot control. Prospero’s frustrating of Caliban’s sexual appetite has irreparably damaged their interactions with one another; from that point forward Caliban can only see Prospero as an obstacle to acting out his desire to “people…/The isle with Calibans” (I, ii, 350-1). In this same episode we also see that Miranda’s interests are altered. In choosing Miranda as his object of desire, Caliban signals her arrival at maturity, which seems to entail a certain skepticism about Prospero and the benevolence his magic. For while Miranda might claim that the desire to know more about Prospero “did never meddle with [her] thoughts,” we quickly find that she is indeed quite curious about his origins and critical of his use of magic arts, as when she upbraids Prospero for turning his art toward Ferdinand (I, ii, 23). While Ferdinand and Miranda’s instant infatuation with one another might simply be result of Prospero’s magical control, it is interesting to note that Miranda’s desire to
cleave to Ferdinand is accounted for in Weber’s writing as the reflex to “participate in normal family relationships” which are often denied under charismatic authority (54). This is to say that Miranda’s immediate bond with Ferdinand, in light of her criticism of Prospero, seems to be a reflex of her desire to form a heteronormative union and reject the strange familial relation in Prospero, who, as Stephen Orgel convincingly demonstrates, singularly embodies characteristics of both Miranda’s mother and father (Orgel 4).

Though Ariel is certainly a more obedient servant than Caliban, Shakespeare makes Ariel’s dissatisfaction with his current condition in Prospero’s servitude to be quite clear. By the time we are introduced to Ariel in I, ii, his relative obedience to Prospero is not derived from any sense of duty within the charismatic scheme, as we might expect after Prospero has broken the charm that confined Ariel to the cloven pine, but because Ariel desires the freedom which Prospero has apparently promised, but never delivered on.

If we recognize, then, that the opening of The Tempest presents a critical juncture at which Prospero must either transform his personal charisma into a more tenable institution for his followers or have his “fortunes ever after droop,” it becomes clear that the arch of the play must chart the attenuation of Prospero’s charisma. This attenuation is most clearly seen in the progression of the three main displays discussed earlier, which become demonstrably less impressive as the play progresses. Compared to the shipwreck scene in I, i, the banquet scene in III, iii with its clever devices must undoubtedly appear as only a fraction of Prospero’s ability displayed in the opening scene. The same can be said of the marriage masque in IV, i compared to the banquet scene. Indeed there is little to distinguish the marriage masque as a display at all except by the details given in the plot that the actors in the masque are spirits and the stage direction that Juno descends miraculously from above.
We see the diminution of Prospero’s magical art not only in the progressive weakening of his visual display but also in the progressive demystification by Prospero himself. What is remarkable about the shipwreck scene compared to the other two displays is that its function within Prospero’s scheme cannot immediately be known. Though we later learn that the tempest he conjures is just as much a “vanity” as the other displays, we are allowed to believe during the duration of the display that it was actually nature running its course on the ship and crew and not a display of Prospero’s magic used to drive his scheme forward. In other words, we are allowed to believe for a moment that, within the illusion of the theatre, the violent weather the passengers and crew experience on the ship is real, only to discover later that it was the strength of Prospero’s art which created the illusion.

This semblance of the real is powerful, both in Prospero’s magic and Shakespeare’s stagecraft, but it too is undermined as Prospero’s charisma gradually dissipates. As much as Alonso believes the banquet scene to arrive on the backs of mysterious “islanders,” it is obvious to the audience that these spirits are of Prospero’s creation, both because Prospero’s intentions to reclaim his throne are better known by III, iii, and because he is present in this display where formerly he had been absent. Moreover, unlike in the shipwreck scene where we only learn of its purpose much later, the function of the banquet display is given immediately after its conclusion, i.e. to “to knit” his enemies “In their distractions” and place them “in [Prospero’s] power” (III, iii 89, 90). The final display of the marriage masque becomes the most demystified in that Prospero admits explicitly to Ariel that it is the vanity of his art and not any physical work done by his art, which is required to demonstrate his personal charisma to Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero even undermines the force of his display to Ferdinand and Miranda themselves when in his “revels” speech he reveals that the bygone vision of the masque is
nothing more than “baseless fabric,” an “insubstantial pageant faded” (IV, i, 151, 155). By giving us a progressively clearer insight into the working of Prospero’s displays, Shakespeare effectively diminishes their charismatically disruptive force. Prospero no longer appears to be using his “gifts of grace” as a means to satisfy the requirements of his charismatic group, but as a means to satisfy a group whose needs cannot be satisfied by pure charisma alone.

This diminution in the potency of Prospero’s charismatic display is not the extent to which his charisma becomes attenuated, however, but only an indication of it. As Edward Shils recognizes in his paraphrase of Weber, “Presumptive contact with the divine, possession by the divine, the possession of magical powers, are only modes of being charismatic” (123). For Prospero, his magical display is not the signified of his personal charisma, but a signifier. The diminution of his charismatic display is not synonymous with the attenuation of his charisma, but a signal of the transformation of his charismatic stance to the world. Specifically, what underlies the diminution of his charismatic display is a process of routinization, a shift in Prospero’s preference from the disordering power of illusion and irrationality to the ordering power of reason. If we remember Weber’s insight, charismatic authority is irrational in that it is not bound to any overriding sense of reason (as in the case of legal-bureaucratic and traditional authority) and is also generally disruptive to social order. The routinization of charisma, as Weber explains, must work in the opposite direction, shift from a position of authority that is maintained through illusion and the unsettling of hierarchal distinction in society to one that relies on reason and the rationality of social order.

This shift is what becomes The Tempest’s ultimate trajectory: to chart the transformation of Prospero’s authority from one reliant on the disruptive or “revolutionary force” of his charisma to one reliant on reason and institution. Turning once again to the opening of the play,
we notice that the shipwreck scene represents the clearest example of the disruptive power of Prospero’s charisma. In the most literal sense, this spectacle plunges the audience headlong into a scene of total disarray; we are literally and figuratively left out to sea with nothing but the confused shouts of the mariners to make sense of the situation. Shakespeare confounds our desire to be properly grounded in the present action of the play, leaving us grasping at whatever minute details about the plot might be revealed among all the uproar. What we are able to glean from this opening scene, moreover, becomes the figurative manifestation of disorder in this scene, i.e. the confounding of social hierarchy by Prospero’s charisma manifested in the tempest. The breakdown of social hierarchy wrought by the tempest is most clearly exemplified in the short dialogue between the aristocratic Gonzalo and the more lowly Boatswain,

Boatswain: ...What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin! Silence! Trouble us not.

Gonzalo: Good, yet remember whom thou hast aboard.

Boatswain: None that I more love than myself. You are a councilor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority. (I, i, 16-23)

The effect of Prospero’s charisma as it is manifested in the tempest, then, is not simply to create disorder on the level of confusion, but to actually disrupt the normal hierarchical distinction of the Neapolitans. The reverence one would normally expect from the Boatswain to his superiors in the hierarchal chain disappears when it becomes clear that those more privileged members of the hierarchical chain cannot in fact “Use [their] authority” to improve their circumstances. One of the effects of Prospero’s tempest, then, is to radically disrupt the
established king-councilor-laborer hierarchy by demonstrating that the authority attributed to kings and councilors by whatever traditional or legal-bureaucratic means is in fact powerless to maintain order and “work the peace of the present” in the direst situations. Thus the opening scene constitutes not only disorder from the audience’s perspective, but a disruption of social order on the level of the plot.

Furthermore, as Prospero reveals his scheme, we learn that this illusion of the tempest was meant to, among other things, “infect [the] reason” of those on board the ship (I, ii, 208). Again we can see this line working on multiple levels. Literally, Prospero’s concern over whether the tempest has “infected” the reason of those onboard arises out of his desire that his tempest seem authentic, that any sort of reason that might have discerned Prospero’s art as the basis of the tempest be suspended. The deeper significance of Prospero’s desire to “infect the reason” of the Neapolitans has to do with the natural function of Prospero’s charismatic authority, which by definition opposes rationalistic thought. Certainly with the example of the Boatswain we can see how the reasonableness of the Italians has been shaken. The Boatswain seems to abandon every reasonable distinction of social hierarchy in the face of Prospero’s charisma. Almost as if it were a condition for arriving to Prospero’s charismatic community, the Italians are stripped of their ability to rationally organize their world and situation.

Yet as the play moves towards its apparent end—to restore Prospero’s lost dukedom—what becomes noticeable is that Prospero relies less on the disorder and illusion of his charismatic authority and begins to appeal to a sense of rationality. If we return to the banquet scene, we notice that an element of rationality is introduced for the first time as part of Prospero’s scheme. While this scene is indeed meant to “knit up” Prospero’s enemies “In their distractions,” there is an explicit message in this display that relies on logical reasoning.
Because Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian “did supplant good Prospero,” the seas have bereft Alonso of his son Ferdinand (III, iii 70). This reasoning is, of course, faulty in its conclusion since it was not the seas that take revenge on Alonso but Prospero himself, nor is Ferdinand dead, but hidden in another part of the island. It is in these falsehoods that the illusion “knits up” Prospero’s enemies (that is the disruptive nature of his charisma remains), yet at the same time we must also notice how the force of Prospero’s statement is not legitimated only by this charismatic display but also by its rationality. For Prospero to be aggrieved as he is presented in this scene is to imply that some rule alien to charisma has been violated, namely that one ought not to supplant “good” people. Just as we see this scene as a diminution in the power of Prospero’s magical display, so also do we see his increased reliance on means outside of his personal charisma to legitimate his position. Similarly, with the demystification of the marriage masque that we have noticed above, Prospero makes an even greater thrust towards appealing to reason in that he attempts to lay out the rationale behind the use of his charismatic authority. Indeed, what makes this demystification possible is Prospero’s revelation of the reasoning behind why he must perform it, i.e. because Ferdinand and Miranda “expect it of [him]” (IV, i, 42) By contextualizing his charismatic display within a more overarching framework of reason, Prospero actively undermines the authority of his personal charisma and places himself on more rational footing.

Both these glimmers of Prospero’s rationalist behavior work toward the last episode of the play where we witness the full routinization of Prospero’s charisma, his complete transformation from a leader who once relied on his charismatic endowment to govern his quasi-communistic community to the vision of a new order that is based on the full return of reason. Prospero, moreover, is plainly aware that this last episode marks his transition into rationalistic
behavior. Speaking to Ariel about the use of his magical arts to charm his adversaries into bondage, Prospero notes that in breaking charms here at the end he is utilizing his “nobler reason ’gainst his fury” (V, i, 26). The result of Prospero’s finally making the transition from magic to reason, as Shakespeare illustrates, is the regaining of the reason and senses by the other characters who had previously been under Prospero’s spell. As the Italian party is brought out of their magical bondage and on to the stage, Prospero remarks that “their rising senses/Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle/Their clearer reason” and that “Their understanding/Begins to swell, and the approaching tide/will shortly fill the reasonable shore” (V, i, 66-68, 79-81). Simultaneous with this recovery of reason is the reestablishment of the rationalistic order that fled at the opening of the play. The first instance where we see this reestablishment take place is in Prospero’s acknowledgement, “I am Prospero, and that very duke/Which was thrust forth of Milan,” and how it differs from the way he explains his former office to Miranda in the beginning of the play (V, i, 159-60). His almost equivocal description, “thy father was Duke of Milan/And a prince of power” in I, ii suggests his uneasiness with associating himself with the office of duke (I, ii, 53-4). By Act V he appears to have no qualms in acknowledging himself as the rightful duke. The hierarchical order we saw disrupted in the shipwreck scene is also restored in Act V. In fact, it is no other person than the same Boatswain, who loved no one more than himself and especially not the king, who signals this reestablishment. When Gonzalo asks him what news he has about what befell him and the rest of the crew after the storm, he replies that “The best news that we have safely found/Our King and company” (V,i, 221-2). Though Alonso’s authority is diminished to some degree by Prospero, this gesture of thinking only about the safety of the king carries the symbolic significance of making this last scene about the reestablishment of hierarchical social order. The blessing of the Ferdinand and Miranda’s
marriage, where Gonzalo imagines a “blessèd crown” dropping over their heads, is not simply
the conventional promise of Shakespeare’s romance. By allowing Miranda to marry Ferdinand,
Prospero re-solidifies the institution he was once exiled from by including his bloodline under
the crown of rule-bound Naples.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of understanding Act V as the final routinization of
Prospero’s charisma is that it is able to deal quite easily with the problem of explaining why
Prospero should abjure his magic here at the end. Early critics like John Dowden suggested that
Prospero’s renunciation of magic is analogous with Shakespeare’s giving up his own stagecraft
at end of his career. That view, however, has mostly gone out of style. Mowat asserts that
Prospero renunciation of magic reenacts the recognizable theme of the witch giving himself over
to moral conscience, but she is also quick to say that this is one of several interpretations of
Prospero’s magic embodied in the same character and that this renunciation could just as easily
be a depiction of a “Juggler” closing out his performance. Stephen Orgel is the most astute in his
treatment of Prospero’s renunciation of magic, since it is he who notices that this final scene is
not a renunciation of Prospero’s authority, but a preservation of it. For simultaneous with his
abjuration of magic is Prospero’s effective usurpation of Antonio’s throne. As Orgel further
explains, “Prospero’s puzzling assertion that ‘every third thought shall be my grave’ can be seen
as a final assertion of authority and control; he has now arranged matters so that his death will
remove Antonio’s last link with ducal power” by passing the dukedom to Naples, a dukedom
moreover which Antonio has no hope of influencing, given that has burned his bridges in his plot
to assassinate his former ally, Alonso (12).

The missing coda to Orgel’s observation here is that this power exerted at the end of the
play is not synonymous with the power that conjured the tempest in the beginning. Prospero is
not using his charisma to charm his adversaries into submission, but appealing to reason and the rules they all share in common (as in lineage, heredity and the rule of law). Whether or not Prospero used his magic to inspire the plot to assassinate Alonso is irrelevant to the ultimate detail that Antonio and Sebastian did in fact plan the assassination of the king. Prospero’s power to exclude Antonio forever from major office in Italian politics, should he ever attempt to seek it again, is derived from his ability to wield the threat of justice (i.e. rules) by revealing that plot, as Prospero himself enunciates in his aside to Antonio and Sebastian: “But you, my brace of lords, were I so minded,/I here could pluck his highness' frown upon you/And justify you traitors” (V, I, 126-8). Orgel rightly objects to the crude notion that Prospero gives up his magic simply because he no longer needs it. We would rather note that it becomes the necessary condition of Prospero’s “institution-building” that he ultimately give up his charismatic mode of authority in light of his newly established authority which is thoroughly legal-bureaucratic and traditional. His charisma having already been attenuated throughout the course of the play, it becomes the logical last step for Prospero to finally give up his charismatic endowment and give way to the institutions he has created (Ferdinand and Miranda, his wider appeal to reason) which will no longer be sustained by his charisma alone, but by a restored sense of reason and order.

Ultimately what we find, then, is that the process that motivates the play from beginning to end is one Weber recognized as uniformly present throughout Western society. Rather than noticing the Tempest simply for its “cultural material” as it relates to colonialism or some specific anxiety in the English monarchy, we see that the arch of The Tempest’s plot rather more deeply at the root of a progressively liberalizing West. For if we remember correctly, few in England were immune from the effects of the financial ineptitude of James’s court, even those who fervently regarded him as a lieutenant of God. And if we take into account an even wider
context, it would only be a few decades after *The Tempest* that England would decapitate her
king in an even greater thrust to eradicate the unreasonable rule of an autocrat. One might
wonder that in rendering this spectacular transformation of charisma to a reasoned, rule bound
institution if Shakespeare’s “prescience” extended beyond Prospero’s “auspicious stars” and
drooping fortunes. That prospect, in fact, hardly seems unreasonable.
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