Leo Marx's first chapter is one of the classic essays in American Studies. I use the first page as a general introduction to Marx's book.

I mention this peaceful spot with all possible laud; for it is in such little retired . . . valleys . . . that population, manners, and customs, remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement, which is making such incessant change in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are little nooks of still water which border a rapid stream . . .

Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," 1820

The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination. The reason is clear enough. The ruling motive of the good shepherd, leading figure of the classic, Virgilian mode, was to withdraw from the great world and begin a new life in a fresh, green landscape. And now here was a virgin continent! Inevitably the European mind was dazzled by the prospect. With an unspoiled hemisphere in view it seemed that mankind actually might realize what had been thought a poetic fantasy. Soon the dream of a retreat to an oasis of harmony and joy was removed from its traditional literary context. It was embodied in various utopian schemes for making America the site of a new beginning for Western society. In both forms—one literary and the other in essence political—the ideal has figured in the American view of life which is, in the widest sense, the subject of this book.
II  Shakespeare’s American Fable

If any man shall accuse these reports of partial falshood, supposing them to be but Utopian, and legendarie fables, because he cannot conceive, that plentiful and famine, a temperate climate, and distempered bodies, felicities, and miseries can be reconciled together, let him now read with judgement, but let him not judge before he hath read.

A True Declaration of the estate of the Colonie in Virginia . . . , London, 1610

Some of the connections between The Tempest and America are well known. We know, for one thing, that Shakespeare wrote the play three or possibly four years after the first permanent colony had been established at Jamestown in 1607. At the time all of England was in a state of excitement about events across the Atlantic. Of course, the play is not in any literal sense about America; although Shakespeare is nowhere explicit about the location of the “uninhabited island,” so far as he allows us to guess it lies somewhere in the Mediterranean off the coast of Africa. For the dramatist’s purpose it might be anywhere. Nevertheless, it is almost certain that Shakespeare had in mind the reports of a recent voyage to the New World. In 1609 the Sea Adventure, one of a fleet of ships headed for Virginia, was caught in a violent storm and separated from the rest. Eventually it ran aground in the Bermudas and all aboard got safely to shore. Several people wrote accounts of the episode, and unmistakable echoes of at least two of them may be heard in The Tempest, particularly in the storm scene. At one point, moreover, Ariel refers to having fetched dew from the “still-vex’d Bermoothes.” Though all of these facts are well known and reasonably well established, they do not in themselves suggest a particularly significant relation between the play and America. They indicate only that Shakespeare was aware of what his countrymen were doing in the Western hemisphere.¹

But when, in addition to the external facts, we consider the action of The Tempest, a more illuminating connection with America comes into view. The play, after all, focuses upon a highly civilized European who finds himself living in a prehistoric wilderness. Prospero’s situation is in many ways the typical situation of voyagers in newly discovered lands. I am thinking of the remote setting, the strong sense of place and its hold on the mind, the hero’s struggle with raw nature on the one hand and the corruption within his own civilization on the other, and, finally, his impulse to effect a general reconciliation between the forces of civilization and nature. Of course, this is by no means a uniquely American situation. The conflict between art and nature is a universal theme, and it has been a special concern of writers working in the pastoral tradition from the time of Theocritus and Virgil. Besides, the subject has a long foreground in Shakespeare’s own work — witness A Midsummer Night’s Dream, As You Like It, and The Winter’s Tale. Nevertheless, the theme is one of which American experience affords a singularly vivid instance: an unspoiled landscape suddenly invaded by advance parties of a dynamic, literate, and purposeful civilization. It would be difficult to imagine a more dramatic

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coming together of civilization and nature. In fact, Shake-
speare's theme is inherent in the contradictory images of
the American landscape that we find in Elizabethan travel
reports, including those which he seems to have read be-
fore writing *The Tempest*.

Most Elizabethan ideas of America were invested in visual
images of a virgin land. What most fascinated English-
men was the absence of anything like European society;
here was a landscape untouched by history — nature un-
mixed with art. The new continent looked, or so they
thought, the way the world might have been supposed to
look before the beginning of civilization. Of course the
Indians also were a source of fascination. But their simple
ways merely confirmed the identification of the New
World with primal nature. They fit perfectly into the pic-
ture of America as a mere landscape, remote and un-
spoiled, and a possible setting for a pastoral retreat. But
this does not mean that Shakespeare's contemporaries
agreed about the character or the promise of the new land.
Quite the contrary. Europeans never had agreed about the
nature of nature; nor did they now agree about America.
The old conflict in their deepest feelings about the
physical universe was imparted to descriptions of the ter-
rain. Elizabethan travel reports embody sharply contrast-
ing images of the American landscape.

At one extreme, among the more popular conceptions,
we find the picture of America as paradise regained. Ac-
cording to his account of a voyage to Virginia in 1584,
Captain Arthur Barlowe was not yet in sight of the coast
when he got a vivid impression that a lovely garden lay
ahead. We "found shole water," he writes, "wher we smelt
so sweet, and so strong a smel, as if we had bene in the
midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kinde
of odoriferous flowers. . . ." Barlowe, captain of a bark
dispatched by Sir Walter Raleigh, goes on to describe
Virginia in what was to become a cardinal image of
America: an immense garden of "incredible abundance."
The idea of America as a garden is the controlling met-
aphor of his entire report. He describes the place where the
men first put ashore as

... so full of grapes, as the very beating and surge of
the Sea overflowed them, of which we found such plentie,
as well there as in all places else, both on the sand and
on the greene soile of the hills . . . that I thinke in all
the world the like abundance is not to be found: and
my selfe having scene those parts of Europe that most
abound, find such difference as were incredible to be
written.

Every detail reinforces the master image: Virginia is a
land of plenty; the soil is "the most plentifull, sweete,
fruitfull, and wholsome of all the worlde"; the virgin for-
est is not at all like the "barren and fruitles" woods of east-
ern Europe, but is full of the "highest and reddest Cedars
of the world." One day Barlowe watches an Indian catch-
ing fish so rapidly that in half an hour he fills his canoe
to the sinking point. Here Virginia stands not only for
abundance, but for the general superiority of a simple,
primitive style of life. Geography controls culture: the
natives are "most gentle, loving and faithfull, voide of all
guile and treason, and such as live after the maner of the
golden age." ²

The familiar picture of America as a site for a new
golden age was a commonplace of Elizabethan travel litera-
ture, and there are many reasons for its popularity. For one thing, of course, the device made for effective propaganda in support of colonization. Projects like those of Raleigh required political backing, capital, and colonists. Even in the sixteenth century the American countryside was the object of something like a calculated real estate promotion. Besides, fashionable tendencies in the arts helped to popularize the image of a new earthly paradise. During the Renaissance, when landscape painting emerged as a separate genre, painters discovered—or rather, as Kenneth Clark puts it, rediscovered—the garden. The ancient image of an enchanted garden gave the first serious painters of landscape their most workable organizing motif. To think about landscape at all in this period, therefore, was to call forth a vision of benign and ordered nature. And a similar concern makes itself felt in Elizabethan literature. Pastoral poetry in English has never in any other period enjoyed the vogue it had then. The exploration of North America coincided with the publication of Spenser’s Virgilian poem, *The Shepheard’s Calendar* (1579) and Sidney’s *Arcadia* (1590), to name only two of the more famous Elizabethan pastorals. It is impossible to separate the taste for pastoral and the excitement, felt throughout Europe, about the New World. We think of the well-known golden age passage in *Don Quixote* and Michael Drayton’s *Poems Lyrick and Pastoral*, both of which appeared about 1605. Drayton’s volume included “To the Virginian Voyage,” with its obvious debt to Captain Barlowe’s report. He praises “VIRGINIA / Earth’s only paradise,” where

... Nature hath in store
Fowl, venison, and fish,

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And the fruitfull’st soil,
Without your toil,
Three harvests more,
All greater than your wish.

To whom the golden age
Still Nature’s laws doth give,
Nor other cares that tend
But them to defend
From winter’s rage,
That long there doth not live.

As in Barlowe’s report, the new land smells as sweet to the approaching voyager as the most fragrant garden:

When as the luscious smell
Of that delicious land,
Above the sea’s that flow’s,
The clear wind throws,
Your hearts to swell
Approaching the dear strand.

The age was fascinated by the idea that the New World was or might become Arcadia, and we hardly need to itemize the similarities between the “gentle, loving, and faithfull” Indians of Virginia and the shepherds of pastoral. In Elizabethan writing the distinction between primitive and pastoral styles of life is often blurred, and devices first used by Theocritus and Virgil appear in many descriptions of the new continent.

Although fashionable, the image of America as a garden was no mere rhetorical commonplace. It expressed one of the deepest and most persistent of human motives. When Elizabethan voyagers used this device they were drawing upon utopian aspirations that Europeans always
had cherished, and that had given rise, long before the discovery of America, to a whole series of idealized, imaginary worlds. Besides the golden age and Arcadia, we are reminded of Elysium, Atlantis, and enchanted gardens, Eden and Tirnanogue and the fragrant bower where the Hesperides stood watch over the golden apples. Centuries of longing and revery had been invested in the conception. What is more, the association of America with idyllic places was destined to outlive Elizabethan fashions by at least two and a half centuries. It was not until late in the nineteenth century that this way of thinking about the New World lost its grip upon the imagination of Europe and America. As for the ancillary notion of the new continent as a land of plenty, that, as we all know, is now stronger than ever. Today some historians stress what the sixteenth-century voyager called “incredible abundance” as perhaps the most important single distinguishing characteristic of American life. In our time, to be sure, the idea is less closely associated with the landscape than with science and technology.4

Elizabethans, however, did not always fancy that they were seeing Arcadia when they gazed at the coast of North America. Given a less inviting terrain, a bad voyage, a violent storm, hostile Indians, or, most important, different presuppositions about the universe, America might be made to seem the very opposite of a bountiful garden. Travelers then resorted to another conventional metaphor of landscape depiction. In 1609, for example, when William Strachey’s vessel reached the New World, it was caught, as he puts it, in “a dreadfull storme and hideous . . . which swelling, and roaring as it were by fits, . . . at length did beate all light from heaven; which like an hell of darkenesse turned blacke upon us. . . .” After the ship was beached, Strachey and his company realized that they were on one of the “dangerous and dreaded . . . lands of the Bermuda.” His report is one that Shakespeare probably was thinking about when he wrote The Tempest. In this “hideous wilderness” image of landscape, the New World is a place of hellish darkness; it arouses the fear of malevolent forces in the cosmos, and of the cannibalistic and bestial traits of man. It is associated with the wild men of medieval legend.5

No doubt the best-known example of this reaction appears in William Bradford’s account of an event that occurred shortly after the Bermuda wreck. When the Mayflower stood off Cape Cod in September 1620, Bradford (as he later recalled) looked across the water at what seemed to him a “hidious and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men.” Between the pilgrims and their new home, he saw only “deangerous shoulds and ror-ing breakers.” So far from seeming an earthly paradise, the landscape struck Bradford as menacing and repellent.

Nether could they, as it were, goe up to the tope of Pisgah, to vew from this wildernes a more goodly countrie to feed their hops; for which way soever they turnd their eys (save upward to the heavens) they could have litle solace or content in respecte of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a wetherbeaten face; and the whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage heiw. If they looked behind them, ther was the mighty ocean which they had passed, and was now as a maine barr and goulfe to separate them from all the civill parts of the world.

This grim sight provoked one of the first of what has been an interminable series of melancholy inventories of the
desirable — not to say indispensable — items of civilization absent from the raw continent. His people, said Bradford, had “no freinds to wellcome them, nor inns to entertaine or refresh their weatherbeaten bodys, no houses or much less townes to repaire too, to seeke for succoure.” Instead of abundance and joy, Bradford saw deprivation and suffering in American nature.

Here, then, is a conception of the New World that is radically opposed to the garden. On the spectrum of Elizabethan images of America the hideous wilderness appears at one end and the garden at the other. The two views are traditionally associated with quite different ideas of man's basic relation to his environment. We might call them ecological images. Each is a kind of root metaphor, a poetic idea displaying the essence of a system of value. Ralph Waldo Emerson had some such concept in mind when he observed, in *English Traits*, that the views of nature held by any people seem to “determine all their institutions.” In other words, each image embodies a quite distinct notion of America's destiny — a distinct social ideal.

To depict the new land as a lovely garden is to celebrate an ideal of immediate, joyous fulfillment. It must be admitted, however, that the word “immediate” conceals a crucial ambiguity. How immediate? we may well ask. At times the garden is used to represent the sufficiency of nature in its original state. Then it conveys an impulse-centered, anarchic, or primitivistic view of life. But elsewhere the garden stands for a state of cultivation, hence a less exalted estimate of nature's beneficence. Although important, the line between the two is not sharp. Both the wild and the cultivated versions of the garden image embody something of that timeless impulse to cut loose from the constraints of a complex society. In Elizabethan travel literature the image typically carries a certain sense of revulsion — quickened no doubt by the discovery of new lands — against the deprivation and suffering that had for so long been accepted as an unavoidable basis for civilization. To depict America as a garden is to express aspirations still considered utopian — aspirations, that is, toward abundance, leisure, freedom, and a greater harmony of existence.

To describe America as a hideous wilderness, however, is to envisage it as another field for the exercise of power. This violent image expresses a need to mobilize energy, postpone immediate pleasures, and rehearse the perils and purposes of the community. Life in a garden is relaxed, quiet, and sweet, like the life of Virgil's Tityrus, but survival in a howling desert demands action, the unceasing manipulation and mastery of the forces of nature, including, of course, human nature. Colonies established in the desert require aggressive, intellectual, controlled, and well-disciplined people. It is hardly surprising that the New England Puritans favored the hideous wilderness image of the American landscape.

What is most revealing about these contrasting ideas of landscape is not, needless to say, their relative accuracy in picturing the actual topography. They are not representational images. America was neither Eden nor a howling desert. These are poetic metaphors, imaginative constructions which heighten meaning far beyond the limits of fact. And yet, like all effective metaphors, each had a basis in fact. In a sense, America was both Eden and a howling desert; the actual conditions of life in the New World did lend plausibility to both images. The infinite resources of the virgin land really did make credible, in minds long
habituated to the notion of unavoidable scarcity, the ancient dream of an abundant and harmonious life for all. Yet, at the same time, the savages, the limitless spaces, and the violent climate of the country did threaten to engulf the new civilization. In the reports of voyagers there was evidence to support either view, and during the age of Elizabeth many Englishmen seized upon one or the other as representing the truth about America and her prospects.

But there were others who recognized the contradiction and attempted to understand or at least to express it. Sylvester Jourdain, who wrote a report on the Bermuda wreck of 1609, observes that the islands were widely considered “a most prodigious and enchanted place, affording nothing but gusts, storms, and foul weather; which made every Navigator and Mariner to avoid them . . . as they would shunne the Devill himselfe . . . .” It was all the more surprising, therefore, when the castaways discovered that the climate was “so temperate and the Country so abundantly fruitful of all fit necessaries” that they were able to live in comfort for nine months. Experience soon led them to reconsider the legendary horror of the place. Jourdain (one of the writers with whom Shakespeare apparently was familiar) finally puts it this way: “whereas it [Bermuda] hath beene, and is still accounted, the most dangerous infortunate, and most forlorne place of the world, it is in truth the richest, healthfullest, and pleasing land, (the quantity and bignesse thereof considered) and meere naturall, as ever man set foote upon.”

William Strachey, in his report, also confronts the ambiguity of nature in the New World. As already mentioned, he had been impressed by the legendary hideousness of the islands:

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... they be so terrible to all that ever touched on them, and such tempests, thunders, and other fearefull objects are seen and heard about them, that they be called commonly, The Devils Islands, and are feared and avoyded of all sea travellers alive, above any other place in the world.

Then in the very next sentence Strachey acknowledges the contrary evidence: “Yet it pleased our mercifull God, to make even this hideous and hated place, both the place of our safetie, and meanes of our deliverance.” By invoking Providence he can admit the attractions of the islands without revising the standard opinion of Bermuda as a hideous wilderness. There were a number of devices for coping with these contradictory ideas about America. One writer, anxious to correct the dismal reports about life at Jamestown during the early years, attacks the problem head on. Having begun with a stock and no doubt transparently propagandistic celebration of Virginia’s abundance, and aware at the same time that the actual calamities were well known, he interjects the direct appeal to the reader’s credulity that I quote at the head of this chapter. For him the problem is to persuade readers to accept an image of America in which “felicities and miseries can be reconciled together . . . .”

But if some Elizabethan travelers discovered that the stock images of America embraced a contradiction, few had the wit to see what mysteries it veiled. Few recognized that a most striking fact about the New World was its baffling hospitality to radically opposed interpretations. If America seemed to promise everything that men always had wanted, it also threatened to obliterate much of what they already had achieved. The paradox was to be a cardinal subject of our national literature, and begin-
ning in the nineteenth century our best writers were able to develop the theme in all its complexity. Not that the conflict was in any sense peculiar to American experience. It had always been at the heart of pastoral; but the discovery of the New World invested it with new relevance, with fresh symbols. Nothing demonstrates this fact more clearly than the play Shakespeare wrote in the hour colonization began.

2

ADRIAN. Though this island seem to be desert,—
SEBASTIAN. Ha, ha, ha!

ADRIAN. Uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible,—
SEBASTIAN. Yet,—
ADRIAN. Yet,—
ANTONIO. He could not miss't.
ADRIAN. It must needs be of subtle, tender and delicate temperance.
ANTONIO. Temperance was a delicate wench.
SEBASTIAN. Ay, and a subtle; as he most learnedly deliver'd.
ADRIAN. The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
SEBASTIAN. As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
ANTONIO. Or as 'twere perfum'd by a fen.
GONZALO. Here is everything advantageous to life.
ANTONIO. True; save means to live.
SEBASTIAN. Of that there's none, or little.
GONZALO. How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green! 11

This exchange takes place when the court party first examines the island after the wreck; it is a comic version of the effort to reconcile conflicting attitudes toward the New World. But, for all the jesting, a genuine sense of the terrain — its palpable presence — comes through. The actuality of the landscape, hence the close juxtaposition of fact and fancy, is a distinguishing mark of pastoral set in the New World. To be sure, a remote and unspoiled landscape had long been a feature of the mode. But the usual setting of pastorals had been a never-never land. The writer did not pretend that it was an actual place, and the reader was not expected to take it as one. (In Europe, for one thing, it was difficult to credit the existence of a site that was both ideal and unoccupied.) In the age of discovery, however, a note of topographical realism entered pastoral. Writers were increasingly tempted to set the action in a terrain that resembled, if not a real place, then the wish-colored image of a real place. Even when the connection is not made explicit, as in The Tempest, we surely feel the imaginative impact of an actual New World.

This sense of discovery accounts in part for the close affinity between the travel literature and Elizabethan pastoral. Many voyagers resort to pastoral conventions in writing their reports. What gives them a special stamp, indeed, is the close juxtaposition of the conventional and the novel; artificial devices of rhetoric are used to report fresh, striking, geographical facts. The combination heightens the sense of awe at the presence of a virgin continent. Although we may recognize Virgil's shepherds in Barlowe's Indians, who are gentle and loving after the manner of the golden age, the fact remains that the place is Virginia. Virginia does exist. Can it be, then, that the old, old dream suddenly has come true? The question, even when unexpressed, makes itself felt in much of the
early writing about America, and it lends fresh conviction and immediacy to the pastoral impulse. We feel it in Gonzalo’s exclamation: “How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!” The greenness of grass is hardly a novelty, yet the conventionality of the image lends credibility to the episode. The effect comes from the strength of feeling attached to so homely a fact. Could anything but green grass, actually before his eyes, produce so lyrical a banality? “The singing of the little birds,” Christopher Columbus had written in 1492 of a West Indian island, “is such that it seems that one would never desire to depart hence.”

But what kind of place is Shakespeare’s “uninhabited island”? Like Arcadia or Virginia, it is remote and unspoiled, and at first thought we are likely to remember it as a kind of natural paradise. The play leaves us with a memory of an enchanted isle where life is easy and the scenery a delight. Or if this is not the whole truth (after all, what about Caliban?), it surely is clear that the island is the sort that can be expected to arouse utopian fantasies in the minds of Europeans. Had not the voyages of Columbus and Cabot inspired Sir Thomas More’s Utopia in 1516? As soon as the storm is over and the castaways reassemble on the beach we hear the discussion just cited. It is Gonzalo, the “honest old Councellor,” who is most responsive to the promise of the green island. Soon he is half-seriously ruminating about the kingdom he would set up if he had “plantation of this isle.”

GONZALO. I’ th’ commonwealth I would by contraries Execute all things; for no kind of traffic Would I admit; no name of magistrate; Letters should not be known; riches, poverty, And use of service, none; contract, succession,

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Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and pure:
No sovereignty; —

SEBASTIAN. Yet he would be King on ’t.
ANTONIO. The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning.
GONZALO. All things in common Nature should produce Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony, Sword, pike, knife, gun or need of any engine, Would I not have; but Nature should bring forth, Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

How seriously shall we take the old man’s vision of the island’s possibilities? Most scholars say that Shakespeare merely is mocking the whole idea. We know that he borrowed it, and indeed some of the actual words, from Montaigne’s essay on cannibals — one of the fountainheads of modern primitivism. We also know that the speech belongs to a tradition that goes back to the ancient Greek idea of man’s original state. Gonzalo admits as much a moment later: “I would with such perfection govern, sir, / T’ excel the Golden Age.” But it is one thing to identify Shakespeare’s source and quite another to know what to make of this famous passage. We sense immediately that the world of Gonzalo’s imagination, for all his “merry fooling,” is in many ways similar to the “real” world of the play, the enchanted island that Prospero rules. Yet it is impossible to miss the skepticism that Shakespeare places, like a frame, around the old man’s speech. We feel it in the force that he lends to the interruptions of the insolent courtiers, Sebastian and Antonio.
These two are nothing if not worldly wise, and they quickly and shrewdly detect the veiled egoism in Gonzalo's conception of society. Antonio puts it with impressive economy: "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning." In one line Shakespeare condenses a treatise on a fallacy that nullifies most primitivist-anarchist programs. The scornful courtier sees that Gonzalo is befuddled about the uses of power, and that he proposes to exercise absolute power in order to set up a polity dedicated to the abolition of power. Gonzalo means to imply, of course, that here nature is so benign that power is not necessary. Hence he would begin his imaginary regime by dispensing with government, learning, technology — even agricultural technology. He is dreaming of what a nineteenth-century utopian might call the "withering away of the state." To see how far Shakespeare is from sharing these sentiments, we have only to compare the "beginning" of Gonzalo's Utopia with the "beginning" of Prospero's actual island "commonwealth." 14

We get our first impression of the setting for Prospero's regime from the violent storm with which *The Tempest* begins. In the opening scene Shakespeare creates a kind of tempestuous no-man's-land between civilization and this other, new world. Later, it is true, we learn that the storm had been contrived by Prospero himself, but then we also recognize that he is forcing his old enemies to re-enact his own passage from civilization into nature. When, twelve years before, he and Miranda also had survived a tempest in a "rotten carcass of a butt," they had been at the mercy of the elements. Nor does Prospero ever forget that the elements were merciless. His enemies, he tells Miranda, launched them upon the water:

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To cry to th' sea, that roar'd to us; to sigh
To th' winds, whose pity, sighing back again,
Did us but loving wrong.

Like the castaways in William Strachey's report of the Bermuda wreck, Prospero and Miranda were saved only by "Providence divine." 15

The opening scene dramatizes the precariousness of civilization when exposed to the full fury of nature. In seventy spare lines we are given what Strachey, describing the Bermuda tempest, calls a "dreadfull storme and hideous . . . swelling, and roaring as it were by fits. . . ." Against a background of thunder and lightning an eggshell ship founders on a furious ocean. "'We split, we split!' — 'Farewell, my wife and children!'" Disorder in society follows close upon disorder in nature. In the emergency the lowly boatswain, who gives orders to noble courtiers, justifies his disregard of social degree by pointing to nature itself: "What cares these roarers for the name of King?" So far as he is concerned, what counts in the crisis is seamanship, technical skill, the ability to resist and repress primal forces. But Gonzalo, who even then fails to appreciate the need for power, thinks the seaman impudent: "... remember," he warns him, "whom thou hast aboard." Whereupon the boatswain, emboldened by danger, invites the nobleman to prove his authority over the tempest — "command these elements" — or, in effect, keep still. 16

Shakespeare leaves no doubt about the difference between the original state of nature as Gonzalo imagines it and as it actually exists in the world of *The Tempest*. The audience at the play enters this world through a howling storm, and so experiences something of what Prospero and Miranda had found when they arrived on the island.
We are likely to forget that the place then was under the sway of evil forces. Its ruler was Caliban's mother, the malevolent "blue-ey'd hag," Sycorax, and twelve years later Caliban still thinks of the island as his rightful possession. "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me." Before she died the "damn'd witch" had imprisoned Ariel in a cloven pine, and to win his co-operation Prospero reminds Ariel what the place had once been like:

Then was this island —
Save for the son that she did litter here,
A freckled whelp hag-born — not honour'd with
A human shape.\(^{17}\)

In its "original" state, that is, before Prospero's arrival, this new world had been a howling desert, where the profane ruled. In the first scene Shakespeare uses every possible device to stress the violent, menacing power of nature. Above all, he makes the storm scene a scene apart. The rest of the action is colored by fantasy, but the storm is depicted in spare naturalistic tones. We are invited to imagine a real ship in a real tempest. The contrast between this scene and the rest of the play is underscored by the absence of Prospero. This is the only time when we are unaware of the controlling power of his magic. As soon as the scene is over we learn of his art, and from then on nothing is "natural," all is touched by enchantment. The rest of the action, until Prospero announces in the last act that the "charm dissolves apace," is a kind of dream. What is more, the dramatic structure of *The Tempest* sets this opening scene off from the rest. Critics frequently note how close Shakespeare comes to observing the classical unities in the play — how (except for the storm scene) all the action takes place on the island, and how (except for the storm scene) it is all neatly packed into four hours. But in unifying the rest of the play Shakespeare isolates and thereby accentuates the force of the storm itself. It lends its name to the entire action. How much simpler the stagecraft would have been had the play begun with a scene on the beach after the wreck (the facts about the storm might easily have been conveyed by dialogue), but how much imaginative force would have been lost! To carry its full dramatic weight the storm must be dramatized. In that way Shakespeare projects an image of menacing nature, and of the turmoil that Prospero had survived, into dramatic time. The opening scene represents the furies, without and within the self, that civilized man must endure to gain a new life. As an ironic underpinning for Gonzalo's sentimental idea of nature, nothing could be more effective than the howling storm.\(^{18}\)

Nor is the menacing character of nature confined to the opening episode. Within the encircling storm, to be sure, there is a lush, green island; but in depicting it Shakespeare does not allow us to forget the hideous wild. All through the first of the comic episodes, when Trinculo and Stephano meet Caliban, we hear thunder rolling in the distance. "Alas, the storm is come again!" says Trinculo as he crawls under the monster's gaberdine. If we sometimes lose sight of unruly nature during the play, it is largely because Prospero's art had done so much of its work by the time the action begins. In twelve years he has changed the island from a howling desert into what seems an idyllic land of ease, peace, and plenty. With his magic he has eliminated or controlled many unpleasant, ugly features of primal nature. And yet enough remain to dispel the primitivistic daydream that Gonzalo speaks.\(^{19}\)
Apart from the initial storm, the most vivid reminder of
the island’s past is Caliban. It is from Caliban that
Prospero learns an invaluable lesson about unimproved
nature. At first his feelings about primitive man, like
Gonzalo’s, had been those of the more optimistic Eliza-
bethan voyagers. He had responded to Caliban as Gonzalo
responds to the “Shapes” that Prospero conjures up:

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

As he reminds Caliban, Prospero once had thought it po-
sible to nurture and redeem him:

I have us’d thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg’d thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

Like her father, Miranda also had pitied Caliban before
the abortive attack. She had taught him human speech,
but now she refers to him as: “Abhorred slave, / Which
any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being capable of
all ill!” It is true that Prospero has Caliban in his power
when the action begins, but the creature’s threatening
presence reminds us throughout that the dark, hostile
forces exhibited by the storm are still active. We are not
in Eden; Caliban must be made to work. He keeps us in
mind of the unremitting vigilance and the repression of
instinct necessary to the felicity Prospero and Miranda
enjoy.  

But finally it is Prospero himself who most clearly de-
finesthe nature of nature, and man’s relation to it, in the
exotic setting of The Tempest. Before his exile he had led
an almost exclusively passive and contemplative life, “rapt
in secret studies.” If there is still something of the medieval
hermit about Prospero as we see him, he now recognizes
what was wrong with his earlier life. By “neglecting
worldly ends,” he had helped the conspiracy that took his
throne. Since then he has been forced to exercise as well
as study power. His survival and his triumph rest upon
art, a white magic akin to science and technology. As
readers of The Golden Bough or the work of Malinowski
know, there are close affinities between magic and modern
science, particularly in their tacit views of man’s neces-
sary posture in the face of physical nature. Both presup-
pose our ability and our need to master the non-human
through activity of mind. The aim of Prospero’s magic,
as his relations with Ariel and Caliban show, is to keep
the elements of air, earth, fire, and water at work in the
service of his island community. He does not share Gon-
zalo’s faith in what “Nature should produce / Without
sweat or endeavour.”  

Each of these attitudes toward nature accords with a
distinct idea of history. Like all primitivist programs,
Gonzalo’s plantation speech in effect repudiates calculated
human effort, the trained intellect, and, for that matter,
the idea of civilization itself. It denies the value of history.
It says that man was happiest in the beginning — in the
golden age — and that the record of human activity is a
record of decline. But Prospero’s personal history exempli-
ifies a contrary view. At first, after his banishment, the ele-
ments controlled his fate, but gradually, by use of reason
and art, he won dominion over nature. As his name sug-
gests, he is a kind of meliorist. (The names of several
characters in *The Tempest* have overtones of symbolic significance. Caliban, for example, is formed from the letters of “cannibal.”) Prospero is derived from the Latin, *prosperare*, to cause to succeed. Although a reclusive scholar in Europe, here in this new world Prospero is more like a social engineer. Given the setting, it may not be too farfetched to see his behavior as prophetic of the deliberate and sometimes utopian manipulation of social forms that would tempt Europeans in a virgin land. His sense of the plastic character of human behavior is largely unstated, but it is made graphic by his impressive role as “designer” of the drama itself. It is he, after all, who stands above the level of ordinary mortals and contrives the ritual of initiation that finally achieves a change of state.

As the shaping spirit of the play, Prospero directs the movement toward redemption, not by renouncing power, but by exercising it to the full. His control is based upon hard work, study, and scholarly self-discipline. We are constantly reminded of his studious habits, and even Caliban recognizes that his power stems from the written word. “Remember,” he warns his fellow conspirators, “First to possess his books; for without them / He’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not / One spirit to command. . . .” Until the final scene we are kept mindful of Prospero’s nagging sense of responsibility, and his devotion to the reasoned use of power. What he feels toward the external forces of nature, moreover, has its counterpart in what he feels about passion, his own included. When Ariel reports the anguish of his enemies, Prospero has to master his vengeful impulse:

> Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,  
> Yet with my nobler reason ’gainst my fury  
> Do I take part. . . .

As man must control the animals, so must intellect dominate passion. Though Prospero is a model of self-mastery, taut, humorless, and awesome, he does not neglect the emotional and sensual aspect of man. This humane balance appears in his self-effacing and magnanimous encouragement of Miranda’s suitor. At the same time he characteristically insists upon a controlled and chaste engagement. Prospero fulfills Hamlet’s ideal: the man who is not passion’s slave.

Prospero’s experience represents a denial of the idea, expressed by Gonzalo, that we should emulate the spontaneous, uncalculated ways of mindless nature. In the beginning, according to the skeletal fable of *The Tempest*, there was more of chaos than of order — a fearful storm, not a delightful garden. To reach the island, an uninhabited site for a new beginning, Europeans must risk annihilation. Prospero’s success, finally, is the result not of submission to nature, but of action — of change that stems from intellect. On this island power makes love possible, and so both may be said to rest upon the book of magical lore — that is, upon the fusion of mind and object best exemplified by art. In Prospero’s triumph Shakespeare affirms an intellectual and humanistic ideal of high civilization.

But having said all this, we still must cope with what now seems a paradox: our initial impression that in *The Tempest* Shakespeare glorifies nature, the island landscape, and the rusticity of Prospero’s little community. To conclude that Prospero’s triumph is a triumph of art over nature does not square with our full experience of the
play. We cannot forget that here redemption is made possible by a journey away from Europe into the wilderness. In Milan the hero's art was anything but triumphant; on the island it helps to create a kind of natural paradise. Here is a life of unexampled bounty, serenity, freedom, and delight. It is an idealized rural style of life, in striking contrast to what we may infer about life back in Milan. The simple comforts, the dreamlike remoteness from the stress of the great world, the lyrical immersion in the immediate sensations of nature — we identify all of these boons with the unspoiled landscape. Above all, we think of the setting as conducive to a sensuous intimacy between man and not-man, like the echoes in Virgil’s first eclogue, that nourishes the spirit as well as the body. But how then are we to reconcile the triumph of Prospero’s intellectual ideal with a celebration of the movement away from advanced society toward nature?

Some critics, it should be said, deny that The Tempest embraces a positive view of physical nature or, to be more concrete, of the island setting. But perhaps that is because Shakespeare, like many writers working in the pastoral tradition, relies upon auditory images to carry his strongest affirmation of man’s rootedness in nature. The visible landscape is relatively insignificant in The Tempest, but to conclude that the characters are unaffected by the setting is to ignore what Shakespeare does with music. The uninhabited island is a land of musical enchantment, and from beginning to end all kinds of engaging sounds play upon our ears. We hear music being sung and played and talked about; we hear the music of the poetry itself; and, what is most revealing, music often serves as the audible expression of external nature’s influence upon mind. After the wreck, the first survivor we meet is Ferdinand, who is following sounds that seem to flow from the very terrain itself:

Where should this music be? 't' air or 't' earth?
It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon
Some god o’ th’ island. Sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the King my father’s wrack,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allaying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air...

That this music actually is made by Ariel is a point I will come back to. Now we need only observe that the music seems to emanate from the air and earth and water. It is one with the landscape, and its effect upon Ferdinand is similar to the effect of the setting upon several of the others. We think of Adrian: “The air breathes upon us here most sweetly,” or Gonzalo: “How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!”

Music puts at rest the fury of the storm. The opposition between music and the tempest is symbolic of the deepest conflict in the play. In fact, one critic (G. Wilson Knight) maintains that these polar images are the key to the dominant unifying theme of the entire Shakespearean canon. Here, in any event, there is no mistaking the power of music to allay the forces of disorder. Even Caliban, as readers often note, responds to the melodious atmosphere:

... the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices...

Caliban’s bestiality, the equivalent within human nature of the untamed elements without, is partly offset by his singular, heavy-footed grace of language. (If the language
was given him by Miranda, the feeling is his own.) And it is heard, significantly, in homage to the island's bountiful landscape:

I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries;
I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough.

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?

Monstrous though he is, there is in Caliban a vein of crude tenderness that makes itself felt largely as susceptibility to music and landscape. As a result he is more appealing than several of the deceitful, corrupt, and besotted men of Europe washed up on this beach. In The Tempest music is a measure of the beauty, order, and proportion of the physical universe.

But how, then, can we interpret the story of Prospero's exile, the experience of "reality" in The Tempest, as a total repudiation of Gonzalo's utopian fantasy? If the plantation speech rests upon the idea of a beneficent order running through nature, so in a way does the Pythagorean musical motif. So does Prospero's delicate masque. For that matter, the entire fable unquestionably affirms the impulse of civilized man to renew himself by immersion in the simple, spontaneous instinctual life. Witness Ariel, the spirit of air who helps Prospero recognize what is truly human. Once an aloof and haughty scholar, Prospero learns on the island the compassion that finally allows him to restore his enemies to themselves. At the moment, already mentioned, when he controls his impulse toward revenge, it is Ariel who gives him his cue:

Shakespeare's American Fable

ARIEL. ... if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.

PROS. Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL. Mine would, sir, were I human.

PROS. And mine shall.

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?

Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part ...

Or, as another token of nature's promise, witness Prospero's success in bringing his daughter up to perfect womanhood in this remote place. Here, far from the sophistication of Europe, he actually does create a brave new world, even if Miranda ingenuously (and how ironically!) confuses it with an old ignoble one.

But why, then, if he does not permit us to take Gonzalo and his dreamland seriously, does Shakespeare expect us to feel differently about Prospero and his New World Arcadia? The answer may be found by comparing the plantation speech and the lovely masque of Act IV.

There are good reasons for thinking of the masque — Ferdinand calls it a "most majestic vision" — as the counterpart, for Prospero, of Gonzalo's vision of the perfect plantation. Each in its way is a tribute to the principle of natural fecundity. Each depicts an ideal land of abundance and joy. Each has its inception in an image of landscape. At the beginning of the masque, Iris (accompanied by soft music) sets the stage by addressing Ceres:

Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;
Thy turfy mountains, where live nibbling sheep,
And flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;

Later the goddess of agriculture responds by blessing the betrothed couple in these words:

Earth's increase, foison plenty,
Barns and garners never empty;
Vines with clust'ring bunches growing;
Plants with goodly burthen bowing;
Spring come to you at the farthest
In the very end of harvest!
Scarcity and want shall shun you;
Ceres' blessing so is on you.

Like the imaginary plantation, this is in effect another openhearted utopian vision. Indeed, if we listen closely to Ceres we can hear a distinct echo (notice the repetition of “foison”) of Gonzalo's speech; in his plantation, he had said:

... Nature should bring forth,
Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance,
To feed my innocent people.

The affinity between the two visions is heightened by the warm relation between the two men. When he first sees his old friend, Prospero cries, “Holy Gonzalo, honourable man,” and again, a moment later, “O good Gonzalo, / My true preserver.”

And yet the differences between the two finally are more revealing than the similarities. Prospero’s masque is a dream, as is the plantation speech, but it is a dream far more consistent with what The Tempest tells us of reality. Here the landscape, so far from representing Eden or the original state of nature, is an idealized version of old England—a countryside that men have acted upon for a long time. It is the traditional domain of Ceres, that is, of agri-culture (in the Latin: fields plus culture), an amalgam of landscape and art. If the land now looks like a magnificent garden, there is no reason to doubt that it once was a hideous wilderness. This paradise is a product of history in a future partly designed by men. (Perhaps there is more than a graceful compliment in Ceres’ lines: “Spring come to you at the farthest/In the very end of harvest!”) The successful blending of art and nature colors all the final affirmations of The Tempest. The music of the island is not made of the native woodnotes wild we might expect to hear in Gonzalo’s perfect plantation. Rather it is a product of collaboration between Prospero and Ariel. Miranda, by the same token, combines the qualities of natural simplicity with breeding and education. Her presence requires us to take seriously the prospect of utopia. She has the gift of wonder. (Her name is derived from the Latin, mirari, to wonder, or mirus, wonderful.) Hence her response when she first sees the court party:

O wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in’t!  

The tone of the masque carries over into the final moments of the play, which are filled with the joy that follows the success of controlled human effort. It is Prospero’s effort that is being rewarded, and the tone differs markedly from the tone of Gonzalo’s vision, with its yearning for a soft, passive, and indolent style of life. All of Prospero’s behavior, including the masque, suggests that half-formed, indistinct idea of history as a record of human
improvement, or progress, that was incipient in Renaissance thought generally. His commitment to art for the melioration of life reminds us of Francis Bacon, who at this time not only wrote an important chapter in the history of the idea of progress, but was convinced that the superiority of the present to the past could be explained by specific innovations in the practical arts. It is a testimony to the power of the poetic imagination that this hermit, with his magical incantations, also can seem a prophet of the emergent faith in progress. 28

But the difference between Gonzalo and Prospero is not that one accepts and the other rejects the idea of Utopia. Like his gentle friend, Prospero also delights in dreams of the good life. But he does not lose sight of the line that separates dream and reality. Shakespeare dramatizes the point most tellingly when, without warning, Prospero stops the masque. Before that, to enhance the effect, we are shown the powerful grip that these poetic images take upon the mind. As he watches the little play, Ferdinand exclaims: “Let me live here ever;/ So rare a wonder’d father and a wise / Makes this place Paradise.” Ferdinand is carried away, and so (he admits in an aside) is Prospero. That is when he “starts suddenly, and speaks; after which, to a strange, hollow and confused noise. . . .” the actors vanish. Prospero “had forgot that foul conspiracy/ Of the beast Caliban and his confederates. . . .” Twelve years before, in Milan, he had remained “rapt” in the life of the mind while an attack was being mounted against him. He is not about to repeat that mistake. He has learned that the urgencies of power take precedence, at least in order of time, over visionary pleasures. Yet there is nothing in what he says or does to belittle the masque. Like Gonzalo, Prospero values utopian visions. But his dream

Shakespeare’s American Fable is closer, within the world of The Tempest, to “reality” or the possible. In fact, the masque may be taken as an oblique statement of the principles for which he now goes forth to suppress Caliban and redeem his European enemies. 29

The difference between the masque and the plantation speech, finally, is the difference between a pastoral and a primitive ideal. For Prospero the center of value is located in the traditional landscape of Ceres. He stands on a middle ground, a terrain of mediation between nature and art, feeling and intellect. Any inclination that he might have had to trust in primal nature (as indicated by his original attitude toward Caliban) now has been checked by his experience of the hideous wilderness, by what he knows of the storm and of his own aggressive impulses and, of course, by what he has come to accept as the truth about Caliban. Even in the closing moments of the play, when he forgives his former enemies, he says nothing to suggest a change in his estimate of Caliban as “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick. . . .” His recognition of inherent and perhaps irredeemable aggressiveness in man saves Prospero’s utopian bent from sentimentality. But neither does he go to the opposite extreme. That he has reservations about the cultivated man, about power, intellect, and art, is implied by his final act of renunciation. In the end he abjures the potent art that distinguishes him from ordinary men. As if distrusting the uses of power, he vows to bury his staff and drown his book. The action of The Tempest has the effect of mitigating the duality that first sets it off. It is a comedy in praise neither of nature nor of civilization, but of a proper balance between them. 30
I began by saying that there are revealing connections, beyond the facts about Shakespeare's sources, between *The Tempest* and America. The first connection is genetic. It links the theme of the play to the contradiction within the Elizabethan idea of the New World. Is the virgin land best described as a garden or a hideous wilderness? In *The Tempest*, as in the travel reports, we can find apparent confirmation of both images. The island, like America, could be Eden or a hellish desert. As the action progresses, the weight of its implication swings like a pendulum between the poles of nature and civilization. The opening movement, when Milan comes to the wilderness, describes the widest arc: a vast distance between the howling storm, in which art counts for everything, and Gonzalo's primitivist vision of Eden regained, where nature counts for everything. But as Prospero's power makes itself felt, the arc becomes shorter. His aim is reconciliation, and as he masters the situation, the pendulum slows down; we move from storm to calm, from discord toward harmony. In the end we are permitted a glimpse, but only a glimpse, of the possibility of man's earthly transfiguration.

But what justification are we given for so utopian a vision? Leaving aside the force of the convention itself (this is, after all, a comedy), we may ask whether the ending is a tribute to Prospero's art or to the musical order, latent in nature, represented by Ariel? The answer implied by the last act is that neither art nor nature can be the basis for hope. So far as the play affirms the pastoral ideal of harmony, it draws upon Shakespeare's sense of an underlying unity that binds consciousness to the energy and order manifest in unconscious nature. If a resolution of the pastoral conflict is conceivable, Shakespeare implies, it is because art itself is a product of nature. In *The Winter's Tale*, a play closely related to *The Tempest* both in spirit and time of composition, he had made his most searching statement of the theme. Perdita and Polixenes are discussing the relative merit of wild and man-bred flowers. In Perdita's garden there are no cultivated flowers:

> ... of that kind
> Our rustic garden's barren; and I care not To get slips of them.

**POLIXENES.** Wherefore, gentle maiden, Do you neglect them?

**PERDITA.** For I have heard it said There is an art which in their piedness shares With great creating Nature.

**POLIXENES.** Say there be; Yet Nature is made better by no mean But Nature makes that mean; so, over that art Which you say adds to Nature, is an art That Nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry A gentler scion to the wildest stock, And make conceive a bark of baser kind By bud of nobler race. This is an art Which does mend Nature, change it rather, but The art itself is Nature.

The context, it is generally conceded, lends Shakespeare's support to Polixenes' view of the matter: the artificial is but a special, human category of the natural. Mind and nature are in essence one. Nature is all. This conviction underlies the seriousness with which Shakespeare, in *The Tempest*, treats the pastoral ideal. But what is there about *The Tempest* that imparts a
rare and compelling credibility, even profundity, to what for so long had seemed an incredible ideal? No single answer will do, but it is clear that certain realities of the age of discovery lend this ancient fantasy its astonishing force and depth. A universal awareness of vast, remote, and unspoiled continents had renewed the plausibility of the pastoral dream, now projected into the future. Although most earlier versions of pastoral had been set in never-never lands, and although The Tempest contains only one allusion to the actual New World, its setting is not wholly fanciful. We begin with a commonplace event of the age: a ship caught in a storm and beached on an uninhabited island. It is like an Elizabethan news report. Beginning with this episode enables Shakespeare to avoid the artificiality, the initial wrenching away from the world of ordinary experience, that we expect of pastoral. To be sure, we move swiftly from the tempest into a world of dreamlike enchantment, but, nevertheless, we move there from an event that has the plausibility of the actual. On this island we encounter no courtiers masquerading as shepherds; these are castaways, survivors of a wreck, and their situation keeps us in mind of the real world beyond. And though the body of the play is closer in texture to myth than to reality, the action carries us from the actual to the mythical and back again. Like the verse, with its vibrant sense of place, the action reflects the poet's awareness of an unspoiled terrain—a new world that really exists. The imaginative authority of the fable arises from the seriousness and wonder with which Shakespeare is able to depict a highly civilized man testing his powers in a green and desolate land.

In addition to the genetic connection between The Tempest and America, there is another that can only be called prophetic. By this I mean that the play, in its overall design, prefigures the design of the classic American fables, and especially the idea of a redemptive journey away from society in the direction of nature. As in Walden, Moby-Dick, or Huckleberry Finn, the journey begins with a renunciation. The hero gives up his place in society and withdraws toward nature. But in The Tempest, as in the best of American pastoral, the moral significance of this move is ambiguous. The island, after all, is the home of Caliban, who embodies the untrammeled wildness or cannibalism at the heart of nature. And that fact also proves to be a comment upon human nature, as Prospero indicates at the end: “Two of these fellows you / Must know and own,” he says, “this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine.” In The Tempest the island is not an ideal place, any more than the woods are in Walden or the sea in Moby-Dick or the river in Huckleberry Finn. And yet, in a world that contains corrupt Milan, the island does offer hope. Precisely because it is untainted by civilization, man’s true home in history, it offers the chance of a temporary return to first things. Here, as in a dream, the superfluities and defenses of everyday life are stripped away, and men regain contact with essentials. In the wilderness only essentials count. America, Emerson will say, is a land without history, hence a land “where man asks questions for which man was made.”

What finally enables us to take the idea of a successful “return to nature” seriously is its temporariness. It is a journey into the desert and back again—“a momentary stay against confusion.” On the island Prospero regains access to sources of vitality and truth. This we must grant even if we deny that the island, representing external nature, provides anything more than a setting for the
renewal that Prospero achieves through an effort of mind and spirit. What happens during his exile is what may happen to us in any of our departures from routine waking consciousness. It is what may happen in sleep, especially in dreams (the action of *The Tempest* is a kind of dream), in the act of love, perhaps even in death where the race renews itself if only in making room for the newborn. It is not necessary to commit the pathetic fallacy in order to accept the restorative power of this movement, literal or symbolic, away from the city toward nature. The contrast between “city” and “country” in the pastoral design makes perfect sense as an analogue of psychic experience. It implies that we can remain human, which is to say, fully integrated beings, only when we follow some such course, back and forth, between our social and natural (animal) selves. In Milan Prospero’s sense of value had become distorted; he had succumbed to the tyranny of his scholarly ambitions. But on the island he rediscovers what it means to be a father, to have senses and a passionaI self. What is ascribed to “nature” in the design may plausibly be understood as the vitality of unconscious or preconscious experience. The partnership between these two realms of being is a means as well as an end in Shakespeare’s fable. The resolution is accomplished by Prospero working with Ariel. Even as the final unravelling draws near, Prospero requires Ariel’s help — “some heavenly music” to lead the court party to the climax. In the closing scene several of the “lost” Europeans find each other and themselves:

... in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand, her brother, 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.33

*Shakespeare’s American Fable*

And so to Naples and then to Milan. The play fosters no illusion that a permanent retreat from the city is possible or desirable. But the temporary exile, or psychic renewal, may also be understood in political terms. If the city is corrupt, it is men who have made the journey of self-discovery who must be relied upon to restore justice, the political counterpart of psychic balance. Thus the symbolic action, as in our American fables, has three spatial stages. It begins in a corrupt city, passes through a raw wilderness, and then, finally, leads back toward the city. But the court party is not returning to the same Milan from which it came. There is now some hope that what has been learned on the island can be applied to the world. What has been learned, needless to say, is not the lesson of primitivism. So far as the ending lends credibility to the pastoral hope, it endorses the way of Prospero, not that of Gonzalo; the model for political reform is neither Milan nor the island as they existed in the beginning; it is a symbolic middle landscape created by mediation between art and nature.

But although Shakespeare invests the pastoral hope with unexampled charm and power, in the end he refuses to make of it anything more than a hope. It is a vision that he checks, in the final scene, by unequivocal reminders of human limitations. “There is no pure comedy or tragedy in Shakespeare,” says Boris Pasternak. “His style is between the two and made up of both; it is thus closer to the true face of life than either, for in life, too, horrors and delights are mixed.” For all the efficacy of Prospero’s magic, the ending of *The Tempest* leaves us a long way from a brave new world. There, for one thing, is Caliban, that “thing of darkness” who vows to be even wilier in the future. There, too, are those unrepentant villains, Antonio and Sebastian, who doubtless are more
clever than Alonso. Prospero relinquishes power, and, what is more, he turns our thoughts to his approaching death. *Et in Arcadia Ego.* In the end we are reminded that history cannot be stopped. The pastoral design, as always, circumscribes the pastoral ideal.\(^\text{54}\)

The pattern is remarkably like the pattern of our typical American fables. To be sure, many of them do not arrive at anything like the resolution of *The Tempest.* The American hero successfully makes his way out of society, but in the end he often is further than Prospero from envisaging an appropriate landscape of reconciliation. Nevertheless, the tacit resolution is much the same. Prospero's island community prefigures Jefferson's vision of an ideal Virginia, an imaginary land free both of European oppression and frontier savagery. The topography of *The Tempest* anticipates the moral geography of the American imagination. What is most prophetic about the play, finally, is the singular degree of plausibility that it attaches to the notion of a pastoral retreat. By making the hope so believable, Shakespeare lends singular force to its denial. *The Tempest* may be read as a prologue to American literature.

**III**

*The Garden*

Have you still got humming birds, as in Crevecoeur? I liked Crevecoeur's "Letters of an American Farmer," so much. And how splendid Herman Melville's "Moby Dick" is, & Dana's "Two Years before the Mast." But your classic American literature, I find to my surprise, is older than our English. The tree did not become new, which was transplanted. It only ran more swiftly into age, impersonal, non-human almost. But how good these books are! Is the English tree in America almost dead? By the literature, I think it is.

D. H. Lawrence to Amy Lowell, 1916 *

*It may in truth be said, that in no part of the world are the people happier . . . or more independent than the farmers of New England.*

Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1797

**ALTHOUGH Shakespeare and his contemporaries had thought about the unspoiled terrain of the New World as a possible setting for a pastoral utopia, a fully articulated pastoral idea of America did not emerge until the end of the eighteenth century. The story of its emergence illustrates the turning of an essentially literary device to ideological or (using the word in its extended sense) political uses. By 1785, when Jefferson issued *Notes on Virginia,* the pastoral ideal had been "removed" from the literary mode to which it traditionally had belonged and applied to reality.

But here again it is necessary to insist upon the vital distinction between the pastoral ideal and the pastoral

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Notes

Wherever possible I have indicated the approximate location of quoted passages in my text. In referring to standard works for which many editions are available, I have cited the chapter rather than the pages of a particular edition.

THE FOLLOWING ABBREVIATIONS ARE USED IN CITING PERIODICALS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AHR</td>
<td>American Historical Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>American Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am. J. of Sci.</td>
<td>American Journal of Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>American Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem. Rev.</td>
<td>United States Democratic Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEH</td>
<td>Journal of Economic History</td>
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<tr>
<td>JHI</td>
<td>Journal of the History of Ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLN</td>
<td>Modern Language Notes</td>
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<td>MLR</td>
<td>Modern Language Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>MVHR</td>
<td>Mississippi Valley Historical Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAR</td>
<td>North American Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEQ</td>
<td>New England Quarterly</td>
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<td>Sci. Am.</td>
<td>Scientific American</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Studies in Philology</td>
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CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

1. For a general survey, see Robert Ralston Cawley, The Voyagers and Elizabethan Drama, Boston, 1938; and the same author's "Shakespeare's Use of the Voyagers in The Tempest," PMLA, XLI (1926), 688-726; more recently Frank Kermode has reviewed the evidence in the revised Arden Edition of The Tempest, London, 1954, pp. xxv-xxxiv; Ariel: I, ii, 229. I am following the Arden text.


3. Kenneth Clark, Landscape into Art, Edinburgh, 1956, Ch. I.


5. Strachey, "A true reportory of the wracke, and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight; upon, and from the Ilands of the Bermudas ...", Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes, ed. Samuel Purchas, Glasgow, 1906, 20 vols., XIX, 6, 12; Cawley, The Voyagers, p. 347ff; and Richard Bernheimer, Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology, Cambridge, Mass., 1952.
11. II, i, 58-51.
13. II, i, 143-60.
14. Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" is the only undisputed source for the play; Kermode discusses the relationship in his edition, pp. xxxvii; T. P. Harrison, Jr., *"Aspects of Primitivism in Shakespeare and Spenser," Studies in English*, University of Texas Publication 4026 (1940), 37-71; A. O. Lovejoy refers to Gonzalo's vision as expressive of "Shakespeare's own extreme antipathy to the [Montaigne] passage," "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *Essays in the History of Ideas*, Baltimore, 1948, p. 238n; that the play embodies a critique of sentimental primitivism is beyond argument, but to call Shakespeare's attitude "extreme antipathy" is an exaggeration; Gonzalo emerges a sympathetic figure, and all the evidence indicates that Shakespeare is reaffirming an ideal resolution of the tension between art and nature; II, i, 163-4.
15. I, ii, 149-51.
16. I, i.