

# *Illusion Magic, Prospero's Ars Rhetorica; a refutation of Baconian influences on The Tempest*

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This essay is a response to the epistemic assertions explored in Elizabeth Spiller's essay on *The Tempest* being in relation to early modern science and representing Baconian empiricism. I disagree with her position for several reasons. A few fractures in Spiller's essay are worth digging into more as they reveal a generalizing tendency which harbors some epistemic hazards.

"In the early modern period, though, those kinds of making and doing that Aristotle had distinguished from true knowledge came to have a new epistemological status. For a brief period in intellectual history, art was accepted as what I would like to call a knowledge practice. Aristotelian understandings of knowledge as eternal, unchanging, and "that which cannot be otherwise" involved a fundamental exclusion of the human from its categories" (Spiller 24).

Firstly, addressing Aristotelean epistemology during the Early Modern by only referencing *Nicomachean Ethics* is thin, *Nicomachean Ethics* is where Aristotle develops a principled moral philosophy, not a system of knowledge (Ettenhuber, 2). Epistemology was a huge topic of debate

from Aquinas, Agricola, Melanchthon, Ramus, Zaberella and much of scholastic philosophy and logic which followed there was intensive debate around what constituted the appropriate use of the senses and logic in the justification of knowledge and what the role of induction was in validating knowledge, Ettenhuber examines part of this history in her work on *The Logical Renaissance* which details and explores influences of changes to logic curriculum during the early modern period (Ettenhuber). The Aristotelian frame being discussed here is a huge debated arena of epistemics ranging widely in justifications and views, not at all the homogenous or nomothetic view toward "true knowledge" that is being presented by Spiller.

It is also worth noting that the 'categories' referenced in the quote above is a technical term in Aristotelian philosophy which carries strict logical definitions, defined in the first work of The Organon, Categories, which deals primarily with the names given to entities and identifying the boundaries of entities in categories and species genus distinctions of difference and inheritance-- that a horse is an animal and that a human is an animal but that a human is not a horse. As it is excerpted here the term takes on more of a contemporary typology which implies that contrary to Aristotelian philosophy, knowledge was non-human and eternal, that being essentialist and resembling platonic idealism with eternal forms which Aristotle frequently decries in favor of diagnosis, dialectic, and discourse as roads to knowledge. Giving the impression that Spiller is not familiar enough with Aristotle to place statements in *Nicomachean Ethics* within the proper context of their broader epistemic system.

"the historic shift in the early modern period away from that model of knowledge thus required the interjection of the human, the introduction of various forms of human invention and intervention, that is to say, art, into what counted as knowledge." (Spiller

As Ettenhuber clearly outlines in the introduction to her work, the shifts that Spiller is talking about took place after Shakespeare's death. "In the Renaissance, logic was the single most important tool for thinking and arguing before Bacon and Descartes began to reformulate the lexicon and syntax of discovery in the 1620s and 1630s." (Ettenhuber, 3). Prior to that time the Elizabethan statues of 1564-1565 heavily emphasized the presence of Aristotle and Porphyry in logic curriculums (Ettenhuber, 68). This implies that Shakespeare would have been most familiar with Aristotelean epistemics or the textbooks which treated Aristotelean logic as a form of knowledge validation.

"Through a new assessment of the possibilities of invention—artificial contrivances and human interventions of the kinds proposed by Francis Bacon and others—oddities that were once classified as the domain of the theologian and the natural historian became the basis for the new science of experimentalism." (Spiller 24)

So, Bacon's *Novum Organum*, was authored in 1620, well after Shakespeare's death and could not have influenced the ideas in *The Tempest*, notably also one of his last works. According to the introduction for the Project Gutenberg edition of Bacon's prior work, *The Advancement of Learning*.

"It was in 1597 that Bacon published the First Edition of his Essays. That was a little book containing only ten essays in English, with twelve "Meditationes Sacrae," which were essays in Latin on religious subjects. From 1597 onward to the end of his life, Bacon's Essays were subject to continuous addition and revision. The author's Second Edition, in which the number of the Essays was increased from ten to thirty-eight, did not appear until November or December, 1612, seven years later than these two books on the "Advancement of Learning;" and the final edition of the Essays, in which their number

was increased from thirty-eight to fifty-eight, appeared only in 1625; and Bacon died on the 9th of April, 1626. The edition of the Essays published in 1597, under Elizabeth, marked only the beginning of a course of thought that afterwards flowed in one stream with his teachings in philosophy.” (Bacon)

*The Advancement of Learning* was published in 1605, making it the most likely of Bacon's works to influence Shakespeare--if he found them influential at all. With the *Tempest* being written in approximately 1610, Shakespeare would be echoing Bacon's early contrarian ideas on empirical validity which were not Bacon's fully expressed epistemic position and treatise.

To claim that a newly printed work on learning and knowledge in the society of Late Elizabethan England would have direct influence on the conception of knowledge of an accomplished educated individual, like Shakespeare, in his middle 30's is a stretch for me. There were many competing ideas and Bacon's arguments were rather niche discussions of theological and epistemic validity which exceeded even most academic discussions of logic and theology at the time. A discussion which we have only speculation of printing dates to even assume that Shakespeare may have been aware of. Without extensive evidence that Shakespeare engaged with Bacon's early essays, it is a stretch to say that Bacon's ideas influenced Shakespeare.

Representing scientific explanation of Aristotle as only that found in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Metaphysics* furthermore is a sweeping generalization which fails to account for the role of *The Organon* as a sequential foundation of logical training and epistemic framework that structured much of British Early Modern thought (Ettenhuber, Chapter 1). Study of *Nicomachean Ethics* would have come after extensive study of *The Organon* and the language of

Categories, Topics, Analytics, and Interpretation are central to interpreting Aristotle's Ethics works.

Spiller also does not incorporate any contemporary discussion regarding the Peripatetic canon or questions of textual authority and interpretation for Aristotle's works. Gutas and Watt's philological scholarship from the 2000s offers alternative textual justification for more nuanced interpretation of Aristotelean authorship by analyzing transmission differences between the Syriac-Arabic line through Quenneshre versus the Graeco-Roman transmission of Boethius (Gutas). This is important when making statements regarding the epistemic system of Aristotle under discussion and the refutation of that system being present in a work because the critical edition of Aristotle which Spiller cites is an edited modern text which likely takes from sources which Shakespeare's understanding of Aristotelean authorship would not have incorporated. The use of a Latin edition from the Graeco-Roman transmission of Aristotle would be a more representative source to critically engage with Shakespeare's epistemology from.

Furthermore, the author continues on to use Bacon's *Novum Organum* as justification for Prospero's art being reflective of Early Modern empiricism. As already mentioned, this work was published 10 years after the *Tempest* was written and is not a likely influence from prior less articulated sources.

"Like the alchemist's crucible, William Gilbert's magnetic terrella, or Francis Bacon's idea for experiments that use the "vexations of art" to reveal the "secrets of nature," the island is a small world in which Prospero seeks to use art to control nature and, in doing so, create different forms of knowledge." (Spiller 26).

The use of demonstration as explanation is a principle of Aristotle in *The Organon* and features in *Posterior Analytics*--the fourth work in *The Organon* following *Prior Analytics*. The opening paragraph of *Posterior Analytics* situates enthymemes or scientific arguments which teach by deduction and examples which teach by induction as the domain of rhetoric or persuasion,

"All teaching and all intellectual learning come about from already existing knowledge.

This is evident if we consider it in every case; for the mathematical sciences are acquired in this fashion, and so is each of the other arts. And similarly, both deductive and inductive arguments proceed in this way; for both produce their teaching through what we are already aware of, the former getting their premises as from men who grasp them, the latter proving the universal through the particular's being clear. (And rhetorical arguments too persuade in the same way; for they do so either through examples, which is induction, or through enthymemes, which is deduction.)" (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 71a1-71a11)

This passage from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* provides a clearer depiction of Peripatetic epistemology and a guide to the crux of Prospero's art. Prospero persuades by induction.

Prospero's magic is the disillusion of the probable by making witness the improbable, a suspension of belief leaving an opening for the persuasion toward his view and aims. Correlation is not causation, the commentary on mere accidents in the play takes on a logically affective role. Particularly, if we take the linguistic polysemy of the term induction in both logic and in play writing, the use of the epilogue spoken by Prospero as an explanatory argument for the play itself--an induction--then we can make the following observation of logical play.

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,

And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true  
I must be here confined by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell,  
But release me from my bands fetters  
With the help of your good hands.  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending' is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.  
(NOR, *The Tempest*, Epilogue.1-20)

As Prospero is to tell his tale to the Neapolitans at the end of the play in chronological deductive form, we can take this epilogue as the induction of the play when taken in inverse. That is that if we read the play with the epilogue first then we are given a deductive view, the cause is given first and the effect of such an end for Prospero is the play which follows. This more closely follows the form of a tragedy where the audience is aware of the events unfolding but the characters portrayed are not aware of the events. In *The Tempest*, Prospero is inductively leading the audience through a series of effects--his magic--to the causes or motivations of his labors to safely deliver his daughter back to Naples and return himself to Milan. If we literally read the epilogue in reverse, it actually reads as an induction and a preface to the play.

Let your indulgence set me free.  
As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
And my ending' is despair,  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Must fill or else my project fails,  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
With the help of your good hands.  
But release me from my bands fetters  
In this bare island by your spell,  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
Since I have my dukedom got  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
I must be here confined by you,  
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Now my charms are all o'erthrown.

To reconsider Aristotle from the above quote, "And similarly too with arguments-both deductive and inductive arguments proceed in this way; for both produce their teaching through what we are already aware of, the former getting their premises as from men who grasp them, the latter proving the universal through the particular's being clear." The play is clearly positioned as inductive with the story unfolding as the particulars are made clear. So rather than a bid for deductive Baconian reasoning as Spiller is advocating, it is through the magic of Aristotelian induction, with a theatre pun in its polysemous sense to boot, that the play is an ode to



Aristotelian logic for carrying our indulgence and rapt attention--or persuasion--leading to Prospero's freedom.

While I do not think that this was necessarily entirely conscious on Shakespeare's part, though aspects of logical craft certainly were intentional, it is a testament to the depth of logic and rhetorical training that Shakespeare received that such structures are present throughout his works. I find Spiller's account of epistemic change rather forced and inelegant, if not entirely slipshod due to the inaccurate attribution of dates of publication and possible influence. Unless there is extensive evidence that a young Bacon was in close frequent discussion with Shakespeare, there seems little credence to Spiller's position other than anachronistic projections of empirical sentiments onto early 17<sup>th</sup> century literature. Prospero's magic relies on timing and sensationalism or perception, that is a magic of illusion or an art of airs, rather than a grand experiment from which a universal nomothetic truth is extracted. By Kairos, Ethos, Logic and force of eloquence Prospero achieves his aims, not by experimentalism or Baconian methodologies of empiricism. From this I feel a further work of merit for contemporary Shakespearean scholars is a comparative analysis of Shakespeare's works through an Early Modern logic and rhetoric frame, courtesy of Ettenhuber and Turner's recent work in logic and philology, and compare the fruits of such an analysis to some of the newer critical theory lenses to take stock if we are actually analyzing Shakespeare or merely semiotically harvesting the artefacts with his name for other purposes.

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