CHAPTER 6

OF ANIMALS AND MEN:  
THE TEMPEST

In the treatises of moral philosophy of the Renaissance humanist period, there is a paradigm that recurs describing what it is like to be human. The paradigm, it can be argued, is revealing of some aspects of the characters and the fairy-tale quality of The Tempest. Moral philosophers write about this paradigm in different ways but they refer to it invariably as being made up of three elements, the nature of which supports their common vision of humanity. In a quotation supposedly from Plato, for example, Baldwin describes the human being as constituted of two elements, the soul and the body, and there is nothing remarkable in this statement. But as he develops his argument, he points out that the soul too is constituted of two elements, first a pure spirit that gives it its otherworldly character and next a reason that has characteristics of both the spirit and the body. “Man,” Baldwin writes, “is a creature made by God of two parts, of a soule everlasting, immortall, of substance materiall, wherein is reason, wisedom, and knowledge: and of a body, fraile and corruptible, made of foure elements, whereof cometh life, lust and senses.” We are no longer in a notion of man as spirit and matter but in one that conceives of him as a spirit and a body and a third thing in between them somehow made up of both, known generally as reason. Reason is at once spirit and matter and that part of it conceived of as “matter” is the soul functioning in time. In this paradigm, Baldwin encapsulates the meaning that contemporary moral philosophers attributed to human life as a working vision of their ideals of wisdom, will, and emotion.

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A little later we see Baldwin’s paradigm repeated in de La Primaudaye’s *French Academie*,2 Crewe’s *Nosegay of Morall Philosophie*,3 de Mornay’s *Trewnesse of Christian Religion*4 and Charron’s *Of Wisdome*. In his treatment of what he calls the “humane spirit” Charron may be less immediately precise than Baldwin as he groups under it not only its usual powers of seeing, reasoning, and imagination, but also the soul and yet a second spirit to describe reason. However, amid his myriad of terms, the tripartite division is there. In the subcategory of the “minde” as he calls it, the powers of seeing, reasoning, and imagination are characterized by the same “taste of the immortal substance” as we find in Baldwin. Again, Charron describes reason as depending on sensory images for knowledge and it shares in the immortality of the spirit above it.5

To apply the vision underlying the paradigm to *The Tempest* is a way of assessing how Shakespeare as a Renaissance humanist might have thought about people as he created the play’s characters. At stake is a sense of human life as a mixed bag of spirit, of reason as both spirit and body, and of body that can be seen to attribute to the play’s characters the vision of intelligent life that contemporary humanists thought was theirs. One can even go out on a critical limb and imagine Ariel as spirit, Prospero as reason, and Caliban as the body. Classical allegory is not at stake here as the *The Tempest*’s characters and its events are not somehow manipulated—as in allegory—by a predetermined moral meaning at the end of the play that governs the incidents and characters of its story. But each of the three characters in question can still be looked upon as finding his complete sense in the harmony of the parts of the paradigm at the same time that he remains an intelligent creature in his own right.

The repeated references to liberty in the play moreover find their meaning in the paradigm. All of the play’s characters are markedly in pursuit of liberty, but what is significant about Ariel, Prospero, and Caliban is that they seek it for a purpose other than that of being stranded on an island by a shipwreck. If the