

# THE SPANISH MAZE

## and the date of *The Tempest*

Roger Stritmatter and Lynne Kositsky \_\_\_\_\_ ❧

Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess:

Miranda Sweet lord, you play me false.

Ferdinand: No, my dearest love, I would not for the world.

Miranda: Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle,  
And I would call it fair play.

*The Tempest*: Act V Scene 1



**SERIES** of articles published by or under review with orthodox Shakespearean journals has documented several inter-related propositions that are expected to contribute significantly to a transformation in *Tempest* studies, among them:

1) Since 1892, William Strachey's *True Reportory* (f.p.1625), has been the only Bermuda narrative believed to have exerted a significant influence on *The Tempest*. Although describing events of 1609-1610, it was almost certainly not completed until some time after the November 1611 performance (S&K A).



2) Strachey's alleged influence is more likely the consequence of Shakespeare's recourse to several far earlier sources, including Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1516),<sup>1</sup> Erasmus's "Naufragium," (1523) and, in particular, Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde* (1555, 1577) (S&K B and C).



3) *The Tempest* is a liturgical drama, conceived for performance during Shrovetide, the traditional feast that took place on the eve of Lent, (known elsewhere as Carnival or "Fat Tuesday"). Indeed, so rich and detailed is the fit between Shrovetide and Lenten cultural practices and the design of Shakespeare's play that it may safely be concluded that it was written, as Hassel has said of *Twelfth Night* and of Jonson's epiphany masques, "with the major outlines of the festival season firmly in mind" (126). As well as enlivening and enlarging our comprehension of the play's design, the Shrovetide context of *The Tempest* disproves the long-held assumption that the first performance was on November 1, 1611 (S&K D).



4) Close study of the Jacobean theatrical tradition suggests that the conventional 1611 date for *The Tempest* is too late by at least eight years. The early Jacobean plays *Faithful Shepherdess* (c.1609) and *Darius* (1603),

together with the German play *Die Schöne Sidea* (before 1605), each exhibit definite traces of *Tempest* influence. *Eastward Ho!* (1605), known to parody *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, and other Shakespearean plays, also parodies *The Tempest* in an extravagant lampoon of a shipwreck in the Thames river that washes the survivors onto the Isle of Dogs. The evidence of these four plays overwhelmingly argues for a *Tempest* composition date at least as early as 1603 (S&K E) and possibly, as Penny McCarthy has argued in *The Shakespeare Yearbook*, as early as 1598 (175-92).

An early date for the play may also solve a longstanding enigma of Stuart theatrical history and supply a fertile perspective on the original context of the play's composition and production. A Revels document (Bodleian Malone MS. 29, f. 69v) transcribed in 1842 by Peter Cunningham and reprinted by Chambers (4.171-72) lists thirteen plays and two masques performed from Hallowmas at the end of October to Shrove Tuesday 1604/05. All but one were performed at Court during the Winter festival season between St. Stephen's Night (December 26) and Ash Wednesday. Plays by Chapman, Heywood, Jonson and "Shaxberd" appear on the list, but seven—more than half of the plays—are indisputably by Shakespeare.<sup>2</sup> The final entry of the document includes an intriguing item, titled "A Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz":

On Shrovsunday A play of the Marchant of Venis	Shaxberd
On Shrovmonday A Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz:	
On Shrovtuesday A play cauled The Marchant of Venis againe comaunded by the Kings Majestie.	Shaxberd

Several relevant conclusions may be inferred from this record: the Shrove Monday performance of *Spanish Maze*<sup>3</sup> was scheduled as the concluding play of the Revels season, and the Tuesday restaging of *Merchant of Venice* was a previously unscheduled command performance.

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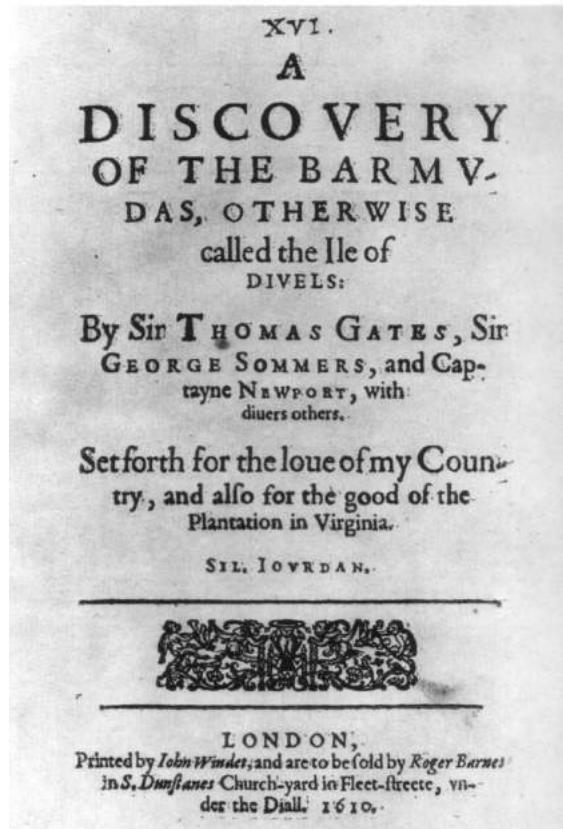
Of the twelve named plays (Cunningham 203-4), only one, *Spanish Maze*, is apparently not extant. Of the seven plays that are definitely by Shakespeare, three are identified as by “Shaxberd,” but four more list no author: “The Moor of Venis,” “Merry Wives of Winsor,” “Loves Labours Lost,” and “Henry the fift.”

From these two facts it is conceivable that *Spanish Maze* is another unidentified play by Shakespeare; indeed, Richard Malim (287) has recently explained the anomalous character of the *Spanish Maze* entry by hypothesizing that this was the original title of *The Tempest*.<sup>4</sup> While Malim makes a plausible case for the identification of the two plays, he leaves a number of issues unresolved or unaddressed. This article critically reviews the evidence supporting Malim’s identification to ascertain if the theory holds up under cross-examination.

It must be acknowledged that there is ample precedent for the discrepancy between modern nomenclature and the performance record of BM 29. Shakespearean plays often circulated by more than one name; BM 29 itself refers to *Othello* as “the Moor of Venis”; The Stationers’ Register

Entry for *Merchant of Venice* names it “The Jew of Venice”; until publication in the 1623 Folio, *The Famous History of the Life of King Henry VIII* was known as “All Is True”; *Much Ado About Nothing* was acted under the alternative title of “Benedick and Beatrice”; and in 1598, another play, probably *All’s Well That End’s Well*, was termed by Francis Meres, “Love’s Labour’s Won.”

The two earliest documented performances of *The Tempest* (Nov. 1, 1611 and c. February 14, 1613), took place at Whitehall. Scholarly opinion diverges on the question of whether the play was written originally for performance at this venue or for the Blackfriars stage. Although at least two recent editions (Vaughan 7-9, Lindley 4) follow Andrew Gurr’s (1989) argument for an original performance at Blackfriars, the two venues had in common a stage apparatus appropriate to the play’s elaborate scenic effects. It may therefore be pertinent that the venue for the 1604/5 Shrove Monday performance of *Spanish Maze* was at Whitehall (Chambers 2.119; Chambers *Facts* 2.330; Cunningham 203-05). This circumstance alone is far from proving that the two plays are one and the same, but it does allow us to hypothesize that *The Tempest* may have been conceived and written for a Blackfriars or Whitehall performance during Shrovetide,



This pamphlet, the first published account of the wreck of the *Sea Venture*, was written by a survivor, and published in October 1610.

and to inquire whether the premise of a Shrovetide production might illuminate *The Tempest's* symbolism, imagery and structure.

### Is *The Tempest* a “Tragedy”?

We should begin detailed analysis of the fitness of the Bodleian MS. 29 title to Shakespeare's play by interrogating its three terms: *tragedy*, *Spanish*, and *maze*. Such a method immediately raises a significant objection that Malim does not consider, namely that while Malone MS. 29 explicitly terms the play a *tragedy*, the folio identifies *The Tempest* as a *comedy* and today it is typically classified as a *romance*, a genre not found in the folio. It is accordingly relevant to ask if *The Tempest* can by any stretch of the critical imagination be termed a *tragedy*.

This objection turns out to be far less formidable than might initially be expected. As Lucas Erne has recently emphasized, Early Modern “generic descriptions were notoriously loose” (50). For example, Jacobean records allude to *Troilus and Cressida* variously as a *comedy* (as in the 1609 quarto), a *tragedy* (First Folio), or a *history* (title page of the 1609 quarto). Moreover, a rich critical tradition that includes the views of such scholars as John Dover Wilson and E.M.W. Tillyard testifies to *The Tempest's* ambiguity of form and its close affinity to the Early Modern conventions of tragedy. With the exception of Antonio's decision to exile Prospero rather than execute him, the exposition is “entirely typical of Elizabethan revenge tragedy”; consequently the play is “more typically tragic in the fashion of its age than *The Winter's Tale*” (Tillyard qtd. in Langbaum 120). Signet editor Langbaum agrees: the play “contains the subject matter of tragedy and it gives us throughout the sense of omniscience, of surveying all life, that we get only at the highest points of illumination in the tragedies” (lxiv).

Doubtless the most germane classification of Shakespeare's play is that of *tragicomedy*, as defined in the contemporaneous induction to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*: “A tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy” (Greg 271). But perhaps the Bodleian MS. scribe, a functionary who managed to spell the name of his generation's greatest playwright as “Shaxberd,” may be excused for lacking the critical vocabulary of John Fletcher, and consequently mistaking a play that “contains the subject matter of tragedy” and is discernibly “typical of Elizabethan revenge tragedy,” for a tragedy pure and simple.

### Is it Spanish?

*Spanish*, the second term of the title, is also appropriate to *The Tempest*, as Malim has argued. Shakespearean scholars—at least since Hunter (1839)—have recognized the close connection between the characters of Shakespeare's play and certain historical rulers of Early Modern Naples and Milan, both of which in Shakespeare's day “were in the undisputed possession of Spain” (Brosch), due to the long-term Spanish policy of annexing the two city states. By 1504 the Treaties of Blois had formally transferred possession of Naples to Spain; Lombardy, and with it Milan, joined Naples under Spanish dominion in 1540<sup>5</sup> when Charles V formally invested his son Philip II with the Duchy.

*Alfonso* and *Ferdinand*<sup>6</sup> were traditional names of the Aragonese ruling family of Naples

during the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This Spanish family intermarried across at least two generations with its indigenous competitors for Milanese power, the Sforza dynasty, engaging in a protracted game of diplomatic chess which steadily extended the sphere of Spanish influence. In 1465, Alfonso II of Naples, before he became king, married Ipolita Maria, the sister of Ludovico Sforza. Later, their son Ferdinand became ruler of Naples while their daughter, Isabella of Aragon, married her cousin, Gian Galeazzo Sforza. In 1480, Ludovico seized de facto power in Milan, following the murder of his eldest brother. Afterwards he expelled his young nephew, the de jure Duke Gian Galeazzo, together with his nephew's wife, Isabella of Aragon. Out of this convoluted "Spanish maze" of Aragon/Sforza alliances and intrigues Shakespeare conjured up his own Alonso and Ferdinand, two Dukes of Milan and their offspring,<sup>7</sup> together with the story of the expulsion of the rightful Duke of Milan and his daughter. *The Tempest's* Spanish ambience is assumed in one of the earliest extant responses to the play, a narrative poem by "R.G." in iambic trimeters titled *The Incharnted Island*, apparently written during the protectorate (Furness 315). In it the Prospero figure, in an interesting switch, becomes an Aragonese king: "In Aragon there livde a king,/Who had a daughter sweet as Spring."

Spanish intrigues, moreover, form the backdrop of one of Shakespeare's most important *Tempest* sources. It is increasingly clear that Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, the 1555 publication which includes the English translation of Peter Martyr's narrative *De Orbe Novo decades cum Legatione Babylonica* (1516), is the primary source of New World imagery and ethos in Shakespeare's play (S&K B). Martyr's work has a distinctly Spanish origin and context. First conceived as a series of letters to Martyr's friend and patron Ascanio Sforza, brother to Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan (MacNutt 8), and afterwards also written to Cardinal Lodovico of Aragon, nephew of Ferdinand II of Aragon and III of Naples, it is dedicated to Charles V. Even Eden's 1555 translation, published during the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor, is dedicated to her Spanish husband, Philip II.

### Is it "a Maze"?

With the third term of the title, *maze*, we pass from a plausible to a certain match between the content of Shakespeare's play and the title, *A Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz*. "Once the characters are on dry land," remarks Malim, "'maze' is a very good description of what they find . . . both geographically and psychologically" (285). Indeed, in passages quoted by Malim, both Gonzalo and Alonso overtly compare their island perambulations to treading a maze:

Gonzalo. By'r lakin, I can go no further, sir;  
My old bones ache: here's a maze trod, indeed,  
Through forth-rights and meanders!<sup>8</sup> (3.3.1-3)

Alonso. This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod; (5.1.242)

A more subtle maze allusion occurs in Act 5 when Gonzalo offers a benediction to Ferdinand and Miranda: "Look down, you gods, /And on this couple drop a blessed crown; / For it is you that have chalked forth the way" (5.1. 201-3).<sup>9</sup>



As we have shown in detail in another context (S&K C), these and other maze allusions are surface manifestations of the play's symbolic structure, which is rooted in the Ovidian and Virgilian accounts of the Cretan labyrinth. According to Barbara Mowat: "Prospero is the creator of the maze in which the other characters find themselves" (196). As Vaughan and Vaughan shrewdly observe, the play's action largely consists of a procession—"geographic movement writ small"—that imitates the treading of a maze:

The first four acts conclude with an invitation to move on: "Come, follow" (1.2.502); "Lead the way" (2.2.183); "follow, I pray you" (3.3.110); "follow me and do me service" (4.1.266)<sup>10</sup>. . . . The characters perambulate in small groups from one part of the island to another; only at Prospero's final invitation, "Please you, draw near" (5.1.319), do they join in one place. Although their physical and psychological journeys through the island's maze have ended, the play concludes with plans for a sea journey back to Milan that roughly parallels the journeys that brought all the Europeans to the island. (Vaughan 17)

Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, symbolized in the microcosm of the mazes found at major Cathedrals such as Chartres, was a traditional redemptive practice at Lent. For this and many other reasons, which include metaphorical cockfights, the presence of a hymeneal masque, the baptism of drunken revelers in the "filthy mantled pool," and redemption at the "sixth hour"—the hour of the crucifixion—it has been argued *in extenso* in another context (S&K D) that *The Tempest* was specifically conceived for performance at Shrovetide, as were *The Merchant of Venice* (Kernan, Hassel), *As You Like It* (Dusinberre), and many other Elizabethan and early Jacobean plays (Hassel, Laroque). It is surely more than just a striking coincidence that *The Tempest* so closely follows the pattern suggested by the title *A Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz*, which is known to have been performed at Shrovetide 1604/5.<sup>11</sup>

A tradition going back to at least the eighteenth century (see e.g. Chetwood) has seemed to verify the commonly accepted 1611 date for the composition of *The Tempest* by reading the retrospective tone of its two final scenes in a biographical register and concluding that the play was Shakespeare's "farewell to the stage." Although Oxfordians have contested the date, most have tended to endorse this biographical mode of interpreting the play's finale. However, as we have previously noted (S&K D), analysis of the play's original liturgical context reveals a more objective register of meaning accessible to an Early Modern audience adapted to the seasonal cycle of entertainment. Shrove Monday, the date of the 1605 performance of *Spanish Maze* (there was to be no play on Tuesday until the King commanded it) was "the last taste of Christmastide" (Hassell 112), "a final explosion of riotous misrule preceding the somber restraints of Lent" (113). Each year at Shrovetide, the winter cycle of plays, masques, and pageants came to a boisterous end; sober rituals replaced the sensuous indulgences, including secular plays, of the winter season. Such a context adds extra meaning to the line "Our revels now are ended" (4.1.148). As the "pageant" ends, Prospero's actors are reduced to "spirits . . . melted into thin air" (4.1.150). It is difficult to imagine a more apposite speech with which to end the masque and begin the denouement of the final Shrovetide play of the season.

Although the tumultuous disorder of Carnival permeates *The Tempest*, so that its antithetical themes of Shrovetide and Lent, its contrasts of the profane with the sacred, contend

throughout the play, the audience in addition may recognize a unicursal progression akin to treading the Lenten labyrinth, or to a theatrical version of the walking of the “Stations of the Cross.” The path follows the drunken bacchanals and machinations of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo—paralleled by the flyting<sup>12</sup> and regicidal plotting of Sebastian and Antonio—through a metaphorical Lenten Communion, represented by a vanishing banquet and table, together with Ariel’s “sermon”; and the contrition of both revelers and Court party. It terminates in the center of the “maze,” at Prospero’s cell, with the “resurrection” of the ship’s crew, and the reunion of Alonso and Ferdinand, who have each thought the other dead. Prospero has placed the ship’s passengers in this labyrinth and with the assistance of his “spirit” led them through it, producing in them by the end of the play the penitence that is the entire aim of Lenten preparation and practice: “They being penitent,/The sole drift of my purpose doth extend/ Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel” (5.1.28-30).

Thus, although at first glance it might be supposed that the title “Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz” is an unlikely fit for the play we have come to know and love as *The Tempest*, on closer view it can readily be seen that the title is not only plausible but apt in every conceivable respect. As mentioned, our forthcoming *Shakespeare Yearbook* article (S&K E) will demonstrate, convincingly we believe, that *The Tempest* was well known to London theatregoers by 1603. The finding of Richard Malim, which after critical review we support, identifying *Spanish Maze* with *The Tempest*, adds further credence to this conclusion.

Whether *The Tempest* was originally known by another title is no longer—barring the rather unlikely discovery of new evidence—susceptible to proof. But it is not difficult to understand why, if the play originally was known as *Spanish Maze*, the title would have been changed to reflect the needs and expectations of a mid-Jacobean Whitehall audience in 1611. During the months leading up to Sir Thomas Gates’s third Virginia Supply (June 1609), there is clear evidence of a heightened ideological conflict between the players and the adventurers. Theatrical parody of the New World enterprise, apparently a thriving business, vexed the authorities of the Virginia Company. In a February 21, 1609 sermon before Lord de La Warre, “at the said Lord Generall his leave taking of England his Native Countrie, and Departure for Virginia,” Thomas Crashaw lashed out at the players for their lampoons:

As for plaiers: (pardon me right honourable and beloved, for wronging this place and your patience with so base a subiect,) they play with Princes and Potentates, Magistrates and Ministers, nay with God and Religion, and all holy things: nothing that is good, excellent or holy can escape them: how then can this action? But this may suffice, that they are Players: they abuse Virginea, but they are but Players: they disgrace it: true, but they are but Players, and they have played with better things, and such as for which, if they speedily repent not, I dare say, vengeance waites for them. (Crashaw 1610 H3v-H4r)

The anonymous author of the Virginia pamphlet, *True Declaration* (registered November 1610), also obviously responding to theatrical representations of the New World, refers to the Third Supply’s tempest-driven diversion to the Bermudas as a “tragicall Comædie”:

Consider all these things together. At the instant of neede, they descryed land, halfe an

hower more, had buried their memorial in the Sea. If they had fel by night, what expectation of light, from an uninhabited desert? They fell betwixt a laberinth of rockes, which they conceive are mouldred into the Sea, by thunder and lightning. This was not Ariadnes threed, but the direct line of Gods providence. . . . What is there in all this tragicall Comædie that should discourage us with impossibilitie of the enterprise? when of all the Fleete, one onely Ship, by a secret leake was indangered, and yet in the gulfe of Despair, was so graciously preserved. Quæ videtur pæna, est medicina, that which we accompt a punishment of evill, is but a medicine against evill. (11)

Traditional scholars such as David Kathman have suggested that reference to the Virginia venture as a “tragicall Comædie” was one of Shakespeare’s inspirations for a tragicomedy about the New World. More plausibly, we suggest that the author of *True Declaration* was familiar with Shakespeare’s play and called it to mind when writing about the wreck of the *Sea Venture*. While mere surface details in *True Declaration*, the literary references to Ariadne’s thread and the labyrinth seem to be drawn from the mythopoeic deeps of Shakespeare’s play. It seems more likely, therefore, that the unknown author of *True Declaration* borrowed both his definition of genre and his labyrinthine symbol from a play he had recently seen at either Whitehall, Blackfriars, or even “the great Globe itself.”

Such references to theatrical representations of the Virginia colonization as those of Crashaw’s sermon and *True Declaration* not only tend rather to support than invalidate an early date for *The Tempest*; they also confirm the existence of a vogue of plays about New World voyages that substantially predates the Bermuda pamphlets and narratives of 1610. Such voyages had been unfolding since the 1580s on the quays of London and Plymouth, and were already memorialized in print in the first volumes of Hackluyt’s *Principal Navigations, Voiages, Traffiques, and Discoueries of the English Nation* (1598-1600). At least by 1605, when *Eastward Ho!* appeared in print, popular plays exploited public curiosity about the exploration and colonization enterprise. But, most important, they suggest a rational explanation for why a late-Elizabethan play originally titled *A Tragidy of the Spanishe Maz* might be renamed, around 1610, *The Tempest*. The 1598 death of Philip II had precipitated a vogue of Spanish dramas, apparently including one that parodied the Spanish attempt to master the new world by following Ariadne’s thread through the wilderness labyrinth of Prospero’s magical island. In 1610-11 the old play was put to alternative but appropriate service and fitted with a new title. By then the treaty of London had taken hold, concluding decades of war with Spain, and the Spanish threat to English colonization of North America was waning. By the “direct line of God’s providence” the colony at Jamestown had survived the horrible winter of 1609-10, though many had starved. All of London was buzzing with news of the Bermuda disaster and the pitiful wreck of the *Sea Venture* in a hideous storm. *A Tragidy of the Spanishe Maz* was resurrected as *The Tempest*, along with the King’s ship, passengers and crew, and Prospero once more had his “dukedom got/And pardon’d the deceiver.”



## Notes

1 *Orlando Furioso* appeared in successively expanded editions until 1532. We are currently unable to determine at what point exactly the relevant material appeared in print.

2 The document records performances of plays by four authors only (and two untitled and unattributed masques): Jonson, Chapman, Heywood, and Shakespeare. One play is recorded with neither title nor author, but only one, *the Spanish Maze*, remains unattributed by modern scholars and is (apparently) no longer extant. Two of the thirteen plays are by Jonson, one is by Heywood and one by Chapman; the remaining seven plays of known authorship are by Shakespeare.

3 During the sixteenth-century reign of Charles V, on the grounds of Alcazar in Seville, was constructed a "Spanish Maze" which acquired an international reputation. The possible connection between this maze and *The Tempest* has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Charles V was the grandson of Ferdinand II of Aragon, also King of Naples.

4 The objection may arise that the variant title is a significant impediment to the theory, but the phenomenon of variant titles is well known. In this regard, Malone MS. 29 is typical: it lists *Othello* as "The Moor of Venis" and *Comedy of Errors* as "The Plaie of Errors."

5 During the 1590's there was a wave of publications of plays concerning Spain and Spanish politics, including *The Spanish Tragedy* (1592, 1594, 1602), culminating around the time of the death of Philip II in 1598 with *Mucedorus* (1598) and *Alphonsus* (1599). A second wave, including *Othello* (Q 1622) and Massinger's *The Duke of Millaine* (1623), coincided with rising Protestant antagonism to the proposed marriage of Charles Stuart to the Spanish Infanta.

6 Alfonso (Alonso) I of Naples, who ruled from 1442-1458 (he was also Alfonso V of Aragon), bequeathed the throne of Naples to his illegitimate son, Ferdinand I (1458-1494). Ferdinand's son was also an "Alonso," Alfonso II (1494-1495); his son in turn became Ferdinand II of Naples (1495-1496). The nephew of Alfonso I was the most famous Ferdinand of all, Ferdinand II of Aragon (and Ferdinand III of Naples, 1504-1516), who married Isabella of Castile in order to unite Spain.

7 Ferdinand; "Yes, faith, and all his lords, the Duke of Milan /And his Brave son being twain" (1.2.438).

8 These terms apparently refer to the straight (forthrights) and curved (meanders) elements of the traditional Church labyrinth. Their use in this context underscores the vitality of the maze as metaphor.

9 The notion of "[chalking] forth the way" is glossed by Lindley (210) with reference to the OED: "marked out 'as a course to be followed' (Chalk v 4c)." More specifically, the image invoked is that of a divinely-sanctioned maze laid out on a chalk path, as were English turf mazes.

10 These instructions are also reminiscent of the practice of processions and parades, traditional at Shrovetide.

11 Consideration has shown that the title, *A Tragidye of the Spanishe Maz*, is not only applicable to *The Tempest*, but that the alternative title is exemplary; the play concerns a maze more than it does a tempest, and it revolves around the dynastic politics of the Italo-Hispanic ruling class of Milan and Naples during the early sixteenth century. Following the paradigm suggested by such doubled titles as *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*, a better title for Shakespeare's play might be *The Tempest, or A Spanish Maze*.

12 *Flying*: a contest of insults similar to the modern African-American tradition of "playing the dozens." (the parent of today's "rap" music). In both Sweden (Søndergaard and Pettitt) and Mediterranean Europe (Campbell), flying was one of a number of "disorderly" amusements allowed during Shrovetide.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- OED Oxford English Dictionary  
 S&K Stritmatter and Kositsky  
 RES *Review of English Studies*

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