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The Design of Benevolence in *The Tempest*

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Abstract

The Tempest is one of several plays written by Shakespeare for which no source has been found. Here, we find a unique pattern of sin, suffering, repentance and redemption. The characters are redeemed after they repent for the sins they have committed. Prospero keeping aside all his political wisdom trusts his own brother in the matter of states, who dethrones him from the dukedom. He suffers for his sin, repents and finally redeemed and overcomes his enemies. Ariel and Caliban are the two helping hands of Prospero in the benevolent design. The sea also proves to be an agent of redemption. The play's ending highlights the restoration of a benevolent world.

Keywords: Sin, Suffering, Redemption, Benevolence, Magician, Alonso, Ariel

The Tempest is Shakespeare's last complete solo work. It is one of several plays written by Shakespeare for which no source has been found. Its plot seems to be original with Shakespeare. Although it lacks a source, the play has similarities to a large number of works, since Shakespeare borrowed names, ideas, isolated passages from an astonishing variety of works and traditions. Robert L. Reid in his article refers to Geoffrey Bullough who observes that *The Tempest's* "didactic nature," as well as Prospero's "masterful aloofness" and "use of the supernatural" have encouraged some critics to treat the play as an allegory. Bullough says:

The whole piece, . . . permeated with Christian feeling, . . . has been interpreted as a Mystery play in which Prospero, if not the Deity, is "the hierophant or initiating priest" in a rite of purification which the Court party must willy-nilly undergo.... Caliban . . . becomes the Monster to be overcome, and Miranda Wisdom, the Celestial Bride. (1)

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Kenneth Muir expresses the fact that *The Tempest* advocates a similar theme of benevolence found earlier in *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Therefore, the play was a necessity to complete the design of the last plays. He writes:

If *The Tempest* did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. It is the natural culmination of the plays of the final period. All the themes which found partial expression in the other romances are in it completely achieved. In the others the happy endings depend on a series of curious chances; but in *The Tempest* accident is virtually eliminated. As Prospero is endowed with magical powers the accident which brings the ship to the island is turned into design. (2)

The design certainly is the design of benevolence. Tillyard too feels that *The Tempest* has much in common with the other last plays. The play 'gains much in lucidity when supported by the others' (3). Prospero is a central character who uses supernatural power to redeem an entire ship of state. He also receives aid from a wise counselor, and is inspired by an angelic daughter. He controls the "spirits" who helps in working out a benevolent pattern in the play. Prospero uses his art for benevolent purposes. His art is in contrast to the evil art used by Sycorax. In his introduction to the 1954 Arden edition Frank Kermode writes that Prospero's art is benevolent. Comparing Caliban's world and that of Prospero he says:

The main opposition is between the worlds of Prospero's Art, and Caliban's Nature...Caliban... and his parents represent an evil natural magic which is the antithesis of Prospero's benevolent Art (4).

Kermode considers Prospero's art based on intellect and opposed to the art used for evil purposes. He writes:

His Art is the disciplined exercise of virtuous knowledge, a 'translation of merit into power', the achievement of 'an intellect pure and conjoined with the power of the gods, without which we shall never happily ascend to the scrutiny of secret things, and to the power of wonderful workings.' This art is contrasted with the natural power of sycorax to exploit for evil purposes the universal sympathies. (5)

Prospero's potent "art" reminds us, by way of contrast with Paulina's disclaimer in *The Winter's Tale*, that her art is lawful, natural, that she is not "assisted / By wicked powers"(V.iii.90-91) . Prospero's ability to resurrect the dead is merely the culmination of Prospero's magical powers.

Francis Neilson refers Professor Eugene Waith of Yale University in his book, who took for his subject the metamorphosis of violence writes that Shakespeare was opposed to moral disorder all through his life. According to the report published in *The Times* (London), he says, "The theme of *Titus Andronicus* was the opposition of moral and political disorder to the unifying force of friendship and wise government, a theme in which Shakespeare was interested all his life." (6)

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The usurpation of Prospero's dukedom by his brother Antonio is one of the important concerns of the play. Prospero is absorbed in his study of "cultivation of the mind," and neglecting affairs of state. He leaves the state affairs to his brother Antonio, and puts too much trust in him, eventually encouraging his ambition to treason. Prospero commits a double offence. First, he forgets the balance between action and meditation. Second, he makes a mistake in trusting the wrong person, a mistake which a ruler should never make. Prospero's sin is the sin of negligence.

Antonio's sin is the deposition of Prospero from his dukedom and an attempt on murder, both of Prospero and his innocent child Miranda. His crime is against humanity. Prospero trusts his brother in the affairs of the state, and devotes his time to enrich his mind, and his brother in communion with Alonso dethrones him and becomes the duke of Milan. Prospero says:

This King of Naples being an enemy
To me inveterate, hearkens my brother's suit;
Which was, that he in lieu o'th' premises,
Of homage, and I know not how much tribute,
Should presently extirpate me and mine
Out of the dukedom...

(I.ii.121-126)

They not only dethroned him but attempted slaughter of the innocents:

In few, they hurried us a-board bark,
Bore us some Leagues to sea, where they prepared
A rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd,
Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats
Instinctively have quit it: There they hoist us
To cry to th' sea, that roar'd to us...

(I.ii.144-149)

Prospero belongs to both worlds, having been thrust from Christendom in the "dark backward and abysm of time". (I.ii.50), and now seemingly embracing the paganism of the isle. Strachey thinks, "Prospero is the central figure of *The Tempest*; and it has often been wildly asserted that he is a portrait of the author and embodiment of that spirit of wise benevolence which is supposed to have thrown a halo over Shakespeare's later life" (7).

Prospero and his daughter's survival on the sea, their arrival at the island, their meetings with Ariel and Caliban as two helping hands seem to be the workings of supernatural power. His expertise in white magic, creating tempest in the sea, controlling his enemies without any physical harm to them reflect a god like potential in him. Wilson Knight, therefore, says "Prospero is a close replica of Christ, with similar miraculous powers" (8). A theater review on *The Tempest* published in the *New York Times*, reveals, "Prospero is

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a man of contemplative sadness and ultimate benevolence". (9) Wilson Knight compares Prospero to Cerimon. According to him "Prospero is also a recreation of Cerimon in *Pericles*." (10) He puts Prospero and Cerimon side by side:

Cer. I hold it ever,
Virtue and cunning were endowments greater
Than nobleness or riches; careless heirs
May the two latter darken and expend,
But immortality attends the former,
Making a man god.
(*Pericles*, III.ii.26-31)

Pro. I thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of my mind
With that which, but by being so retir'd,
O'erpriz'd all popular rate...
(I.ii.89-92)

By comparing Prospero to Cerimon, Knight considers them as religious recluse who are on the brink of magical power. He further says that they may be compared with those earlier religious persons, Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet* whose magic arts control the action, and Friar Francis in *Much Ado about Nothing*, who negotiates Hero's death and reappearance. These are people of spiritual rather than practical efficiency.

The Tempest opens with a sea-storm in which Alonso the King of Naples' ship is wrecked and drifts to Prospero's island. The tempest-tossed sea is merciless and the boatswain cries to the noblemen saying that they are useless or rather a hindrance. Antonio and Sebastian are also rebuked and made to know that social status is nothing in such an emergency. Frye says that what is happening here is not a mere shipwreck. In fact, it is symbolic of a whole society collapsing into chaos.

The ship is controlled by Ariel with the magical power enacted by Prospero. Ariel and Caliban are two helping hands of Prospero on the island. Ariel is a spirit who was imprisoned by Sycroax, and Prospero's benevolent gesture sets him free. Prospero tries to help Caliban as well in learning language. Unlike Ariel, Caliban is gifted with all the senses. He can speak, taste, see, feel and smell, and is equipped with arms and hands. Moreover, he can also be educated, for both Miranda and her father try to instruct him. So his origin as a land animal is an established fact for he cannot exist without food, fuel, clothing and shelter. In this, he differs from Ariel, who was imprisoned in the pine tree by Sycorax, and yet lived for twelve years. But then Ariel is not human, in any way. Ariel is a spirit. Ariel, according to Wilson Knight, "is the agent of Prospero's purpose. He is Prospero's instrument in

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controlling and developing the action. He is Prospero's stage-manager; more, he is the enactor of Prospero's conception: Prospero is the artist, Ariel is the art". (11)

Shakespeare's comparison of Ferdinand and Caliban is evident from Ferdinand's appearance on Caliban's exit. His entrance is graced with a song expressive of the order and harmony which he is to represent in the play:

Come unto these yellow sands,
And then take hands:
Curtsied when you have, and kiss'd
The wild waves whist.

(I.ii.377-380)

In fact the music itself betokens harmony and order, for Ferdinand says of it:

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

(I.ii.392-396)

Prospero waits for twelve years to heal his enemies. He wants his brother and the king Alonso to suffer for dethroning him and casting him and his daughter adrift. Their suffering would redeem them for the crime they committed against him and his daughter. For twelve years he has waited for this moment to come. At last he learns of their visit to Tunis for the marriage of the King's daughter. How he learnt about their arrival is not clear, but he tells Miranda:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,
(Now my dear lady) hath mine enemies
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience
I find my zenith doth depend upon
A most auspicious star, whose influence
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes
Will ever after droop.

(I.ii.179-185)

Francis Neilson explains that Prospero comes to know about their journey, "By some form of telepathy he has learned of the return voyage, and, magically, has intercepted the King's ship and created, with the aid of Ariel, a raging storm which has driven the vessel ashore." (12) Now that he has cast a spell upon them, and Ariel is carrying out his plan of making them realize their bitter plight, the chief problem of the play comes to light.

Prospero's talisman is compared to sheer helplessness of the people in the boat. The boatswain mocks at Gonzalo's calm at the outset of the storm: "if you can command these

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elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority" (I.i.22-24). The irony implied is that Prospero can command these elements, and has, as Miranda suspects: "If by your Art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (I.ii.1-2). Her subsequent statement that if she were "any god of power"(I.ii.10), she would have saved them is realized in Prospero's plenipotentiary powers. Miranda is so concerned about them that she implores Prospero, his mercy towards these sufferers and their ship. And Prospero "reassures her, somewhat as Christ" (13) not to fear the waves:

Be collected:

No more amazement: tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done.

(I.ii.11-13)

They are safe. Even their garments are fresh:

Not a hair perish'd;
On their sustaining garments not a blemish,
But fresher than before.

(I.ii.217-219)

Shakespeare re-enacts the original crime in *The Tempest*. Here, Antonio with the help of Sebastian tries to murder Alonso. Antonio and Sebastian standing with a sword over Gonzalo re-enact what Alonso did with Prospero in the beginning. Here Alonso is the victim of the cruel mind. Prospero does not want to avenge from his enemy, he, therefore, sends Ariel to awaken Gonzalo. Ariel enters Gonzalo along with and says :

My master through his Art foresees the danger
That you (his friend) are in...

(II.i.293-294)

Prospero controls the entire re-enactment scene which is evident from the manner he frustrates the malevolent design of Sebastian and Antonio. Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo's plot to murder Prospero is a comic analogue both to Alonso's original crime and Antonio's and Sebastian's frustrated attempt to repeat it. From parody we now move on to a serious action. Ariel informs Alonso about the loss of his son. Like Leontes he is punished. 'For Alonso the loss of Ferdinand seems to be a punishment without a crime' (14), whereas Leontes' death of the child revealed and confirmed the guilt of the father. Act III, Scene iii opens with Alonso's announcement of his despair:

Even here I will put off my hope, and keep it
No longer for my flatterer: he is drown'd
Whom thus we stray to find; and the sea mocks
Our frustrate search on land. Well, let him go.

(III.iii. 7--10)

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Alonso is in a state of “inward sorrow and grief” (15). It now remains for Prospero to force him to recognize the connection between his suffering and his “natural un-cleanliness and the enormity of [his] sinful life.” (16) Some spirits bring in a table with food upon it but when ‘men of sin’ attempt to ‘stand to and feed’, Ariel in the form of harpy, prevents them and causes the table and the contents to disappear. Northop Frye believes that “the vision of the disappearing banquet” is “symbolic of deceitful desires” (17) and Kermode suggests that this illusory banquet “is conceivably related to allegorical interpretations of scripture. Eve was tempted with an apple, and Christ with an illusory banquet; the former temptation was successful, as with the ‘men of sin’, the latter a failure, as with pure Gonzalo...Banquets represent the voluptuous attractions of sense which (as in Marvell’s Dialogue) the resolved soul must resist.” (18) Prospero’s banquet is not the Satan’s temptation but of the commonest of all a symbolic banquet: The Communion Table. This is the supper from which the notorious and unrepentant sinners are traditionally excluded.

The sea is an agent of redemption, too. It is hostile in appearance but benevolent in effect. The restoration of order which this song heralds is made more explicit by the wonderful image of the 'Sea-change' (I.ii.403) in the next, referring specifically to Alonso, whose remains are to be transformed 'Into something rich, & strange' (I.ii.404) - that is, his life is to be converted from its sinful, rebellious state into one more ordered and harmonious, and the agent producing this change is the sea, hostile in appearance but benevolent in effect, proved by the fact that no harm is done to those who are marooned, even to the extent that their clothes retain 'their freshness and glosses' (II.i.61-62) despite being immersed in the sea. That the sea is an agent of redemption is apparent when Alonso first becomes aware of his great guilt and expresses his contrition:

O, it is monstrous: monstrous:
Me thought the billowes spoke, and told me of it,
The winds did sing it to me: and the Thunder
That deep and dreadful organ-pipe, pronounc'd
The name of Prosper: it did bass my Trespass,
Therefore my son i'th' ooze is bedded; and
I'll seek him deeper then e're plummet sounded,
And with him there lie mudded.

(III.iii.95-102)

Alonso’s reaction to Ariel’s accusation is different from that of Antonio and Sebastain. As Gonzalo tells us:

All three of them are desperate: their great guilt
Like poison given to work a great time after,
Now 'gins to bite the spirits.

(III.iii.104-106)

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He is depressed to the extent that he wants to commits suicide:

SEB. But one fiend at a time,
I'll fight their legions o'r.
ANT. I'll be thy second.

(III.iii.103-105)

First, through the mouth of Ariel, disguised as a harpy, Prospero tries to arouse penitence in the three men of sin:

You are three men of sin, whom Destiny,
That hath to instrument this lower world,
And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
Hath caused to belch up you, and on this island,
Where man doth not inhabit—you 'mongst men
Being most unfit to live.

(III.iii.53-58)

After allowing them to suffer for a brief period, Prospero releases his enemies:

Go, release them Ariel:
My Charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
And they shall be themselves.

(V.i.30-32)

Here, Prospero acts as a benevolent magician. He finally appears to the shipwrecked travelers in the recognition scene, which, because it reunites those who have been separated and often presumed dead, carries within its very structure the possibility of resurrection. Shakespeare exploits the moment for its potential as Prospero reintroduces himself to Alonso:

Behold, sir King,
The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero:
For more assurance that a living Prince
Does now speak to thee, I embrace thy body;
And to thee and thy company I bid
A hearty welcome.

(V.i.107-112)

Prospero confirms to Alonso that he is alive. The effect on Alonso, who believes he is seeing a dead man before him, is a mixture of wonder and repentance:

Whe'er thou be'st he or no,
Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me,
As late I have been, I not know. Thy pulse

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Beats as of flesh and blood; and, since I saw thee,
Th' affliction of my mind amends ...
Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs.

(V.i.111-19)

Alonso's life without Ferdinand will be a hell. He has to suffer, he has to repent if he wants God to forgive him and return to him his son. The just vengeance of God is what Ariel invokes as the reason for the treatment of Prospero's enemies. Ariel reveals Alonso the real cause of his suffering and despair at the beginning of the scene. The crime against Prospero has been revenged by the seeming death of Ferdinand. Alonso's life without his son will be a torment to him unless he can achieve 'contrition of the heart' and 'an amendment of life' (19) the first and last parts of repentance.

Hunter believes that the first effect of Ariel's announcement upon Alonso is to derive him not toward penance and salvation, but toward desperate self destruction. (20) He quotes Nowell saying, "The conscience of heinous offences, and the force of repentance, may be great, that the mind of man, on each side compassed with fear, may be possessed with despair of salvation" (21)

Prospero plays the part of Providence, and he is the protagonist of the action he has himself willed. Shakespeare created Hamlet--but Hamlet created Shakespeare. The audience is not merely spectators but actors on the stage of life. The drama itself is an image of life--but life is a dream in the mind of God:

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

(IV.i.148-158)

The spirit of the Final Plays also finds its perfect home in the last series. Here the child-theme is repeated in Miranda, who is cast adrift with her father on the tempestuous seas. The lost son of Alonso is recovered, alive and well, and the very ship that was wrecked is found to be miraculously 'tight and yare and bravely rigg'd' (V.i.224) as when it 'first put out to sea.' (V. i. 225).

Prospero's "discovery" of Ferdinand and Miranda "playing at Chess" is a moment of "miracle" that is seen to be the unvarying climax of the comedy of forgiveness. Alonso discovers that the sin of which he has believed himself guilty—the death of Prospero and Miranda—has not occurred, and that his punishment – the death of Ferdinand has been spared in reality. The love of his son and Prospero's daughter will ratify the reconciliation of their fathers, though Alonso must first request the pardon of Miranda:

But O, how oddly will it sound, that I
Must ask my child forgiveness! (V.i.198-199)

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Ferdinand acknowledges providential blessings. In response to Alonso's query as to whether Miranda is a (pagan) "goddess that hath severed us, / And brought us thus together?" Ferdinand explains, "Sir, she is mortal; / But by immortal Providence she's mine" (V.i.189-91) He also remembers to thank Prospero for his quasi-resurrective role: "She / Is daughter to this famous Duke of Milan" "of whom I have / Received a second life [...]" V.i.193-94,196-97). Prospero has indeed waked sleepers from their graves, but his joining of these two is a far more benign use of his "so potent art." He too recalls that his temporal powers pale before those of God. Asked by Miranda how they were saved from destruction many years ago, he prefaces his comments with the pious, "By Providence divine"(I.ii.160).

Prospero interferes saying the time for torments of conscience is gone:

There, sir, stop:

Let us not burthen our remembrance' with
A heaviness that's gone.

(V.i.200-202)

Alonso confesses his sin and repents and gives back his dukedom to Prospero:

The dukedom I resign, and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs.

(V.i.118-119)

Antonio is unrepentant throughout the reunion scene. Antonio's remaining taciturn and apparently unrepentant throughout the reunion with his "flesh and blood" brother is one possible exception to this final concord. Prospero forgives him, too, but qualifies the terms of his mercy:

My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know
Thou must restore.

(V.i.133-134)

Kermode, however, believes "Prospero's forgiveness of his enemies certainly lacks that generosity" (22) which is exhibited to some extent in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*:

For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault.

(V.i.130-132)

There remains the last movement, of recognition and forgiveness. First, Prospero, having used his art for the last time and brought his great experiment to a head, abjures magic in a great speech drawn from Ovid:

But this rough magic
I here abjure; and, when I have requir'd
Some heavenly music—which even now I do—
To work mine end upon their senses, that

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This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (V.i.50-57)

Ultimately, the characters turn to prayer for divine aid. As *The Tempest's* opening is carefully based on divine prayer, "All lost, to prayers, to prayers! All lost!" (1.1.52) so is the closing, "And my ending is despair, / Unless I be reliev'd by prayer" (Epilogue 15-16), a refrain echoed in Ariel's injunction to Alonso that his only hope to escape the "Ling'ring perdition" of divine judgment "is nothing but heart's sorrow / And a clear life ensuing" (III.iii.77, 81-82). This is a formula for nothing less than contrition and repentance. Thus, prayer is the only way out of punishment and perdition. Prospero uses his tempest- magic to draw his enemies to the island, but renders them harmless. According to Wilson Knight Prospero, "wrecks and saves, teaches through disaster, entices and leads by music, getting them utterly under his power, redeeming and finally forgiving." (23)

For Ariel the moment of his freedom is at hand. Prospero charges him to arrange for calm seas, and then "to the elements be free, and fare you well." The epilogue spoken by Prospero is a renunciation of the art of the magician. His charms are all overthrown, and now he can rely only upon his own native strength. However, for the future he has a wish of an ideal condition for men, which resides in the heart of the true philosopher:

Now I want
Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;
And my ending is despair,
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

(Epilogue 13-20)

The joys of earth's blessings are to be showered upon the lovers. A Golden Age of riches will come to them, with children who will honor their parents.

The political state, as it was known to Prospero, is forgotten. The strivings for power, the quarrels of royal aspirants, the rise and fall of dynasties have no place in the future of Ferdinand and Miranda. There is not even a hint that the heir to Naples will take the throne. Royalty would die for want of pomp and tribute where "sunburn'd sicklemen, of August weary" dance in joyous mirth. "Let me live here ever," Ferdinand proclaims. "This short-grass'd green" has become a paradise. To him it has been a vision of the conditions prevailing in the Isles of the Blest, but to the intellectual, philosophical Prospero a mere dream broken by actuality.

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. . . . Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got,
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island. . . .

(*Epilogue, 5-8*)

He prays in the epilogue. That is the saddest note of all, for forgiveness and redemption are delicate virtues and often have short life, and no one knows this fact as well as he does. For him, divested of his magical power, even though he should resume his "secret studies," life in Milan would be an uncertain business after the rule of Antonio.

The play's ending highlights restoration of a benevolent world. The sinners who marred the benign world are repentant except Antonio but he is not in a position to harm anyone. Ferdinand gets Miranda providentially. Alonso repents and seeks Miranda and Prospero's pardon. Ariel gets its desired freedom. Caliban gets back his "bare island" with additional knowledge he acquired from Prospero. The entire members of the court are reunited. They sail to Milan to re-start a new life where "all can be controlled by a benevolent will" (24)

Alonso's ship sailing towards Naples is carrying the future of the two nations now in union. The ship, which was once a "ship of fools", is now a ship of two royal families redeemed from sinful strife. The "sea-change" has brought a rebirth of the repentant people, and their ship after the purgatorial tempest is something like the ark after the Flood. The ship of death in which Prospero and Miranda came to the island twelve years ago is now a ship of rebirth. Prospero's awakening is in two stages. First, he becomes more benevolent. Second, all thoughts of revenge dissipate.

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