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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 2

The Tempest

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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean

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Introduction

FABIO CIAMBELLA

Is Shakespeare's *The Tempest* a Mediterranean play? Some scholars, such as Cantor (2006),¹ argue that "although *The Tempest* is set on a nameless and imaginary island, it is located somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean, poised between Europe and Africa" (896). The reasons for such a statement are numerous. First of all, if one excludes the histories, set in Britain for obvious reasons, almost all the remaining plays are set in the Mediterranean, especially the romances, to which *The Tempest* belongs. As a matter of fact, *Pericles* is set in the Eastern area of the Mediterranean, *Cymbeline* divides between Rome and Britain, and *The Winter's Tale* opens in Sicily and then moves to a Bohemia, which, as is well-known, has an improbable (Mediterranean?) seacoast. Secondly, as most of the play's resources² are set in the Mediterranean, *The Tempest* itself must be part of the Mediterranean world dictated by its intertextual network. Suffice it to mention Virgil's *Aeneid*³ or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁴ among *The Tempest*'s best-known classical resources whose adventures are set in the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, although it is true that a "brave new world" (5.1.215)⁵ had been discovered and recently

1 See also, among others, Wilson 1997; Garber 2004, 855-6; Stanivukovic 2007, 19.

2 I am here borrowing the concept of 'resource' from Drakakis 2021.

3 For further details, see, among others, Kott 1976; Hamilton 1989; Wiltenburg 2007.

4 Critics have highlighted intertextual and interdiscursive echoes between *The Tempest* and book 7 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (either in Latin or via Golding's translation), i.e., the episode of Jason and Medea. See, among others, Brown 1994; Lyne 2000; Garrison 2019.

5 All quotations from *The Tempest* are from the New Oxford Shakespeare modern critical edition by Taylor et al. (2016).

colonised by the British when Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, the centre of the early modern world was still the Mediterranean Sea, where the European Christian fleets were engaged in battles and wars against the Turks. In this regard, Kantarbaeva-Bill (2014), for instance, reads *The Tempest* as a Eurocentric play focused on the rivalry between Christian princes and the Ottoman empire, these latter reduced to silence in the play:

The Tempest can . . . be read as an appeal to European powers, specifically to the emergent Great Britain, to take advantage of the waning Ottoman power. The Ottomans are demonized and portrayed as weak and effeminate; though they managed to conquer the Roman Empire, that era has long passed. (51)

Nevertheless, some “[c]ritics have in effect tried to shift the geographic center of Shakespeare’s world from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic” (Cantor 2006, 897). This geo-ideological shift, Cantor affirms, was mainly effected by US critics by the end of the last century, who

have understandably looked for ways to link Shakespeare with their concerns as Americans. The result has been to emphasize the issue of colonialism in Shakespeare, to pursue the geographic and historical connections between Shakespeare and America by foregrounding the subject of the British Empire in his plays. (Ibid.)

Ariel’s reference to the “the still-vex’d Bermoothes”⁶ (1.2.229), that is, the Bermudas, or other allusions “to a Patagonian god named Setebos⁷ . . . and to dead Indians”⁸ (McInnis 2014) might be a clue

6 It must be noted, however, that Prospero calls Ariel to fetch some dew in Bermuda, which is not strange since he is a spirit of the air. In fact, Ariel does not say that the ship is in Bermuda: “Safely in harbour / Is the king’s ship; in the deep nook, where once / Thou call’dst me up at midnight to fetch dew / From the still-vex’d Bermoothes, there she’s hid” (1.2.269-72).

7 Although the witch Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, worships a Patagonian god, as stated by her son (“[Prospero’s] art is of such power / It would control my dam’s god, Setebos”, 1.2.448-9), she is also said to come from Argier, i.e., Algeri (“PROSPERO Where was she born? Speak. Tell me. / ARIEL Sir, in Argier”, 1.2.312-3), on the southern Mediterranean coast.

8 The reference to “a dead Indian” (2.2.34) is by Trinculo who, in

in favour of the ‘Atlantic hypothesis’, even considering that some scholars,⁹ following Malone’s influential ‘discovery’ of Strachey’s letter as a possible resource of the play (1778), discuss whether William Strachey’s account (1609) of the *Sea Venture*’s shipwreck off the coasts of the Bermudas can be one of the resources of Shakespeare’s play. This account of a “most dreadful tempest” was published in 1625 under the title of *A True Reportory of the Wracke*, as part of Samuel Purchas’s four-volume collection of travel narratives *Purchas his Pilgrimes*. Vaughan (2008) affirms that the letter, probably surviving in two manuscript copies before 1625, reached England in September 1610. Although it might be possible that Shakespeare read it, and

[d]espite the affinity between Strachey’s letter and Shakespeare’s play, it must be emphasized that Bermuda, according to most critics, is not the scene of the play. Rather, an abundance of textual affinities between the play and the narrative attest that Strachey’s account of an event that took place near and on the Bermuda Islands almost certainly helped to shape Shakespeare’s play – set in the Mediterranean – about a hurricane, an island refuge, and various characters and events that imaginatively draw upon the Bermuda story. (273)

Malone’s hypothesis, albeit dismissed for some time,¹⁰ gained momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, when decolonisation movements arose in Africa and the Caribbean. It is in those years that the (post) colonial readings of *The Tempest* began to pinpoint it as a colonialist

his speech, does not affirm that on the island there are Indians, he only acknowledges that he knows they exist somewhere.

9 Issues concerning Strachey’s letter are strictly connected with the authorship debate; hence, in this introduction I deliberately decided to avoid the topic. See Stritmatter and Kositsky 2007 or Vaughan 2008 for further details.

10 See, for instance, Stoll, who stated that “[t]here is not a word in *The Tempest* about America or Virginia, colonies or colonizing, Indians or tomahawks, maize, mocking-birds, or tobacco. Nothing but the Bermudas, once barely mentioned as a faraway place” (1927, 487), or Kermode, who affirmed that Strachey’s letter added “nothing . . . fundamental [to *The Tempest*’s] structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered, and the Bermuda voyage never taken place” (xxv).

play, resulting in a decentralisation of the Mediterranean setting, as well as in the interpretation of the Prospero-Caliban stage couple as a master-servant relationship which anticipated Defoe's Crusoe-Friday duo. In this context, Raman argues that there is no play by Shakespeare more "associate[ed] with New World colonization" (2011, 51) than *The Tempest*. Nevertheless, even before the second half of the last century, some researchers had moved the play's Mediterranean setting to the Atlantic Ocean. Lee (1968 [1929]), for example, believed that Caliban is a faithful portrait of the Native Americans, "a creature stumbling over the first stepping-stones which lead from savagery to civilization" (296). Later scholars, such as Lamming (1960) and Fernández Retamar (1974), shared this view, thus moving the setting of *The Tempest* from the Mediterranean Sea to an island in the Atlantic Ocean, more precisely in the Caribbean, although British colonialism did not arrive there until 1625, some years after Shakespeare's death.

Nevertheless, a couple of allusions to places in the Atlantic Ocean cannot outweigh the references to Mediterranean landmarks that abound in the play. Stritmatter and Kositsky, for instance, have counted numerous occurrences of Mediterranean cities – that is, Argier (2 occurrences), Carthage (4), Milan (17), Naples (20), and Tunis (9) – and conclude that since the beginning of the twenty-first century scholars have "invite[d] a return to [the] critical exploration of the play's Mediterranean context" (2013, 86). This return to a Mediterranean-centred view of the play after years of (post)colonial interpretations also raised questions about the peripheral position of England within the Mediterranean Sea, and about the kingdom's possibility of taking advantage of this position to turn its attention to the American continent. As argued by Brotton:

To interrogate the specificities of *The Tempest's* complex negotiation of its Mediterranean contexts does not simply call for a rejection of its New World readings in favour of its Old World resonances . . . Instead I would argue that the play is precisely situated at the geopolitical bifurcation between the Old World and the New, at the point at which the English realized both the compromised and subordinated position within which they found themselves in the Mediterranean, and the possibility of pursuing a significantly

different commercial and maritime initiative in the Americas. (2016, 37)

After all, even Caliban is a character whose origins are halfway between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea:

The composite nature of Caliban that includes the blending of New World references and a North African origin, for example, serves as a reminder that England's early colonial endeavors are contemporaneous to England's experiences of North African piracy and Ottoman power in the Mediterranean; such seemingly different contexts can be interlinked politically and symbolically in complex ways. (Hatner 2019, 81)

Therefore, the late-20th/early-21st century Mediterranean-centred views of *The Tempest* re-focus scholarly attention on the Mediterranean Sea, yet enrich their critical considerations with ideological, political, and symbolical issues that hint at (post)colonial readings of the play. So much so that, as suggested by Loomba, different geographies interweave and “remind us . . . of the limitations of compartmentalizing the waters, of thinking about the Atlantic without the Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean without the Indian Ocean” (2015, 28).

Whether one adheres to the Mediterranean or Atlantic hypotheses, it is clear that the sea in the play is a multi-symbolic, semantically polysemic, and even deliberately geographically ambiguous space, whose role in *The Tempest* must be investigated precisely by considering it as a multifaceted location. As Scuriatti affirmed,

The sea of *The Tempest* is highly ambiguous from the geographic point of view: partly Mediterranean, partly Atlantic Ocean, partly Irish Sea,¹¹ it is a highly wrought intertextual phenomenon evoking Virgil's *Aeneid* and the Homeric poems, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and functioning symbolically also as a catalyst for some of the fundamental themes in the text. (2012, 92)

On that topic, Hatner argues that “[a]s we have only begun to explore the manifold connections between these spaces, it is an important

11 In 1919, Plunket Burton put forward the hypothesis that *The Tempest* could be set in Ireland, instead of the Mediterranean or the Atlantic. See Baker 1997 for a thorough discussion of the Irish matter in *The Tempest*.

task for Early Modern Studies to further pursue lines of investigation that focus on their intersection” (2019, 81).

It is exactly this intersection of geographical, political, and symbolical issues that is explored in this volume dedicated to *The Tempest* and the Mediterranean Sea.

This volume consists of eight articles which explore the relationship between *The Tempest* and the Mediterranean Sea. It is organised in four Parts, each dealing with the Mediterraneanity of the play from different perspectives. Part 1, entitled “*The Tempest*: Its Genesis and Its Mediterranean World(s)”, focuses on close readings of the text in order to explore the importance of the Mediterranean Sea for the genesis of the play and the narration of the past and present events in which the Shakespearean characters participate. This approach paves the way for Part 2, “*The Tempest* and the Mediterranean Myth: from Resources to Afterlives”, which investigates the relationship between the Shakespearean play, its resources from the Mediterranean Graeco-Latin past and its afterlives in twentieth-century poems looking at the Mediterranean dimension of the play. “From the Mediterranean to the Mediterranean: *The Tempest*, Italian Music and Cinema” is the title of Part 3, which looks at both influences on *The Tempest* and of *The Tempest*. First, it is dedicated to understanding how Italian Renaissance music may have influenced some choices concerning Ariel’s song(s). Secondly, this part explores how *The Tempest* has shaped the production of three twentieth-century Italian directors who mainly dealt with dialects in their works. Finally, Part 4, “Ecocritical and Postcolonial Readings of *The Tempest*”, offers two methodologically well-framed readings of the play which reaffirm the centrality of the Mediterranean Sea in *The Tempest*, and try to bring to the fore new textual evidence in support of the Mediterraneanity of the play, by adopting and/or criticising recent approaches.

Part 1 includes two articles by Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, and Silvia Bigliuzzi. Edmondson and Wells’s essay investigates the genesis of the play, posing the easy – yet difficult to answer – question, “How . . . did Shakespeare set about writing *The Tempest*?”.

The centrality of the Mediterranean Sea is acknowledged, although (post)colonial readings and the ‘Atlantic hypothesis’ are also considered, together with issues concerning Shakespeare’s eclectic use of classical and contemporary “Mediterranean-based” resources – from Virgil’s *Aeneid* to Florio’s translation of Montaigne’s *Essays* and Thomas’s *The Historie of Italie*, among others – and the circumstances which led to *The Tempest*’s performance(s) and publication in the Folio. In this fascinating essay which touches on some of the play’s main issues, the two scholars explore the Mediterranean setting against the backdrop of Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour Lost* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which, like *The Tempest*, are not tied to any individual source, while likewise being set in a Mediterranean context.

Bigliuzzi’s essay focuses on the role of memory in *The Tempest*, and relates it to the play’s Mediterranean resources, in particular to book 2 of the *Aeneid*, with the aim of understanding how the characters comprehend “the finiteness, irreversibility and linear directionality typical of tragic time, fraught with tensions and anxieties” in the precarious world of the play. After introducing sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theories of memory – indebted to Plato’s ontology of memory, Aristotle’s epistemology, as well as Montaigne’s philosophy – and their “awareness that the sense of the past is ephemeral and that it may be subjected to revision”, intertextual links between Aeneas’s and Prospero’s painful narratives are knowledgeably explored. Bigliuzzi concludes that in *The Tempest* the construction of meaning is inherent in the questioning of the model of Aeneas’s tale and in the fact that the loop of time Prospero lives in is dramatised, as well as in his fear of forgetting things – or not remembering them properly. This opens questions about time, memory, and storytelling on stage, something new if compared with Aeneas’s confidence in his own memory.

Part 2 opens with Cristiano Ragni’s thorough exploration of the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between the Greek myth of Plato’s Demiurge – as “depicted in the *Timaeus*” – and Prospero, interpreted as a divine-like character, in Ragni’s words, “Shakespeare’s Demiurge”. The article begins with the affirmation that the Mediterraneanity of the play is also connected with its Graeco-Latin resources, and goes on to investigate Plato’s myth

of the Demiurge, who, similarly to Prospero, “is not described as the creator of the cosmos, but as a craftsman, a divine Reason, that imposes order to the universe”. The closing section of the article is devoted to an analysis of the relationship between the Demiurge and Prospero, ascertaining that the myth of the Platonic Demiurge might have inspired Prospero’s eagerness to impose order onto a chaotic situation, and his desire to craft “a brave new world” (as stated by Miranda, 5.1.217) at will.

Erin Reynolds explores another idea of *The Tempest* as a myth understood as “a ‘pattern of events’ or a basic essence of a work, distinct from its poetry”. The chapter focuses on W. H. Auden’s poem *The Sea and the Mirror*, and puts forward the idea that the Shakespearean play inspires and informs the poem, which can be considered both an adaptation and afterlife of the play. Before delving into the text of Auden’s poem, Reynolds retraces the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critical thoughts and conceptions that shaped the idea of the ‘myth’ of *The Tempest* from Shakespeare to Auden’s *The Sea and the Mirror*. The goal of the essay is not only that of understanding the process(es) of deconstruction and reconstruction of the myth of *The Tempest* in Auden’s poem, but also that of analysing why Auden was inspired by Shakespeare’s play in the first place. Reynolds sagaciously concludes that reading *The Sea and the Mirror* through the lens of *The Tempest* helps readers and scholars understand the extent to which the ‘myth’ of the play “fit into [Auden’s] philosophy of dualism”, and permits them “to transform Ariel and Caliban into representatives of the two ‘Hells’ on either side of Auden’s ‘This World’”. Moreover, the ‘myth’ is subverted by making Ariel and Caliban actors who play roles of themselves “to demonstrate the limitations of knowledge in life and art”.

In the third Part, Shira Melcer and Emanuel Stelzer examine the relationship between Shakespeare’s play, music, and cinema in search for Mediterranean inspirations. Melcer offers an interesting overview of the Italian madrigal and its differences from and similarities with the English version, which derives from the Italian one, through Yonge’s 1588 *Musica transalpina*, the first collection of madrigals ever published in England, of Italian origin. By analysing Robert Johnson’s 1611 English madrigal form of Ariel’s song “Full Fathom Five”, probably “the version used in the first performance

of *The Tempest*”, and Thomas Morley’s Italian form of “O Mistress Mine”, from *Twelfth Night* 2.3, Melcer proposes her own version of “Full Fathom Five”, with clear influences and confluences of Italian and English madrigal forms, thus presenting a more ‘Mediterranean’ – and historically accurate – version of Ariel’s song.

Stelzer offers a multifaced and thought-provoking exploration of what he calls “dialect Shakespeare”, a series of adaptations of *The Tempest* in Italian dialects, from the Neapolitan version by Eduardo De Filippo (1983), to Davide Iodice’s 1999 *La Tempesta. Dormiti, gallina, dormiti* (*The Tempest. Sleep, Chicken, Sleep!*), and Gianfranco Cabiddu’s 2016 film *La stoffa dei sogni* (*The Stuff of Dreams*). Recurring to sociocultural and ideological approaches, Stelzer reflects on the role of Italian dialects in Shakespeare’s adaptations of *The Tempest*, with the aim of understanding whether and to what extent their use represents a sort of reaction to cultural hegemony – *sensu* Gramsci –, at the same time foregrounding local political and countercultural movements. Since *The Tempest* explores the power of language as an *instrumentum regni* to control alterities – as evident in the Prospero-Caliban relationship – dialectal adaptations perfectly embody the quest between minority and hegemonic culture(s)/language(s).¹²

The closing Part proposes two different, critically fresh and original, readings of *The Tempest* according to two of the most widespread approaches today, that is, ecocriticism and postcolonialism. This latter approach, however, is criticized. Magdalena Gabrysiak introduces her chapter by questioning what Ariel means by “sea change” (1.2.401) in his/her famous initial song “Full Fathom Five”, and in order to do so she draws upon a solid review of the most significant ecocritical readings of the play, with particular emphasis on the Mediterranean Sea. These ecocritical readings, affirms the author, underline “a need to remember a pre-modern ocean, and in their focus on a distant past and in their

12 For matters concerning the tension between centre and periphery, minority and hegemonic cultures in relation to Shakespeare studies, see, for instance, the series *Global Inverted Shakespeare*, edited by David Schalkwyk, Silvia Bigliuzzi, and Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, for Bloomsbury *The Arden Shakespeare*.

interest in memory, they echo key themes of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*". In this sense, Gabrysiak, like Bigliazzi in this volume, reflects on the "complex web of interconnected temporalities and narrativized memory" of the play, especially on such Aristotelian temporal categories as *kairos* and *chronos*, and Shakespeare's use of sources, understood through Shane Butler's model of the classics' deep time. The chapter concludes with a brief yet interesting analysis of two contemporary cinematic and theatrical adaptations, Warlikowski's *Burza* (2008) and Taymor's *Tempest* (2010), interpreted as works "that look towards Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a countermeasure against Romantic models for human engagement with the environment".

Finally, through the lens of postcolonial theories, Anmol Deep Singh reads Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda as a political act encompassing gender and racial issues; an act of rebellion which overcomes the interpretation of Prospero and Caliban relationship as a master/servant one. The author argues that it is true that Caliban is a victim of Prospero's power; yet it is also true that he is the one who perpetrates (or tries to perpetrate) violence. For this reason, the reader/audience is invited to revise the usual idea of Caliban as Prospero's favourite, innocent prey. Although critics have argued that Caliban cannot be accused of rape, since he did not understand the ideological and political implications of that kind of violence, "he seems to recognise its potentially political effect: when Caliban is accused by Prospero of trying to dishonour Miranda, his reference to his future lineage betrays an instinct for self-preservation, which, as primitive as it sounds, does have a political inflection". In fact, by raping Miranda, Caliban would have the possibility to have a child from the future queen of the isle; hence, the failed attempt, says Singh, is also "a failed coup".

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