

9. Storms and the Colonial Imagination

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Acts 4-5

Jourdain, *A Discovery of the Bermudas*

ENGL133 Imagining Nature

Course Stuff

- Tiny Ecologies #3: extension—now due Sunday 3/30 by 5 pm uploaded to Canvas
- Reminder: Optional extra credit (counted toward your Engagement grade): short response to Zoom lecture TODAY Wednesday 3/26 from 5-6 pm by Professor Shannon Gayk on “After Apocalyptic Ecologies”—details and Zoom link in Canvas Announcement

How Are Shipwrecks Good to Think With?

- in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the shipwreck provided a philosophical laboratory to test out ideas about savagery and civilization
- but shipwrecks are also documents of climate change for modern environmental scientists
- how do you reconstruct the history of climate when there is little widespread instrumental data before the 19th and 20th c.?
- Valerie Trouet study correlates Spanish shipwrecks in the Caribbean (1495–1825 CE) with a tree-growth rings from the Florida Keys in order to model the correlations between the two
 - Source: Trouet V., Harley, GL, and Domínguez-Delmás, M. "Shipwreck rates reveal Caribbean tropical cyclone response to past radiative forcing." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113.12 (22 Mar 2016): 3169-74.
- narrow tree rings coincide with weather patterns of strong storms because high winds destroy foliage and storm surges inundate roots with salt water
- in this way, historical records of shipwrecks and dendrochronology provide a parallel record of past climate events
- tropical cyclones and hurricanes (like the one that wrecked the *Sea Venture* in 1609) are fewer when there is less solar activity
- in this study, nature is not just a nonhuman actor with strong effects in the human world
- there are several nonhuman witnesses (trees, shipwrecks) to the human world that is shaped by shipwreck

Native Peoples in Early Modern England



What would Shakespeare have known about Native Americans and from where?

- between 1500 and 1615, about 35 native peoples were brought to England
- most were brought as captives and cynically displayed
- for ex. in 1576, explorer Martin Frobisher sailed to Canada and captured several Inuits after luring them to his ship ringing bells
- Frobisher transported them (with a canoe) back to England where all 3 died of injuries and illness
- but sometimes sent as ambassadors
- Chief Powhatan sent 2 emissaries to London, Namontack and Machumps, who were subsequently wrecked on the *Sea Venture*. Machumps killed Namontack in a dispute while they were shipwrecked.

"This year [1502] also were brought unto the king three men taken in the Newfound Island. These were clothed in beasts' skins, and did eat raw flesh, and spake such speech that no man could understand them, and in their demeanour were like to brute beasts, whom the king kept a time after. Of the which upon two years after I saw two, apparelled after the manner of Englishmen in Westminster Palace, which at that time I could not discern from Englishmen till I was learned what they were."

-Robert Fabyan, *Chronicle*

Source: Vaughan, Alden, "American Indians in England (act. c. 1500–1615)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

CALIBAN. All the infections that the sun sucks up
From bogs, fens, flats, on Prosper fall and make him
By inchmeal a disease! His spirits hear me,
And yet I needs must curse. But they'll nor pinch,
Fright me with urchin-shows, pitch me i' th' mire,
Nor lead me like a firebrand in the dark
Out of my way, unless he bid 'em. But
For every trifle are they set upon me,
Sometimes like apes, that mow and chatter at me
And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which
Lie tumbling in my barefoot way and mount
Their pricks at my footfall. Sometime am I
All wound with adders, who with cloven tongues
Do hiss me into madness. Lo, now, lo!
Here comes a spirit of his, and to torment me
For bringing wood in slowly. I'll fall flat.
Perchance he will not mind me.

Enter Trinculo. (2.2.1-17)

Caliban in the Storm, 2.2

-what is the role of nature here?

-Prospero?

-like a divinity, Prospero uses nature as an intermediary or a scourge to perform his will

-the island as natural dystopia?

Trinculo's First Encounter with Caliban, 2.2

TRINCULO. What have we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish—a very ancient and fishlike smell, a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish. Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. (2.2.24-32)

-Caliban and Trinculo's mutual incomprehension? What does Caliban think he is?

-What is Trinculo's response?

-category confusion

-”this monster would make a man”

-reflection on European values

Nature, Utopia, and Sovereignty in *The Tempest*

CALIBAN. I'll show thee the best springs. I'll pluck thee berries.

I'll fish for thee and get thee wood enough. ...
I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow,
And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts,
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee
To clustering filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?

STEPHANO. I prithee now, lead the way without any more talking.—Trinculo, the King and all our company else being drowned, we will inherit here.—Here, bear my bottle.—Fellow Trinculo, we'll fill him by and by again.

CALIBAN. (*sings drunkenly*)
Farewell, master, farewell, farewell.

TRINCULO A howling monster, a drunken monster.
(2.2.157-175)

-what is the island like?

-cf. to Caliban's description of nature as Prospero's scourge at the beginning of 2.2?

-how does Caliban's indigenous knowledge of the island work here?

-can Caliban be seen as a 'steward' of the island?

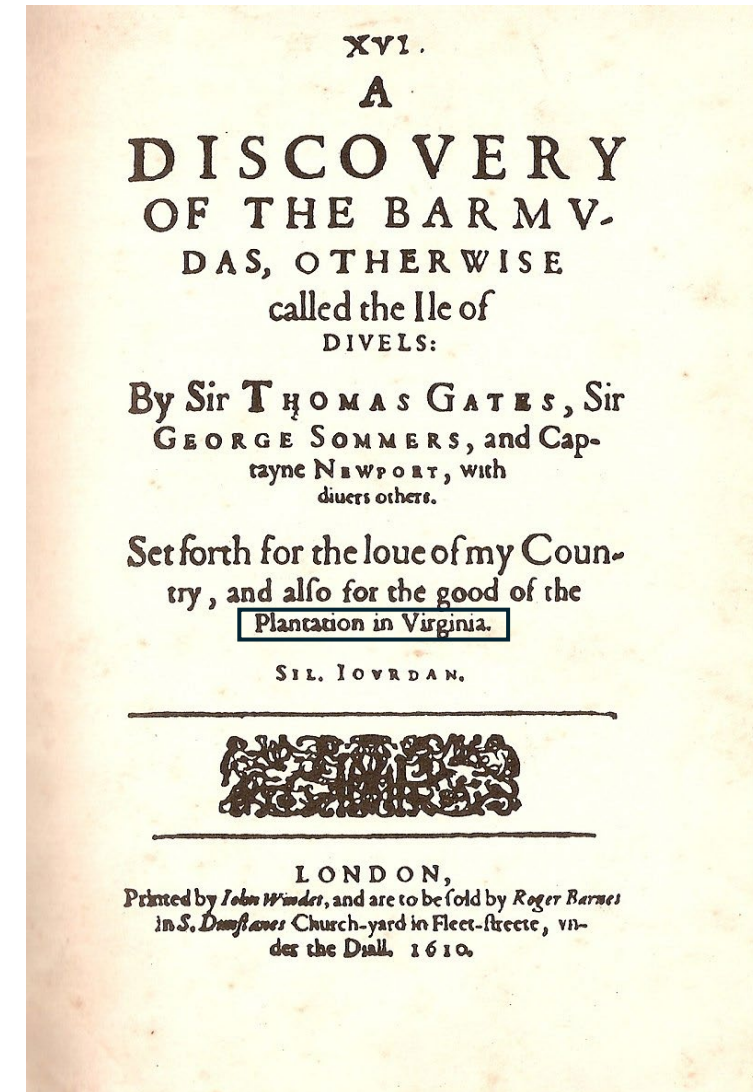
The Island as a Character

- described in the cast of characters as “an uninhabited island”
- how Prospero frames the island: the logic of “terrae nullius”
- “Then was this island / (save for the son that she did litter here/ A freckled whelp, hag-born) not honored with/ a human shape.” (1.2.281-84)
- the colonial trope of “terrae nullius” [empty land]
- cf Longfellow’s *Hiawatha*, the paintings of Albert Bierstadt, and the photographs of Ansel Adams)



The Bountiful Island trope in Jourdain's *A discovery of the Bermudas*

Fish is there so abundant that if a man step into the water they will come round about him, so that men were fain to get out for fear of biting. ... There is fowl in great number upon the islands where they breed, that there hath been taken in two or three hours a thousand at the least. ... The country yieldeth divers fruits, as prickled pears, great abundance, which continue green upon the trees all the year. ... The country affords no venomous creature, so so much as a rat or mouse or any other thing unwholesome. ... [The entrance to the harbor] is so narrow and strait between the rocks as that it will with small store of munition be fortified and easily defended with all advantage the place affords against the forces of the potentest king of Europe (Jourdain 110-113).



Nature, Utopia, and Politics in *The Tempest*

GONZALO. Had I **plantation** of this isle, my lord ...

And were the king on 't, what would I do? ...

I' th' commonwealth I would by contraries

Execute all things, for no kind of traffic

Would I admit; no name of magistrate;

Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,

And use of service, none; contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;

No occupation; all men idle, all,

And women too, but innocent and pure;

No sovereignty—

SEBASTIAN Yet he would be king on 't.

ANTONIO The latter end of his commonwealth
forgets

the beginning.

GONZALO

All things in common nature should produce

Without sweat or endeavor; treason, felony,

Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine

Would I not have; but nature should bring forth

Of its own kind all foison, all abundance,

To feed my innocent people.

I would with such perfection govern, sir,

T' excel the Golden Age.

SEBASTIAN 'Save his Majesty!

ANTONIO

Long live Gonzalo!

GONZALO And do you mark me, sir?

ALONSO

Prithee, no more. Thou dost talk nothing to me.

(2.1. 147-173)

-What is the counselor Gonzalo's vision for the island?

-How does it compare to the political rule that Prospero has established on the island?

-utopia= 'no place'

Love Island: Miranda and Ferdinand

- they both are unsure whether or not the other is human or divine on first sight

- Prospero impedes their courtship by pretending to accuse Ferdinand, son to Alonso King of Naples, of trying to usurp the island from him (1.2.454-57)

- The Iris (the rainbow), Ceres (goddess of earth), and Juno (goddess of childbirth) pageant (4.1)

- Why does Prospero stage this pageant for the lovers? Effect?

- What does the interruption of this pageant mean?



Joseph Wright, "Ferdinand and Miranda in Prospero's Cell" (Engraving, 1800).

The End of *The Tempest* 5.1: Who is the Most Unnatural of All?

-What is Prospero's relation to nature as expressed in 5.1?

-cf. to Caliban's "nimble marmoset" speech (2.2.157ff)

-Prospero accuses his brother Antonio of having "expelled remorse and nature" and of being "unnatural" (5.1.76; 79)

-To what extent is Caliban natural or unnatural?

PROSPERO. You elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,
And you that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back; you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,
Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrumps, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew; by whose aid,
Weak masters though you be, I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure. ... I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (5.1.33-57).

Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals” (1580): Savagery vs. Civilization

I do not find that there is anything barbaric or savage about this nation [i.e. Brazil], according to what I've been told, unless we are to call barbarism whatever differs from our own customs. Indeed, we seem to have no other standard of truth and reason than the opinions and customs of our own country. There at home is always the perfect religion, the perfect legal system--the perfect and most accomplished way of doing everything. These people are wild in the same sense that fruits are, produced by nature, alone, in her ordinary way. Indeed, in that land, it is we who refuse to alter our artificial ways and reject the common order that ought rather to be called wild, or savage. In them the most natural virtues and abilities are alive and vigorous, whereas we have bastardized them and adopted them solely to our corrupt taste. Even so, the flavor and delicacy of some of the wild fruits from those countries is excellent, even to our taste, better than our cultivated ones. After all, it would hardly be reasonable that artificial breeding should be able to outdo our great and powerful mother, Nature. We have so burdened the beauty and richness of her works by our innovations that we have entirely stifled her. Yet whenever she shines forth in her purity she puts our vain and frivolous enterprises amazingly to shame.

-Montaigne reverses the polarity of Amerindian savagery and European civilization

-he argues that Amerindians live in accordance with nature vs. European civilization that has corrupted nature by trying to improve upon it

-What does the play say about savagery and civilization?