

9. Storms and the Colonial Imagination

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Acts 1-3

Strachey, *The True Reportory of the Wracke and
Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates*

ENGL133 Imagining Nature

Course Stuff

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



William Shakespeare (1554-1616), *The Tempest* (1611)



- one of Shakespeare's late plays
- first performed before King James on 'Hallowmas nyght' (1 November) 1611
- the storm becomes the catalyst for imagining how human and nonhuman worlds interact
- the play's themes suggest that Shakespeare wants his audience to think about nature and the "New World"
- what does it mean to live in a state of nature? What is the difference between civilization and savagery?

Shakespeare and the Archive: Shipwrecks, Storms, and Colonialism

- while the play suggests a Mediterranean location, scholars have long pointed out that most of its details come from two accounts of a famous shipwreck in Bermuda that happened the year before this play was first performed
- cf. Ariel tells Prospero that the rest of the shipwrecked crew have been set in a harbor in the “still vexed Bermudas” (1.2.229)
- shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* in 1609 on the coast of Bermuda on its way to Virginia to resupply Jamestown
- there were 150 people on board; they were shipwrecked for over a year but managed to build 2 vessels and then continue on to Virginia in 1610
- 2 eyewitness accounts of this shipwreck that Shakespeare would most likely have known:
 - William Strachey, *The True Reportory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates*
 - wrote a letter back to England describing the wreck and its aftermath (not printed until 1625)
 - Gates was the governor of the Virginia colony and a founding member of the Virginia Company, also on board the *Sea Venture*
 - Silvester Jourdain, *A Discovery of the Bermudas*
 - first printed in 1610
- both narratives are documents of Britain’s early colonial activities in North America as both men were part of the Virginia Company-sponsored voyage
- the *The Tempest* is therefore also part of this colonial archive

The Tempest

Dramatis personae [Characters in the play]

The Scene, an vn-inhabited Island	
<i>Names of the Actors.</i>	
<i>Alonso, K. of Naples:</i>	
<i>Sebastian his Brother.</i>	
<i>Prospero, the right Duke of Millaine.</i>	
<i>Anthonio his brother, the usurping Duke of Millaine.</i>	
<i>Ferdinand, Son to the King of Naples.</i>	
<i>Gonzalo, an honest old Councillor.</i>	
<i>Adrian, & Francisco, Lords.</i>	
<i>Caliban, a salvage and deformed slave.</i>	
<i>Trinculo, a Iester.</i>	
<i>Stephano, a drunken Butler.</i>	
<i>Master of a Ship.</i>	
<i>Boate-Swaine.</i>	
<i>Marriners.</i>	
<i>Miranda, daughter to Prospero.</i>	
<i>Ariell, an ayrie spirit.</i>	
<i>Iris</i>	<i>Spirits.</i>
<i>Ceres</i>	
<i>Juno</i>	
<i>Nymphes</i>	
<i>Reapers</i>	

Dramatis non personae?

-Nonhuman characters play just as important a role in the play

- the storm

- the island

- Prospero's magic books

-also note that several important characters are not “human” persons

- Sycorax

- Ariel

- Caliban

The Tempest as Character



BBC The Tempest (via UMD library):

https://www.ambrosevideo.com/index.php?option=com_tpc&view=resource&Itemid=230&id=331339

“On St. James' day, July 24, being Monday ... the clouds gathering thick upon us and the wind singing and whistling, a dreadful storm and hideous began to blow from out the northeast, which swelling and roaring it were by fits, some hours with more violence than others, at length did beat all light from Heaven; which, like an hell of darkness, turned black upon us, so much the more fuller of horror, as in such cases horror and fear use to overrun the troubled and overmastered senses of all, which taken up with amazement, the ears lay so sensible to the terrible cries and murmurs of the winds.

-Strachey, *The True Reportory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates* (1)

Strachey, *The True Reportory*

Then men might be seen to labor ... for life; and the better sort (even our governor and admiral themselves), not refusing their turn and to spell each the other, to give example to other. [All working in order to testify] how mutually willing they were yet by labor to keep each other from drowning, albeit each one drowned whilst he labored (3).

Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

BOATSWAIN You mar our labor. Keep your cabins. You do assist the storm.

GONZALO Nay, good[man], be patient.

BOATSWAIN When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin! Silence! Trouble us not.

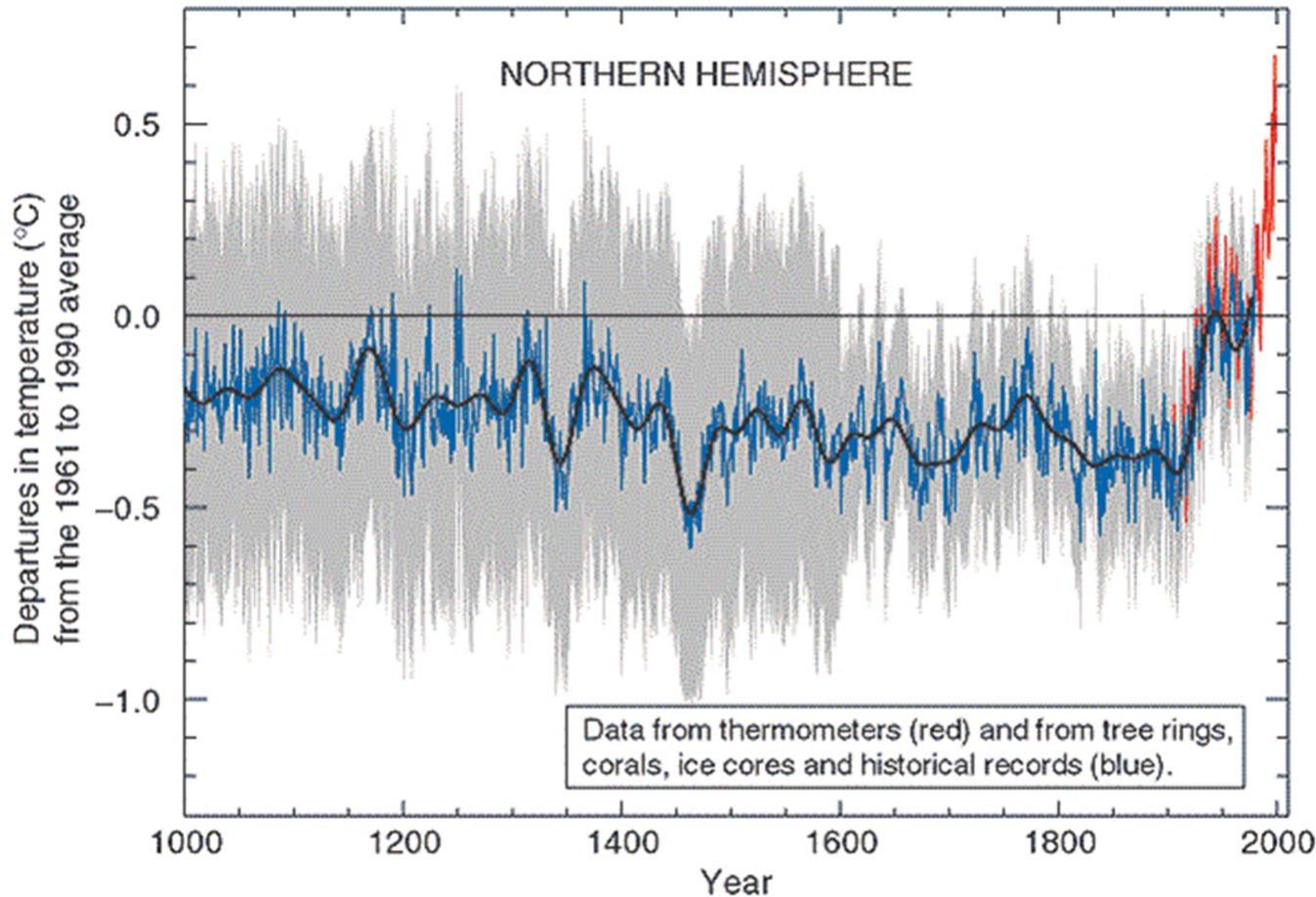
GONZALO Good[man], yet remember whom thou hast aboard.

BOATSWAIN None that I more love than myself. You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap.—Cheerly, good hearts!—Out of our way, I say! (1.1.13-28)

-in the play, the storm sets up the themes of division, rebellion, and disloyalty

Humanmade: How do storms create meaning in the premodern period?

- What causes storms in the premodern period? Multiple causes work together
- Aristotelian meteorology said that storms come from 'dry exhalations' in the ground
- But also human causes
- 'anthropogenic'=humanmade
- cf. contemporary "anthropogenic climate change"
- The Anthropocene= age of humanmade climate shift that follows on from the Holocene
- most stratigraphers date this from the mid-19th c. Industrial Revolution that began to release carbon into the atmosphere and contributed to global warming



Source: Mann, Michael E.; Bradley, Raymond S.; Hughes, Malcolm K. (1999), "Northern hemisphere temperatures during the past millennium: Inferences, uncertainties, and limitations" *Geophysical Research Letters* 26 (6): 759–762.

What does anthropogenic weather look like before the Anthropocene?

The Great Wind of 1362

The great, terrible, and unprecedented wind. In the year of Our Lord [1362] ... a public proclamation having been issued everywhere on behalf of the king that jousts would be held at Cheapside in London on Monday 17 January (ostensibly against all comers, but inwardly and figuratively through the agency of the devil and his mother and the seven deadly sins), the great devil Satan sending in advance as warnings his evil angels and signs of his malice, on the Saturday before these jousts, namely, on the feast of St Maurus the abbot (15 January), around the hour of vespers on that day, dreadful storms and whirlwinds such as had never been seen or heard before occurred in England, causing houses and buildings for the most part to come crashing to the ground, while some others, having had their roofs blown off by the force of the winds, were left in that ruined state and fruit trees in gardens and other places, along with other trees standing in woods and elsewhere, were wrenched from the earth by their roots with a great crash, as if the Day of Judgement were at hand, and fear and trembling gripped the people living in England to such an extent that no one knew where he could safely hide, for church towers, windmills, and many dwelling-houses collapsed to the ground, although without much bodily injury. Many extraordinary and prodigious stories are told about what happened during those storms.

-The Chronicle of the Anonymous of Canterbury (119)

And the southwestrene wynd on Saterday at euen
Was pertliche for pride and for no point ellis.
Pyries and plumtrees were puffed to the erthe
In ensample, ye segges, that ye shulden do the bettre.
Beches and brode okes were blowen to the grounde
And turned upward here tail in tokenyng of drede
That dedly synne er domisday shal fordoon hem alle.

-*Piers Plowman*, B. 5. 14-20 (ca. 1370s)

[And the southwest wind of last Saturday evening
Occurred manifestly on account of pride and for no other reason.
Pear trees and plum trees were blasted to the earth
As an example—you men!—that you should live better.
Beech trees and broad oaks were blown to the ground
And their roots were turned upward as an omen of judgement
That mortal sin would destroy them all before Domesday.]

So what?

There was no such thing as a “natural” disaster in the premodern period because all storms were caused by human moral and ethical behaviors



Paris, c. 1410-1430, London, BL Additional MS 18850



Joe Romm [Follow](#)

Dr. Joe Romm is Founding Editor of Climate Progress, "the indispensable blog," as NY Times columnist T...
Oct 28, 2013 · 3 min read

Superstorm Sandy's Link To Climate Change: 'The Case Has Strengthened' Says Researcher



BOTTOM LINE: Manmade climate change significantly worsened the chances a unique superstorm like Sandy would devastate New Jersey and New York. If humanity's unrestricted emissions of carbon pollution continue unabated, however, Sandy-type storm surges will become the norm on the East Coast.

-storms are a place where the category of the natural gets interrogated: to what extent are these natural causes? To what extent are they human caused?

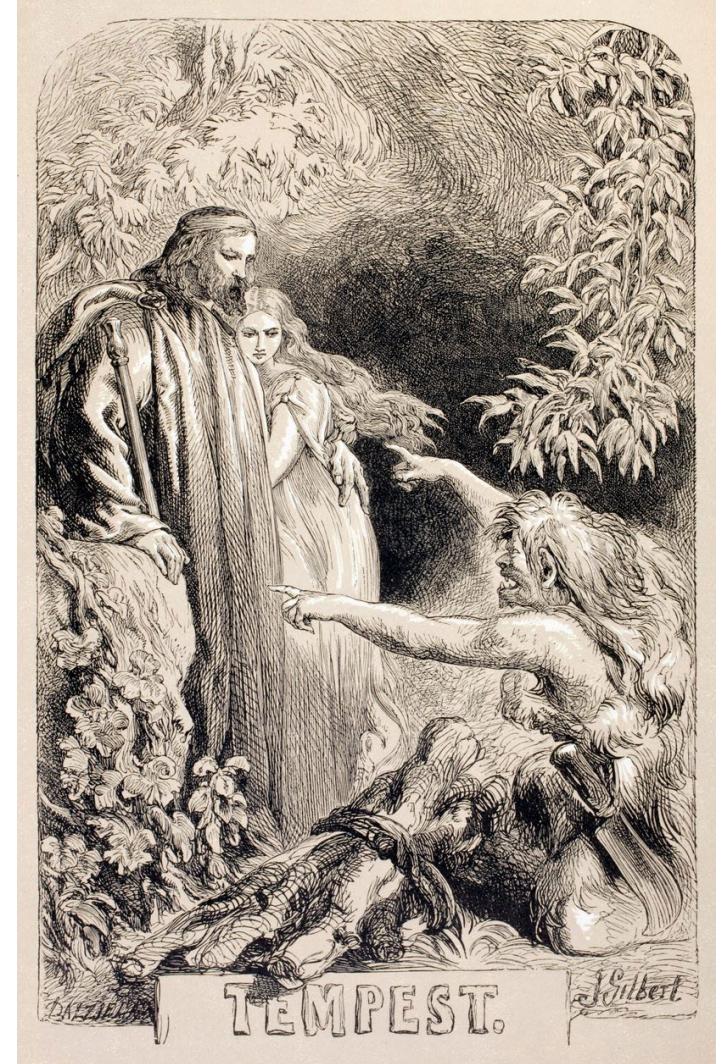
-same questions today as in the premodern period, just different answers

Prospero's Tempest

- not “natural” but a storm created by Prospero’s “art”
- Prospero’s desire to cosplay divinity and to master nature and the non-human
- it is the catalyst that sends the characters back into history because it prompts Prospero to tell Miranda her own family history (1.2)
- Miranda? From Latin ‘miror’= to wonder and the theme of amazement

Colonial Encounters: Caliban

CALIBAN. This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light and how the less,
That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee,
And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax--toads, beetles, bats--light on you,
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island. (1.2.332-44)



- Caliban's nonhuman status—described as fish, monster, beast, tortoise, etc.
- the competing narratives about sovereignty of Prospero and Caliban

Caliban and the Figure of the Savage

- an anagram of “cannibal”
- Indigenous peoples of North and South America were sometimes portrayed as cannibals
- Caliban described in list of characters as ‘a savage and deformed slave’
- Caliban’s ‘earthiness’ contrasted Ariel’s “airiness”
- the designation ‘savage’ sets up a contrast between civilization and savagery
- Caliban seems to be a hybrid of early modern stereotypes of indigenous people
- for Shakespeare, he seems to be a thought experiment



Cannibalism in Brazil in 1557 as described by Hans Staden. Etching by Théodore de Bry, 1562

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 Newfoundland 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 Fabian, *Chronicle*

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