

Owning the Weather: Reading *The Tempest* After Hurricane Katrina

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Abstract

After the untold effects of hurricane Katrina on the gulf coast of Louisiana and its major city, New Orleans, it is hard for me, a recent Louisiana resident, not to appreciate the overwhelming presence of wild weather in such an important and familiar work as Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. A few decades ago the Polish émigré Jan Kott unforgettably taught us that Shakespeare is indeed our contemporary. And it is with this in mind and still trembling from the capricious havoc Katrina wreaked on the island of New Orleans that we must take the play's hardly latent climatological interests seriously — as the very image of the play itself. The spectacle and panic and terror that the apparently bad-tempered Prospero generates on command and at the expense of his enemies suggests that he is quite willing to engineer the island's primeval environment for his gain and pleasure. A magician of Promethean stature, the deposed Duke's actions thrust him in the company of all those terrorists who will stop short of nothing to get their way. Prospero is nothing less than a terrorist of air.

Let me begin with this passage by Christopher Hallowell describing a walk he took in the Barataria Preserve in 2001, before Hurricane Katrina surged in from the Gulf over Lake Pontchartrain and then into New Orleans:

I visited the park on a spring day when fields of blue irises bloomed among the cypress and spider lilies rose from pockets of black water like fairy wands. The trail I chose to hike ever so gradually descends through the remains of a cypress forest, into a brackish marsh and finally to the banks of Bayou Segnette, which connects to the Gulf. From the bayou's banks, you look west across Lake Salvador and the marshes on the opposing banks, and you can think that there is no other place so rankly primeval as right here. The bustling serenity of the exuberant growth around me struck me as the way this land was meant to be. I could sense the flow of water through the swamp, too slow to see, but feeding and filtering on its course to the sea. I could see the demarcation between swamp — where the cypress grow — and freshwater marsh with its profusion of flora, and then brackish marsh where

cordgrasses predominate. Naively, I thought that the whole coast of Louisiana should be included in this park. (Hallowell 2001, 234)

In 1978, thanks to the unflagging efforts of Frank J. Ehret, Jr. and the approval of President Jimmy Carter, the Barataria Preserve was created in lower Louisiana, just ten miles south of what the first French settlers called the Island of New Orleans. The Preserve was closed to the reach of the oil and gas companies already operating throughout the state's wetlands and opened exclusively to tourists interested in visiting a relatively untouched part of its rapidly vanishing coastal environment (Hallowell 2001, 229-36). The Preserve is a small fraction of the Jean Lafitte National Historical Park, which in turn is a modest portion of Louisiana's vast but steadily diminishing coastal domain. When Ehret started exploring the area with his preservationist dream already pushing at the back of his mind, he stumbled upon several old cypress pirogues and began collecting Indian arrowheads and, here and there, pottery shards. This material evidence of the area's once flourishing indigenous cultures helped him get Louisianans indifferent to the coastal region interested in what many people in and out of state dismissed as mere swamp. The opening passage by Hallowell is part of a closing eulogy to Louisiana's marshlands in his book *Holding Back the Sea: The Struggle on the Gulf Coast to Save America*, which came out in the first half of 2001. Then, in late August of 2005 came the liquid winds and howling waters of Katrina.

For purposes of comparison, let us now consider a passage about another ecosystem, this one from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which most of us know by heart because of the archetypal resonance with which its New-World images are melodied. The scene, however, provides us not with a straightforward topographical description like Hallowell's, but a rather dreamy utopian agenda for Miranda's symbolically charged "brave new world" (*The Tempest*, 2.1.182).¹ The words are those of Gonzalo, the King of Naples's counselor, who — notes a somewhat sarcastic Sebastian, the King's brother — "will carry this island home in his pocket, and give it his son for an apple" (2.1.86-87). Given its recognizable source in Montaigne and a well-known Virginia Company report by William Strachey, the passage hinges on an already operant colonial design, namely, "Had I plantation of this isle, my lord, / [. . .] And were the King on't, what would I do?" Gonzalo then proceeds to tell us:

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; —
 [. . .]
 [. . .] Nature should bring forth,
 Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,
 To feed my innocent people. (2.1.138, 141, 143-52, 158-60)

Both the Barataria Preserve and Gonzalo's utopian island are places where pristine nature has been *mise en image* as spectacle — similar in scope to an ecomuseum, where a piece of territory understood in a geographical and ecological sense is cordoned off for preservation as part of a people's cultural and material patrimony (Maggi and Falletti 2000). The Hallowell passage reads like a geographer's report and is metonymically focused on identifying the Preserve's various microhabitats, while that from *The Tempest* is heavily literary and symbolic — an overlay of European tropes on an exotic American site. Shakespeare's prescient idea of staging a hypothetical New-World island as a desirable (and exploitable) ecosystem is, of course, riddled with hard-hitting ambiguities, for Gonzalo's and Miranda's utopian visions are offset by a much more manipulative and even frightening project with which those of us rooted in the bellicose twentieth century are all too familiar. Prospero, not Gonzalo, is the island's king, and it is his vision of being stranded on "this bare island" (Epilogue, l. 8) that we must attend to. If, after "[t]he direful spectacle of the wrack" (1.2.26) comprising the play's opening scene, we are more serenely entertained by the island's illusionary sites and atmospheres, it may be because they are so consummately engineered by a clandestine magician-climatologist who, if we stop to think of it, has totally militarized the island's ecosystem. From a post-Katrina perspective, Shakespeare is once again our intimate contemporary, as the Polish émigré Jan Kott observed in the mid-1960s (Kott 1964).

The wild weather that surged over the Island of New Orleans in the fall of 2005 is already fully thinkable in the abiding "sea-sorrow" (1.2.170) of *The Tempest's* terror-wielding ruler. Already when the play begins, its virgin island habitat is governed by an angry colonial humanist whose hermetic secrets — culled from books of Renaissance science — are fully manifest in the meteorological effects he unleashes to complete his sovereign designs. Most of us would agree that in the bard's teasing last play, there are stories behind the story that continue to ruffle our appreciation of it long after we have left the theater. The one that Katrina points us to is

written in that elusive and still unreckoned syntax of signs comprising the play's physio-semiotic dimension (Deely 1990, 30-32) — the system of signs that specifically encodes the island's physical environment and weather ("the still-vex'd Bermoothes" [1.2.229]) and the repeated anemostrophic forays of Ariel: "be 't to fly, / To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride / On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task / Ariel and all his quality" (1.2.190-93).² Hurricane Katrina's devastation of one of our country's most culturally rich and precariously situated cities opens us to what may well be *The Tempest's* last significant latency, that of the chilling strategy of "atmoterrorism" enforced by a mentally harried Prospero (see Sloterdijk 2006, 7-38). For we are not allowed to forget that the deposed Duke of Milan was left by his usurping brother Antonio "To cry to th' sea that roar'd to us; to sigh / To th' winds, whose pity, sighing back again, / Did us but loving wrong" (1.2.148-51). After being condemned with his child, Miranda, to bob like a cork in the open sea, the book-loving astronomer drifted in his "rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg'd / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast" (1.2.146-47) to a sparsely inhabited island, over which he quickly gained control by subduing not only its few inhabitants, but above all, its ecosystem. As the post-Katrina world reminds us afresh, Prospero was intensely interested in the elements. It is this hermetic alphabet that the play unscrambles into a physio-semiotic ecology that in the primeval world of Pan was once considered infra-ordinary knowledge (Sini 1981, 255-77).

By no means do I wish to say that Prospero is interested in the environment for its own sake; he is not. Perhaps we can claim such an interest for Caliban alone among the cast of characters Fortune has thrown together on the island, although others besides him often comment on the latter's various natural features, both favorably and, in accordance with Prospero's designs, with an extreme sense of fright. Contrary to Caliban, Prospero does not really care about the physical aspects of the island, except to employ various climatic elements of it as ecological weapons to further his private plans. To those living in the bayou towns along Louisiana's gulf coast, such secretive engineering of the environment for strictly private gain is a quite familiar, although until recently a largely unacknowledged, phenomenon. Now, after Katrina, the implicitly Promethean dimension of Prospero's vocation demands to be considered anew in Shakespeare's last play. Today, were a director to cast Prospero as a prototype of all those oil and gas company engineers who have imposed their will on Louisiana's wetlands with little or no regard for the environment, we would hail the idea as dead on target. But the designs of the deposed Duke of Milan lead us to embrace him as our contemporary in an even more intimate and world-shaking sense.

Were it for the opening scene of the tempest alone, we might be inclined to attribute the quality of Prospero's machinations to a merely theatrical impulse, a rather preposterous scheme that he

himself — had he given it second thought — would have dismissed outright as disproportionate to his goal. After all, a whole shipload of people was involved, only a handful of whom were Prospero's direct adversaries. And the terror inflicted, while stunningly spectacular, seems not to have been considered sufficiently in terms of the degree of trauma caused. We can still hear that choral cry so typical of all acts of mass terrorism coming from the ship:

A confused noise within: "Mercy on us!" — "We split, we split!" — "Farewell, my wife and children!" — "Farewell, brother!" — "We split, we split, we split!" (1.1.58-60)

With the transcripts of the cell phone messages sent from the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11, 2001 still fresh in our minds, we can have little doubt about what the experience of shipwreck in the opening scene of the *The Tempest* was actually like. And Hurricane Katrina is even closer in time to remind us about the gratuitous quality of all such suffering in which human beings are reduced to what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben has called "*nuda vita*" or bare life (2005, 377-404). Were there any doubt about the ruthlessness of the opening act, Prospero's own dear child, Miranda, comes forward to speak for all of us:

If by your Art, my dearest father, you have
 Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
 The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
 [. . .]
 . . . O, I have suffered
 With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
 [. . .]
 Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
 Against my very heart! (1.1.1-3, 5-6, 8-9)

Of course, Prospero is quick to reassure her, pointing out that all on board the ship are now safe on shore and nobody was drowned, injured, or died of heart failure. But then, in an abrupt shift, he launches into a defense of his turbulent actions by providing a historical justification of how he ended up being "master of a full poor cell" (1.2.20). During the course of the play, the term "cell" becomes a rigid tag for Prospero's island headquarters. It fits well with his militarization of the island's climate and his decision to remain invisible while carrying out his secretive aims.

Initially, the idea of casting Prospero as a terrorist may seem like a wild — and even exorbitant — charge, one demanding more argument and detail. When and where we engage with a work of art is always crucial to our interpretation of it. Reading *The Tempest* from a New

Orleans perspective illuminates its meaning in startlingly new ways. If Prospero deserves the label of terrorist for the way in which he manipulates the island's ecosystem throughout the play simply to cow his adversaries, it is because of the very nature of terrorism as we have come to know it in our time. Most notably, it was during WWI that the environment was explicitly introduced to end the standoff between opposing lines of French and German soldiers hunkered down in trenches.

With the use of mustard gas on the Ypern front in mid-April of 1915, the ecological conditions of human life suddenly became the preferred target of military strategists (Sloterkyk 2006, 20-40). Releasing containers of this gas under favorable weather conditions, the Germans created a huge toxic cloud some six kilometers wide and 800 meters high. As the cloud drifted into the French lines, the soldiers who were exposed to it began choking and gasping for air and bleeding from the nose. Before Ypern, there was nothing quite like it in military history. The cloud of poisonous air created a huge gap in the French trenches and the German troops were able to wedge their way forward with little opposition. Later, gas masks became standard equipment for soldiers in the trenches.

As the German scholar Peter Sloterdijk points out in his remarkable study *Luftbeben. An den Quellen des Terrors*, terror presupposes an explicit concept of the environment in that it introduces a form of destructive action aimed at the enemy's habitat rather than his body. Transcending the difference between violence against persons and violence against their surrounding life-world is constitutive of the terrorist act (Sloterdijk 2006, 18-19). Terrorism is above all a method of action that targets the enemy as an object in the environment. Returning to the play, it is specifically the medium of air that *The Tempest* stages, since Prospero's interest in meteorological warfare is primarily anemoscopic, concerned with controlling the winds. More generally, his secret art involves discovering ways to control the atmosphere as a whole — the weather, the winds, and, of course, the waves. His creation of *the tempest* as a means to bring his enemies to the island is only one instance of his overall strategy, albeit the most spectacular and Promethean one. We have learned from the now countless acts of terrorism that seem to be happening everywhere in today's world that the perpetrators seek to mix spectacle and terror together to gain the maximum effect. In *The Tempest* it is this very combination — and not terror alone — that establishes Prospero as one of terrorism's unproclaimed maestros.

For that matter, many commentators on the play have noted that *The Tempest's* island king is incomparably skilled in turning nature into spectacle; in his hands the environment's humble and obedient New-World features — its atmosphere, the wind, the temperate climate, the clouds, thunder — all become a form of second-degree reality. Today we would call it ideal matter for breaking news. But all this prodigality, I would urge, amounts to nothing less than terror in the

air. From the standpoint of hurricane-conscious New Orleans, this claim appears quite obvious. No amount of comedy or nuanced applications of romance will belie the hyperbolic effects of Prospero's underlying strategy, his ability to produce artificial atmospheres. To engineer such effects, Miranda's Faustian father — Herder would have called him an "aerologist" (Sloterkijk 2006, 40) — freely commands Ariel to not only tinker with the island's ecosystem but, more pointedly, turn it into a destructive force. In Prospero's design, nature itself becomes a tactical weapon to control others; and yet, in spite of his repeated successes, he remains a bitter, remorseless, and even a haggard man, consumed finally by his own power — perhaps in part, because there can be little real pleasure in inflicting suffering on others and making a spectacle out of it. As a result of his efforts, by the end of the play Prospero looms as a very modern figure — the forerunner of a Robert Oppenheimer or an Edward Teller, two scientist-technicians who knew a great deal about terror in the air.

The Tempest's terror, as I mentioned above, is phenomenologized through a diffused and systemic presence of physio-semiotic activity in the play. This epiphanic energy produces its wild weather, startling atmospheres, and the various illuminations of its conjured microclimates. But there is more. In the process of representing itself, the writing and staging of weather in *The Tempest* also produce the very image of the play, its textual ecology.³ The *dispositio* — the Latin word for Foucault's *dispositif* (Agamben 2006, 18) — of this dramatic ecology is stratified in two discursive skeins that now intersect, now oppose, and now run parallel to each other as the play unfolds.⁴ I am referring here to the diametrically opposed strategies of Prospero and Caliban. Prospero's climatological interests generate a largely anemological order in which the writing of wind is preeminently encoded by the little-known rhetorical figure of "anemography." The play's technology of terror is largely the result of a willfully extravagant investment in this figure.⁵ The other discursive skein contributing to the play's ecological *dispositif* (or apparatus) is developed by Caliban, undoubtedly the New-World island's most representative figure and the one who is most attuned to the archaic Pan-like confusions of its habitat.

Let us begin, then, with Prospero, whose anemoscopic manipulation of the weather is immediately revealed in the second scene of the opening act when he demands of Ariel, "Hast thou, spirit, / Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?" (1.2.194). Even though the play memorably stages the storm in the very first scene, Ariel proves equally eloquent in describing the terror it has caused among those in the ship. As one sailor cried out in despair, "Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here" (1.2.213-14). Words themselves — and all authority — are drowned out by the roar of the wind and water, and it is "the foaming brine" (1.2.211) that ultimately delivers

what Gonzalo, in a quite different context, calls "a kind / Of excellent dumb discourse" (3.3.37-38). It is the dumbness of this ostensive and pre-linguistic sign system that Shakespeare so brilliantly captures in the ecological dimensions that give a local habitation to the play's island topology. Again, much of the scenography that entertains us is the direct result of Prospero's ability to control the island's weather and its surrounding sea.

It is worth noting that Prospero's means of action are also strictly related to the play's means of representation: he chooses the agency of the winds to make "roaring war," and these howling means are wholly invisible, semiotic, and present only as effects. Nevertheless, in Shakespeare's day these effects could be diagrammed through anemoscopic knowledge traceable to ancient Athens and notably revived by the Italian architect Egnatio Danti. Most likely, it is this specialized skill — a quintessential form of cartographic semiosis — that firms up Prospero's secret knowledge of the heavens as suggested by this late summary of his activities:

. . . I have bedimm'd
 The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd 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-bas'd promontory
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up
 The pine and cedar . . .
 [. . .]
 By my so potent Art. (5.141-48, 150)

Evidently, Prospero is referring to the hurricane he stirred up in the opening scene of the play. This spectacularly staged and typically Caribbean gulf storm should be appreciated for what it is — a very modern display of ecoterrorism based on a thorough understanding of the order, division, and names of the thirty-two winds well-known by the makers of early modern sea charts (Danti 2003, 231).

As Egnatio Danti, the builder of Pope Gregory XIII's Tower of Winds, notes in his treatise *Anemographia* (The Wind Treatise) of 1581:

what more outstanding gift in life could be granted, by the Lord everlasting, to republics or the princes of men, that they might not only rule over the lands, but that they may even hold in contempt the innumerable dangers of the deaf sea and of storms, as though these

dangers were crushed below their feet? They shall have mastery, and where once the route was unclear now they may trace a safe course. (Danti 2003, 233)

As his similarly confident Art suggestively reveals, Prospero was almost certainly well-versed in the art of map-making, thus making him a member of that elite group of seagoing admirals who knew "the number, position, and order of the Winds . . . [and] the precise manner and circumstances in which each blows" (233). Of course, not all Renaissance cartographers (or anemologists) were virtual atmoterrorists, but they were certainly well-acquainted with the techno-scientific command of the winds. After being cast up on a bare Caribbean island, Prospero developed a single-minded interest in climatology — and a pressing desire to study how he might engineer the ecosystem, particularly the air. After Katrina, it is easier for us to construe how Prospero's ability to turn his New-World desert island into a plantation-designed ecomuseum would also include his control of the early modern *mappemonde's* thirty-two winds. For that matter, he himself is not unaware of what he calls "this rough magic," which on occasion also becomes "[t]his airy charm" (5.1.54), depending on his mood and the unfolding conspiracies of his visiting countrymen.

It goes without saying that Prospero could not have controlled the island's weather system without Ariel, his somewhat reluctant slave, whom at the very end of the play he epitomizes as "thou, which art but air" (5.1.21). If indeed Ariel is often indistinguishable from the air, then he more than deserves to be remembered by his Greek name, *meteoros* — meaning high above the ground, hovering in the air. Not surprisingly, Ariel-*meteoros* and Prospero-*meteorologos* (astronomer, meteorologist) work in tandem. Together, they succeed in producing a spectacle that can only be appreciated as a wholly modern terrorism of air — of winds, waves, thunder, and the howling cries of drowning sailors. This is the point of view from the Island of New Orleans.

After the awesomely noisy staging of the initial, hurricane-induced shipwreck, the mood of several other scenes — apparently belonging to the tinsel of romance or the green swards of pastoral — are undercut by an imminent menace of thunder and lightning, as the stage directions indicate. In his recent book *L'accident originel*, the French intellectual Paul Virilio has noted that one of the principal goals of terrorism is to create a sense of panic in the midst of large groups of people (2005, 101) and produce among the population at large a lingering sense of insecurity. Several sharply drawn scenes of panic and insecurity in *The Tempest* expand the terrorist logic of the opening storm. For example, in 3.3, the signs of an approaching storm abruptly blow away the gay mood of the spirit-banquet that Ariel has conjured to entertain the marooned survivors. The stage directions read: "*Thunder and lightning.*" As Ariel "*vanishes in thunder*" (again, stage directions), Alonso, the King of Naples, cries out:

O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
 Methought the billows 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 Prospero. (3.3.95-99)

It seems that not even the wind and the billows are allowed to forget the presence of Prospero, even though he never strays beyond "the line-grove which weather-fends your cell" (5.1.10). In the passage above, we have yet another explicit linking between the clandestine climatology of the isle and Prospero as an invisible ecoterrorist hidden away in his cave. One other scene of induced panic merits our attention, for its alleged comedy begins as a rather pathetic display of exposed vulnerability and suffering. I am referring to the scene in which Trinculo, Stefano, and Caliban meet for the first time. We are on another part of the island now, and Prospero's slave, Caliban, enters carrying wood. Once again, the stage directions call for "*A noise of thunder heard*" (2.2). When Trinculo enters, it seems as if he is still woozy with fear from the tempest:

Here's neither bush nor shrub, to bear off any weather at all, and another storm brewing; I hear it sing i' th' wind: yond same black cloud, yond huge one, looks like a foul bombard that would shed his liquor. If it should thunder as it did before, I know not where to hide my head. (2.2.18-23)

As this and later scenes cumulatively suggest, the tempest's effects continue to loom over Prospero's island, producing a behavioral ecology of panic and insecurity, as if Trinculo's "huge one" — the Big One, people in New Orleans would say — were pressing against the edge of the horizon. And there is no place, mind you, for Trinculo to hide his head. Throughout this largely comic scene involving the island's low life, reduced now to Agamben's category of bare life, Prospero has thunder rolling just above the lines of the actors and even competing with them. Evidently, conditions are menacing enough to command these words from the besotted Trinculo, who has now stumbled upon Caliban: "This is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. [*Thunder.*] Alas, the storm is come again!" (2.2.36-38). In Vico's *Scienza nuova* of 1725 (1990, para. 58, 105, 411) the charged scenography of thunder and lightning is said to have led humankind to invent religion and civil society in order to cope with its otherwise uncontrollable fear.

In *The Tempest*, on the other hand, we are asked to observe a deposed and revengeful Renaissance duke turn his bookish knowledge into a meteorological attack on the life-world of the

island's inhabitants. The diffuse aural spinning out of the heart of the storm continually washes over the island's primeval topography, creating an overwhelming effect of atmoterrorism. We should not be beguiled into thinking that the staged and artificially engineered wild weather is merely a harmless means to achieve divine or poetic justice. On the contrary, what we have is simply a private matter between a flawed and revengeful Prospero and his totally exposed and vulnerable adversaries. From the standpoint of New Orleans, the scene of inquiry Shakespeare is asking us to consider is surely the momentous and totally modern one of the manmade storm, the play's Big One. What, then, does the thunder say? The answer may lie in Prospero's early summons to Ariel, whom he calls "My tricky spirit" (5.1.227):

Go make thyself like a nymph o' th' sea: Be subject to
 No sight but thine and mine; invisible
 To every eyeball else. Go take this shape. (1.2.301-304)

No matter how invisible and Eliotian Ariel is (think of *The Waste Land's* papier maché nymphs) and no matter how secretive Prospero, together they manipulate and successfully subvert the archaic sign system that Christopher Hallowell, in his walk in the Barataria Preserve, had described telegraphically for Prospero's princely designs. But this archaic system (see Sini 1981, 61-224; Sini 1989, 192) actually exists in the play, and its existence is undoubtedly a major cause of Prospero's smoldering rage. I am referring here to the life-world of Caliban, *The Tempest's* Caribbean Pan. Never having gained access to this world and weary now of all the trumped up spectacle, Gonzalo, Prospero's still loyal retainer, confesses at the end: "Some heavenly power guide us / Out of this fearful country" (5.1.106-107). Unfortunately, only Caliban is in a position to reveal the other major discursive skein of the island's ecosystem — one that counters Prospero's anemoscopic strategies and is differently attuned to those physio-semiotic dimensions which the deformed native weaves into brilliant, autochthonous filaments of description. Let us now look into this capacity more closely.

Early in the play Ferdinand, King Alonso's son and the future husband of Miranda, asks, "Where should this music be? I' th' air or the earth?" (2.2.390). Of course, the music is Ariel's, as ordered by Prospero, but there is also a contrapuntal music (and discursive skein) that belongs to the order of the earth, which Caliban — called by Trinculo a "natural" (3.2.31) and by Prospero a thing of the earth: "Thou earth, thou!" (1.2.316) — is intimately familiar with. For example, when he describes this island music for Stefano and Trinculo, Caliban provides us with some of the play's most memorable lines:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,

Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd,
 I cried to dream again. (2.2.133-41)

Responding to Caliban's rhapsodic enthusiasm, Stefano says: "This will prove a brave kingdom to me, where I / shall have my music for nothing" (2.2.142-43). And Caliban immediately rejoins that such "sweet airs" will only sound "[w]hen Prospero is destroy'd" (3.2.144). The most impressive example we have of Caliban's music is when he himself joyously performs his freedom song and dance after making a conspiracy pact with Stefano and Trinculo.

But there is another way for us playgoers to get an immediate sense of the kind of native music we are discussing here, and a rather pleasant one at that. We need only take a walk in the differently charmed world of the Barataria Preserve or, *faute de mieux*, read Christopher Hallowell's book on the various econiches of Louisiana's wetlands. Evidently, as Caliban informs us, his isle, too, has a typical gulf coast ecosystem, one made of "*bogs, fens, flats*" and "*hedgehogs [and] adders*" (2.2.2-15; italics added); and, as a visit to the Barataria wetlands would reveal, of raccoons, otters, muskrats, mink, deer, fox, alligators, crabs, shrimp, oysters, catfish, redfish, bass, trout, turtles, seagulls, ducks, pelicans, herons, egrets, scarlet tanagers, red-winged blackbirds, and a host of neo-tropical warblers, indigo buntings, and purple grosbeaks, to mention the most familiar.

In truth, Caliban's celebration of the island goes well beyond its music, for unlike Prospero, he obviously cares about his environment and its myriad riches. Following him about in his rather spare but always intense appearances, we learn about his deep love and his highly developed knowledge of the island, and ultimately his oneness with it. Undoubtedly, Caliban lacks Prospero's power and entitlement, but he equals him in passion and persistence. Instead of the Duke's secret — and probably alchemical — control over nature, Caliban reveals a peculiar form of knowledge that the ancient Greeks referred to as *metis* (see Detienne and Vernant 1974, 7-31).⁶ *Metis* embraces those skills, talents, and know-how that are bestowed *in seme* at birth and developed through constant practice — like the art of ballet or flyfishing or woodcarving. *Metis* cannot be learned from a book or a "do-it-yourself" manual. One already has to be good at doing something and can then develop this talent into a specialized skill through long and arduous practice.

Caliban's knowledge of the island suggests just such a form of *metis* strictly linked to his daily activities in it. Because of his slave's undeniable expertise, Prospero quickly learns to depend on him for his and Miranda's basic necessities. Without Caliban and his skills, we even wonder if Prospero — much like the early English colonists at Jamestown — would have been able to survive. (Lucky for him that he has his bookish magic which, however, goes only so far.) When Caliban imagines how life will be when he has rid the island of Prospero, he muses, "No more dams I'll make for fish" (2.2.180), and later he says of his task master, "He shall drink nought but brine; for I'll not show him / Where the quick freshes are" (3.2.65-66). To a considerable extent, therefore, Prospero depends on Caliban for his inside knowledge of the island. Apparently, his books cannot rival his slave's proven *metis*.

When Caliban says above, "I'll not show him / Where the quick freshes are," he reveals his central and ecologically indispensable role in the play as describer (*descripteur*), and it is this verb — *to show* — that gives us the most direct indication of his link to the physio-semiotic dimensions of the island's various biotopes. Caliban's *metis*, in effect, takes the specific modal form of *faire-voir*, of making us see (Greimas 1963, 67-102). Thus, when he meets up with Stefano and Trinculo, he seeks to win them over by practicing the fairly magical art of description: "I'll show thee every fertile inch o' th' island" (2.2.148). With this geographical program as frame, Caliban then descends into the kind of poetic detail that leaves no doubt as to who the real sovereign of the island is: "I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries; / I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough" (2.2.160-61). And then, to crown his triumphantly ostensive function:

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
 And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
 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? (2.2.167-72)

In the whole of the play, Prospero has no equivalent observations about the island's habitat that might rival those just quoted. Paradoxically, he remains spatially fixed and is all command, while Caliban is all movement, but excels almost exclusively in description. Prospero holds the center of the island and, it seems, the high ground. Throughout the play he remains in or immediately around his cell and shows no interest in the island's flora and fauna. When Caliban appears for the first time in 1.3, he apparently comes from below — from the hard ground where Prospero has

confined him to a pen. Formerly free, he is now a slave upon whom Prospero and Miranda are fully dependent for their daily needs.

As Caliban tells it, in the beginning of his relation with Prospero: "I lov'd thee, /And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (1.2.338-40). This is exactly the kind of help the Virginia colonists relied on to survive during their first years at Jamestown. For this consideration, Caliban reminds Prospero: "[H]ere you sty me / In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me / The rest o' th' island" (1.2.344-46). It is an old story told over and over again in postcolonial circles. Later on, Caliban tells Stefano and Trinculo that the spirits of the island hate Prospero "[a]s rootedly as I" (3.2.93). This last statement is especially interesting inasmuch as it suggests a spirit-war taking place on the island. If such a war exists, it certainly concerns Prospero's and Caliban's two radically different life styles and ways of dealing with the island's life-world. These opposed styles are fully revealed in the discursive strategies they use to appreciate and relate to the island's resources.

After the recent devastations along the Gulf Coast, it now seems appropriate that were we to place Shakespeare's magician-scientist in a contemporary setting, we would want to portray him as living in a fully climatized world of his own making. The various micro-climates he produces to awe his adversaries and reduce them to a state of total insecurity and powerlessness are merely samples of the scenarios that he regularly dreams up in his cell. Today's director would have to furnish Prospero's hideout with air-conditioning, an ipod, an indoor pool, a refrigerator, a freezer, surveillance cameras, a satellite disk, pesticides of various potency, a biochemical laboratory, a database with videos of possible worlds, and so on.

As for the books that keep Prospero "rapt in secret studies" (1.2.77), they would be of the same cut as the original ones: various kinds of technical-alchemical manuals about how to sink a ship at sea, how to stir up a hurricane, how to induce panic in a group of people, how to take over the ecosystem of a small Caribbean island, how to control the winds, and so on. When Ferdinand exclaims, "Let me live here ever; / So rare a wonder'd father and a wise / Makes this place Paradise" (4.1.123-25), he is simply acknowledging the engineered pleasures of Prospero's second-degree remake of the island's primeval ecology. The first-degree nature of the latter is Caliban's, whom Ferdinand does not encounter until on the point of leaving the island for good.

If we think of it, there is little wonder why Prospero seems incurably beset with melancholy. At the end of the play, when his books are now buried and his staff broken, everything he cherishes vanishes in air. As he notes philosophically, his actions at best have produced "an insubstantial pageant" (4.1.155). It is hard to believe that the other characters in the play would be quick to agree. With respect to Caliban's more substantial world, Prospero's conjured ecomuseum proves to be a

frightfully ephemeral spectacle. This is due to the fact that Shakespeare wants to dramatize a totally modern meteorological condition defined suggestively by Carl Schmitt as the Order (*nomos*) of the Ocean — meaning the Atlantic (Schmitt 1997). The establishment of this Oceanic Order, in fact, is clarified by the birth of two popular literary genres in the sixteenth century, both of which inform *The Tempest*: namely, the utopia and the *naufragium* or shipwreck (see Nowe and Virdis 1993; De Brito 1992; Lanciani 1991). Prospero brings the two genres' agendas together by unleashing an atmospheric catastrophe created by his own technical skills. The scene of shipwreck helps to dramatize the unprecedented power of man to rival God by creating terror in the air.

For Prospero, the island as a whole is a fitting laboratory for his meteorological experiments. As he performs them, he requires Ariel to brief him with a series of weather reports that become fundamental to the Duke's designs. In a veritable Renaissance tour de force, Shakespeare's play becomes a weather theater that exploits the scientific observations Thomas Hariot (*Briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia* 1590), John White (who illustrated the report with his drawings), William Strachey, and others brought back to England in the late sixteenth century from what became the first permanent British colony in North America. Based on the scenes that follow the opening *naufragium*, it is no exaggeration to say that Prospero applies this genre's codes to the whole island, as if it too were a ship at sea, and in doing so he also articulates the new Atlantic condition that Europe's princes sought to govern. As Gonzalo notes after the shipwreck, "Our hint of woe / Is common; every day, some sailor's wife, / The masters of some merchant, and the merchant / Have just our theme of woe" (2.1.3-6).

In order to reestablish his princely authority and, implicitly, the order of command that the New-World hurricane had upset aboard ship, Prospero during the course of the play seeks to domesticate the Oceanic Order itself: "I'll deliver all; / And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales, / And sail so expeditious, that shall catch / Your royal fleet far off" (5.1.313-16). This is wishful thinking not only on Prospero's part, but also Shakespeare's. *Jus publicum Europaeum* ended beyond the *Raya* (treaty Line) of Tordesillas (Cassi 2007, 36-42). For no amount of ecoterrorist spectacle would tame the *mare liberum* — the free sea — of the Atlantic Ocean, and nothing can justify the new order of terror *The Tempest* not only announces, but also enacts.

Notes

1. All references to *The Tempest* are to the edition of Frank Kermode (Shakespeare 1988).
2. The word *anemostrophic* (familiar to Renaissance humanists) means "the manipulation of the winds." Other similar terms having to do with the control of the winds (and more generally, the weather) that appear in this essay are the following: *atmoterrorism*, the use of the atmosphere

to create terrorist effects; *anemoscopic*, meaning wind-control strategies; *anemography*, the science of the winds; *aerologist*, one who is a master of the science of wind currents.

3. This concept of a text that generates an image of itself as it works and through its work is developed by Julia Kristeva 1969, 237.
4. It should be said that Foucault's *dispositif* or apparatus also implicates a rhetorical order or *oikonomia* (the Greek word for *dispositio*). In rhetoric, in fact, *dispositio* refers to the distribution of arguments and their several components according to their opportune places.
5. Curiously, the figure of anemography is not listed or discussed in the few standard manuals of rhetoric that I consulted: Garavelli 1989 and Lausberg 1969.
6. There is an excellent chapter on "the contours of practical knowledge" in Scott 1998, 309-41.

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