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CALIBAN, THE CROCODILE, THE ‘PRICKLE PEAR’: LINGUISTIC AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN EARLY-MODERN TRAVELOGUES AND IN *THE TEMPEST*

CONTENTS

Introduction

> As yet no pine tree on its mountaintop
> Had been chopped down and fitted out to ship
> For foreign lands; men kept to their own shores
>
> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book I, 134-6

Since the early phase of postcolonial literature and theory, writers such as Octave Mannoni, Fernandéz Retamar and Aimé Cesaire have notoriously found in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and in the play's portrayal of the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, an opportunity to reflect on colonial dynamics and archetypes. Deeply indebted to what is now a rich tradition of scholarly work on the subject, I, too, have considered *The Tempest* in order to shed light on the early stages of England's colonial presence in the 'New World'. In the first chapter of the following study, before turning to Shakespeare' text, I focus almost exclusively on early colonial texts concerning the 'New World', as well as those that belong to the historically contiguous literature of exploration. More specifically, however, my interest resides in the cultural and epistemological implications of travel, and the early modern age, with the beginning of Europe's various colonial projects which involved the crossing of an ocean towards previously unknown territories, stands out as a particularly palatable instance to delve into the subject.

In Ovid's re-telling of the myth of the four ages of mankind, staticity is one of the principal qualities of the Golden Age. All things are in place: the pine tree is "on its mountaintop," people keep "to their own shores." Movement, on the other hand, both in terms of desire and of its physical enactment, is the defining feature of the fourth and last age,

the age of iron, in which “men live off plunder” (193), and in which the pines, “turned to keels, now prance among the waves” (181): a sinister image containing the seed of mankind’s environmental impact, and forebodes the encounter with the Other that will take place upon landing. It is worth noting how, in his description of both the Golden and Iron ages, Ovid omits a description of men *reaching* foreign lands, but writes instead of men *leaving* or setting sail, as though the evils associated with human circulation were not merely an unwanted consequence of the encounter between peoples, but are contained in the very decision to travel. Departure, Ovid seems to suggest, is either caused by false or misguided desires (such as curiosity or the intention to “plunder”), or is engendered by an environment in which life’s original harmony has already been disrupted. The *Metamorphoses* is not explicit as to why the movement of people towards foreign lands is listed along the other, more tangible evils of the iron age, such as warfare or the “piercing into the bowels of the earth” (187) in search for precious metals. It is clear, however, that these events are deeply interrelated, and, as in the Christian myth of Adam and Eve, knowledge — both gained and sought after — is the unspoken root of upheaval. Not an idealized version of knowledge as enlightenment, but the tangible ‘discovery’ of the world beyond one’s own surroundings: without an Other, there is no one to plunder or to wage warfare against.

The myth of the Golden Age acquires new relevance for Europeans during the early modern period, in association with the indigenous populations of the American continent. Mentions of the natives’ innocence and perceived prelapsarian state abound in travellers’ accounts, with some writers explicitly resorting to the myth of the Golden Age to describe the natives’ practices of communal living. The paradox, of course, is that the natives’ supposed golden age was to be brutally interrupted precisely by the Europeans who invaded their land. After all, they were the ones who had done all the travelling, just as in the Ovidian myth, in order to plunder and to extract the gold and silver which were“wrapt in the secret bowels of

the earth," as the playwright George Chapman put it in his *Memorable Masque*, a masque singing the praises of the recently invaded land of Virginia, which was performed at court alongside Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in 1613 (qtd in Gillies, 674). Notwithstanding the contradiction, the pursuit of knowledge, intended this time as an ideal contribution to the advancement of mankind, has been a central narrative in the historicization and memorialization of early modern travellers, from Columbus to Vespucci, Magellan, John Cabot, and many more. A careful perusal the transatlantic travel accounts from the period, however, is sufficient to refute this romanticized narrative, and to substitute it with a more practical concern on the travellers' part, ubiquitous in the literature of discovery: the pursuit of profit. This is not to say that early modern travelogues are not extraordinary texts, filled with events and encounters capable of inducing wonder even in a twenty-first century reader. However, more often than not, their protagonists are intrepid and unscrupulous businessmen rather than Ulyssean heroes moved by insatiable wanderlust.

In recent years, after centuries of obscurantism, critical perspectives on European colonization of North America are entering the mainstream discourse about national identity in countries like the United States, Canada, and England, forcing other nations to reckon with their own complicated past. On June 9th, 2020, a statue of Christopher Columbus was toppled, set on fire, and rolled into a nearby lake in Richmond, Virginia (Elliott 2020). The protests, which began in order to denounce the lethal impact of policing on African American communities and on other racialized minorities, grew to become a nationwide anti-racist and anti-colonial movement — a logical and historically coherent development, since many North American police departments did evolve directly out of slave patrol militias (Williams, 74-77). Around the same time, a statue representing the British merchant and slave trader Edward Colston was toppled in Bristol, UK; another statue of Columbus was beheaded in Boston, and many other monuments celebrating Europeans involved in the colonization of

the Americas and of Africa are currently being scheduled for removal. Some of the arguments employed to deprecate this wave of iconoclasm call for contextualization, often insisting on how these figures were ‘men of their time’, and likening the current reappraisal of historical personages to the *damnatio memoriae* practised in Ancient Rome or the erasure of the past perpetrated by totalitarian regimes. This line of argument could be grossly summarized as follows: we should celebrate problematic figures for what they accomplished, but we should gloss over the ‘mistakes’ (often a code word for the more uncomfortable term, ‘crimes’) they committed, because when or *where* they committed them, they were not crimes. There are, however, at least two obvious problems with this argument. First, the subject ‘we’ clearly does not include the descendants of the colonized and of the enslaved, who cannot be expected to feel sympathy or appreciation for a symbol that belongs to the culture of the colonizer and slave master. Those who celebrate Columbus Day, for example, whether consciously or not, are celebrating the European settlers’ presence on American soil (and, consequently, a history of genocide and slavery). It is significant, in fact, that in place of Columbus’ statue in Richmond, protesters placed a sign that read, “Columbus *represents* genocide” (emphasis mine) — a word choice that suggests how the toppling of a statue involves more than a revision of the figure of Columbus himself, and is instead aimed at the very criteria through which the United States and other nations have chosen the narratives that constitute their identity. In other words, “yesterday’s ethics are not under attack, today’s collective memory is” (Zucchetti). Furthermore, the argument used to counter revisionist practices implicitly contains its own contradiction: just as in the past those who erected the statues chose to selectively pick out the elements of history that fit the narratives they intended to celebrate, dismissing stories of violence and enslavement as secondary or omittable details, so today those who topple the statues rightfully shift the retrospective focus on what has been erased in the construction of History. In a way, the same principle of

selectivity is applied, but the values that inform it have shifted, and some would argue that the values the statues represented were cover-ups for a system that was violent and oppressive to begin with. Hence, by all means, down with the statues, the street names, and the cultural products that tacitly celebrate a version of history in which stories of injustice and oppression are silenced (by 'down' I do not necessarily mean removal, but any context-specific measure that is capable of filling the previous narrative's gaps).

The question is more complex when it comes to texts. We cannot simply topple problematic books off the library shelves and forget about them, because along with them we would lose portions of the very history we are trying to consider with a critical eye. Unlike statues, books do not celebrate history — they contain it (or, at least, a version of it). Reading the works of Columbus and other early modern voyagers and colonizers, for example, is crucial in order to outline the cultural and ideological foundations of the European colonial enterprise across the Atlantic. I am suggesting nothing unheard of — since the latter half of the twentieth century, the unearthing and critical analysis of colonial discourse in literature and in other cultural products has been at the core of the work of postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Sara Ahmed, to mention but some of the most renowned. Often, postcolonial studies have dealt with the perception of alterity, of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural difference, as it manifested itself in the moment of encounter between two cultures, even before or beyond the actual enforcement of a colonial rule. From Tzvetan Todorov's suggestively titled *The Conquest of America: The Problem of the Other* to Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters* and Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvellous Possessions*, some scholars have focused on the proto-colonial interactions that took place between 'New World' inhabitants and European travellers between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth century as exemplary instances of an experience of radical alterity, in which the perception of all parties involved was startled to an unprecedented degree (Todorov, 3-5). The narratives

through which Europeans came to construct their image of the Other — the indigenous inhabitants of the American continent — and which would soon constitute the basis and moral justification for the colonial project, were then under formation. In this process the bare bones of the colonizer's ideology and epistemology were exposed.

In the following study, I discuss the writings of Francesco Carletti, a Florentine merchant and slave trader; of Thomas Hariot, the famous English astronomer who took part in the 1585 expedition to Roanoke Island and wrote one of the earliest and most extensive accounts of the local people and landscape; of William Strachey, an English colonist who survived shipwreck; and, more in passing, of several other figures involved in Europe's colonization of the Americas. To return to the *Metamorphoses*' concern with the relationship between knowledge and travel, I am interested in what Ovid does *not* describe: the moment in which travellers reach foreign lands. My approach is initially microscopic: I do not focus, at first, on the narratives, myths, or ideological structures of the travellers, but on the epistemic and linguistic processes that echo them, and through which unfamiliar elements of the 'New World' made their way into the traveller's language, as writers attempted to render them intelligible to their readership. This has led me to include in my discussion elements of the early modern travelogues which might seem frivolous within this highly politicized field of study, such as a travellers' description of a banana, of a prickly pear, of a crocodile. I believe, however, that this narrow scope might have served to illustrate an aspect of early modern travelogues that scholars have often acknowledged, but rarely considered in depth: I am referring to the effort of "depicting the unfamiliar in such a way that it could be understood by those who had not seen it" (Elliott, 18), and the consequent realization that "there are no terms to express the objects, manners and customs that cannot be found in the reality [the traveller] comes from (Fortunati, 11). This study, therefore, deals with "the shock of the unfamiliar" (Elliott, 17) as it reverberates through the traveller-writer's language, his choices

of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical strategies, during the relation of newly obtained knowledge.

The problematic formation and relation of knowledge in early modern travelogues does not merely stand out in retrospect, but was often acknowledged by the travellers themselves, as in the work of Jean de Léry and Thomas Hariot. Furthermore, as Julia Schleck points out, the climate of uncertainty and unreliability surrounding the travelogues was increased by the skeptical (when not straightforwardly hostile) reception they risked to receive at home, often as a consequence of discrediting campaigns of misinformation started by the traveller's rivals at court, or by other figures adverse to the colonial enterprise. Walter Raleigh and Thomas Hariot's self-conscious and almost obsessive insistence on the veracity, credibility, and accuracy of their relations, which I discuss in chapters II and III, points to the topicality of these concepts in connection to England's colonial enterprise in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Shakespeare, like other contemporary writers, did not pass on an opportunity to jab at the stereotype of the deceitful traveller. From *As You Like It* and *All's Well That Ends Well* to *Antony and Cleopatra*, his plays replicate Elizabethan and Jacobean prejudices against travellers, who were often charged with vanity, affectation, exaggeration, and, most importantly, with the falsity of their reports. *The Tempest*, more than any other Shakespearean text, dramatizes the traveller's predicament as a witness to nearly incredible events that risk to to be met with mockery and disbelief in his homeland. However, possibly in light of England's then-recent involvement in the colonial enterprise (the Jamestown colony was established in 1607; the play is dated around 1611), and of the increase in the production of English 'New World' narratives that followed, in addition to devoting entire scenes to the characters' debates on the "vouched rarities" (II.2. 62) contained in reports faraway lands, *The Tempest* presents a more profound meditation on the traveller's predicament. Indeed, the play delves deeper into contemporary stereotypes, in order to

ascribe the traveller's unreliability to a linguistic and epistemological struggle in the face of the unfamiliar. Rather than deceitful, *The Tempest*'s travellers are deceived. The moment in which travellers *reach* a foreign land, the consequent acquisition of knowledge through sensorial experiences, and the mediation of the unknown through language, are staged in two key moments in the play: Trinculo and Stephano's encounter with Caliban, in Act I, scene 2, and the shipwrecked party's argument about the quality of the land on which they have ended up, in Act II, scene 2. Despite being a fully-formed character with a distinguishable poetic voice, throughout *The Tempest*, Caliban also acts as a mirror for the shipwrecked travellers' clumsy and redundant attempts to define him, fit him within the limits of familiar categories of knowledge and language, resulting in the vast and discordant verbal surplus which makes the character so hard to visualize for a modern reader.

The chapters that follow set out to accomplish three tasks. First, to perform a close reading of passages from a number of transatlantic early modern travelogues, in which the challenges the unfamiliar presents to the traveller-writer's language are particularly evident. These include for the most part descriptions of previously unknown items from the natural and animal world, although some, such as Jean de Léry's description of the Tupinamba people, illustrate the sense of radical alterity with which Europeans perceived the American natives (and, at least according to the travelogues, viceversa). Secondly, I will try to situate *The Tempest* within its historical context, and, through a survey of previous critical perspectives, I will highlight the variously interpreted relevance that early modern travel literature bore upon its composition. Finally, through a close reading of the play's text, I will discuss the passages that explicitly thematize travel, and discuss the subtler ways in which the epistemological and linguistic problems of travel narratives are woven into the text, so as to constitute a central, rather than peripheral component of *The Tempest*.

I. The Travelogues

> "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world"
> (LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, 5.6)

> "...we have taken five thousand of small and great fish at one hale: as pilchards, breams, mullets, rockfish, etc., and other kinds for which we have no names"
> (WILLIAM STRACHEY, *A true repertory of the wracke*)

In his *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo,* published in 1594 and dedicated to his patron Ferdinando I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, the Florentine merchant and slave trader Francesco Carletti provides an account of "a certain kind of long fruit about the length of a span" (Carletti, 10) which he first encounters in the island of Santiago, in the Cape Verdean archipelago. He describes it as being

> as big as a cucumber and with a smooth skin, which is removed like that of our home-grown fig, but much thicker and harder, and what is left inside can be eaten, and it is sweet and it resists the tooth; almost a ripe melon but drier and without juice; they are also eaten roasted and cooked underneath the embers, like pears (10).

The fruit in question are bananas — "'badanas,'" in Carletti's spelling of the word used among the natives, which he records in quotations. Although his description is not necessarily imprecise, its accumulation of comparative terms to illustrate different aspects of the fruit evokes a composite, clumsily assembled image. With retrospective knowledge of a banana's aspect and qualities, Carletti's description may not seem so opaque, after all: aided

by our visual reference, we can proceed to trace the latter's conformity to Carletti's verbal rendition. But a 16th-century European reader, for whom the term "badanas" prompted no visual association, would have had to piece together the fragments of Carletti's cognitively fragmented and saturated banana. Although mentioning the "cucumber," the "home-grown fig," the "ripe melon," and the "pears," within the span of a single sentence, might successfully illustrate separate features of the banana, their cumbersome juxtaposition ultimately risks to obstruct the reader's visualization of the fruit as a whole. Carletti's passage on the banana is an instance of how "the human mind has an inherent need to fall back on the familiar object and the standard image, in order to come to terms with the shock of the unfamiliar" (Elliott, 21). Interestingly, however, his associations are far from constituting a necessary linguistic recourse. On the contrary, when they are not purely superfluous, they are at best complementary to his narrative. "As big as a cucumber," for example, had already been rendered with the earlier mention of a "long fruit about the length of a span," whereas the indications regarding the banana's cooking process function perfectly without the addition: "like pears." The fact that these specifications were included, then, suggests a sense of inadequacy, on Carletti's part, in regards to the efficiency of a description that merely lists the qualities of its object, such as shape, colour, taste. As if to compensate for a potential lack of vividness in the passage, he links each aspect of the fruit to a familiar term of comparison, thus unintentionally obtaining an opposite kind of opacity, which stems from abundance rather than scarcity.

Carletti was not alone in his difficult attempts to describe the new elements encountered during his travels, nor, of course, was the difficulty specific to a given language (Italian, in his case). Resorting to comparison was the standard response adopted by those writers who actually ventured into more or less detailed accounts of the foreign lands' flora and fauna. Furthermore, "[u]p to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a

constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture" (Foucault, 19). Its importance extended far beyond that of a mere descriptive device, since "[i]t was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them" (19). In his discussion of the "sixteenth-century *episteme*" (33), Foucault points out the existence a rich "semantic web of resemblance," which included *Amicitia, Aequalitas* (*contractus, consensus, matrimonium, societas, pax, et similia*), *Consonantia, Concertus, Continuum, Paritas, Proportio, Similitudo, Conjunctio, Copula,*" and "a great many other notions that intersect, overlap, reinforce, or limit one another on the surface of thought" (20). Practices of similitude and analogy were constitutional to the formation of sixteenth-century Western knowledge: strong ontological links between disparate things beings were established in this manner, although today such links might seem descriptive at best, when not purely allegorical or rhetorical. The early modern rhetorician John Hoskyns, for examples, in his praise of metaphors, wrote that "[metaphor] is pleasant because it enricheth our mind with two things at once, with the truth and with similitude" (qtd in Sell, 43). Similitude itself — not as a mere rhetoric strategy but as a structural link in the "grid (...) which sixteenth-century learning had laid over things" (Foucault, 25) — was valued as an element of knowledge. The fragility of this "grid," however, is evident, as is

> the plethoric yet absolutely poverty-stricken character of this knowledge. Plethoric because it is limitless. Resemblance never remains stable within itself; it can be fixed only if it refers back to another similitude, which then, in turn, refers to others; each resemblance, therefore, has value only from the accumulation of all the others, and the whole world must be explored if even the slightest of analogies is to be justified and finally take on the appearance of certainty. It is therefore a knowledge that can, and must, proceed by the infinite accumulation of confirmations all dependent on one another. And for this reason, from its very

> foundations, this knowledge will be a thing of sand. The only possible form of link between the elements of this knowledge is addition" (33-34)

Travel literature, and particularly those texts concerned with remote and exotic regions, exemplified and exposed precisely the hyper-fragmented nature of such a system, in which knowledge must be achieved through the "infinite accumulation" of resemblances, in what often resulted in epistemological *mise en abyme*. Carletti's passage on the banana is certainly "plethoric," but it is also "a thing of sand": as in a game of prestidigitation, while our attention is being drawn to the copious similitudes in the forefront of Carletti's description, the thing itself— the banana— vanishes in the background. Furthermore, in the passage, the banana is truly known *only* in relation to other fruit, but such relations are also immediately framed as partial, imperfect, or approximate, by the very author who devises them. The texture of the banana is compared to the "home-grown fig, *but* much thicker and harder;" it is "*almost* a ripe melon *but* drier and *without* juice". Aside from the fact that the moisture and succulence of the melon are the defining features of its texture, and that to deny them calls into question the choice to invoke the comparison in the first place, the addition of similitudes is systematically affected by the subsequent subtraction or weakening of the shared links between the two terms of the equation.

All travel literature, sooner or later, seems incur in the same problem — that of describing something in a language which does not include it, for a reader without firsthand, empirical references —, although this is much rarer in today's globalized world, in which the circulation of information and goods has done much to erase the unknown from our linguistic horizons. What made European travelogues from the 'New World' differ radically from most previous travel literature, then, was not the sudden appearance of a new necessity, but rather the scale and depth at which this necessity manifested itself in the decades after Columbus' 'discovery' of America, in 1492. America was "a totally new phenomenon, quite outside the

range of Europe's accumulated experience and of its normal expectation" (Elliot, 8). After millennia of commercial exchange, wars, and proselytism, early modern Europeans "knew something, however vaguely and inaccurately, about Africa and Asia. But about America they knew nothing" (8). Indeed, "[b]y the end of the sixteenth century, the inquiring Englishman had access to a quite impressive body of authentic information on Africa in the form of published accounts of actual sea voyages and land travels and fairly accurate maps, particularly of the coastal areas" (Jones, 1). Knowledge derived from "the Bible" and "the classical historians" (1) was intermingled with the accounts of English mariners who "not only had visited Africa but had published accounts of their voyages that described personal encounters with the peoples of the coastal areas with whom they had traded" (1). The question of whether the ancient sources, which had laid "[t]he foundations of knowledge about Africa" (2), were indeed reliable, is partly a retrospective superimposition, more relevant to our contemporary understanding of 'truth', than it would have been for sixteenth-century epistemological standards, which, in order to construct their 'truth', required the collection "together into one and the same form of knowledge all that has been seen and heard, all that has been recounted, either by nature or by men, by the language of the world, by tradition, or by the poets" (Foucault, 44). Precisely, in part, because of the work of classical authors like Herodotus and Pliny, Africa had been included in Europe's image of the world since immemorial times. Beyond that, Africa was also a relatively accessible destination, so much that "English merchant ships [bound to] North Africa (...) even carried adventurous tourists as passengers" (Jones, 31). Furthermore, as it will be the case in the early seventeenth century with travellers returning from the 'New World', "Not only did Elizabethans read about Africans from published accounts, they must also have heard (...) from returning sailors who often brought back strange trophies from their intrepid voyages to give verisimilitude to their otherwise improbable narratives" (14).

Even the far East had little by little entered Europe's mental worldscape, and at a much more digestible rate, in part thanks to the writings of travellers such as Flemish Franciscan missionary William of Rubruk, and, more famously and fabulously, of Venetian merchant Marco Polo, both of whom had reached the territories of modern-day China in the second half of the thirteenth century. Marco Polo's account, in particular, established a significant bridge between Asia and Europe. Not that *Il Milione* devotes particular attention to the physical aspects of the lands visited by its author. But one conclusion a reader of the time could draw from the fact that a Venetian man had learned the Chinese language and had held important diplomatic positions at the Khan's state was that, hundreds of miles away from Europe, was an established society and culture, penetrable to an extent, both linguistically and socially — a fully-formed and self-defined Other, however mysterious, demonized or fantasized about. A culture that is perceived as such, does not need to be assimilated, let alone invented: it can simply be acknowledged, and interacted with on a number of levels. On a literary and imaginary level, instead, "America was peculiarly the artifact of Europe, as Asia and Africa were not" (Elliott, 5). The first encounters between Europe and America were characterized by an inevitable bluntness, a suddennes, which is partly due to the nature of a sea voyage itself. Whereas medieval travelers to the far East, journeying in carriages or on horseback, were gradually introduced to new landscapes, peoples and customs, the landing in the 'New World' was preceded by weeks of near-nothingness, in terms of new physical and cultural features, save for the flat horizons of the Atlantic ocean and changes of weather. In *The Arte of Nauigation*, translated by Martin Eden in 1561, the Spanish cosmographer Martín Cortés de Alcabar, addressed precisely this difference, claiming that sea voyages

> differ from viages by lande, in thre thynges. For the lande is fyrme and stedfast. But this is fluxible, wauering, and moueable. That of the lande, is knowen and

> termined by markes, signes, and limittes. But this of the Sea, is uncerten and unknowen. And if in viages by lande, there are hylles, mountaynes, rockes and craggie places, the Sea payeth the same seuen fold with tormentes and tempestes. Therefore these viages beyng so difficulte, it shalbe hard to make the same be vnderstode by wordes or wrytynge (qtd in Klein, 136).

Since the sea does not lend itself to words, "it should be 'painted' – in maps and charts" (Klein, 136). There is, therefore, a silence that pervades the sea voyage: a silence of the written word, which echoes the silence of an environment with no "markes, signes, and limittes". But when the traveller, according to Cortés' advice, can again resort to writing, the language frame of cultural references he has available to speak of the 'New World', belongs to the land which preceded the silence, virtually unaltered by external influences. Throughout the voyage across the Atlantic, the ship itself remains an enclosed English microcosm (or Spanish, or Portuguese, etc.), lacking any cultural or social interaction with its surroundings, aside from the customary stop in the Canary Islands or in Cape Verde which many expeditions performed, especially those departing from Spain and Portugal. Land travellers voyaging over similar distances, instead, could count on such interactions to secure interpreters, receive relatively recent news of the lands towards which they were bound, and become acquainted with the gradually-changing linguistic, ecological and cultural elements of such lands. In 1253, having reached modern-day Tibet, William of Rubruk can write in his *Itinerarivm* that the language of one of the local populations — the Uyghurs — is "the common root of the Cuman and Turkish language" (Rubruk, 128), well conveying the extent to which, no matter how different a culture might have seemed to a European traveller to the East, the perceived degree of its linguistic and cultural alterity was not comparable to that of the populations across the Atlantic.

The encounter with those populations overseas is epitomized by the ever-recurring scene of a reciprocal sighting between European men on ships and indigenous people on the

shore — a scene whose depiction dates back as early as Boccaccio's *De Canaria*, which, written in 1342, "marks the end of the mythical-classical conception of the Fortunate Isles in literary and geographic terms, and the first appearance of human and anthropological difference which anticipates by 150 years the texts on the new worlds" (Abulafia, n.20, 82-83). Although Boccaccio himself did not embark on the journey and acted solely as a chronicler of the event, the text represents the first recorded Atlantic encounter, or 'discovery', in which Europeans reached a previously unknown population beyond the extended boundaries of Europe and Africa. After a first mention of "men and women" who "go about naked and are savage in their customs" (qtd in Abulafia, 73) a more significative description of the encounter is offered once the Genoese ship lead by Niccoloso da Recco reaches a second and bigger island of the Canary archipelago:

> they saw a great multitude of men and women coming towards them on the shore, almost all naked, save for some, who seemed superior in rank, dressed in goat skins painted in yellow and red, and, from what it seemed from a distance, extremely soft and delicate and sewn with much skill with intestine strings (...). That multitude of people showed their desire to trade with the people on the ships, and to interact with them. But when from the ships a few boats were sent closer to the shore, unable in any way to understand their idiom, they did not have the heart to land. (...) But some of the islanders, seeing how none of those people would land, set out swimming towards the ships, so that some of them were taken, and they are those which we have brought back [to Europe] (qtd in Abulafia, 73-75).

It is emblematic that the defining feature of the first set of observations and impressions gathered by Europeans about a previously unknown population on the Atlantic sea should have been that of distance, of physical removal. Somewhat comically, while initially not daring to cross the strip of water which separated them from the Other, the European sailors did nonetheless manage to produce detailed remarks on the "extremely soft and delicate" texture of the natives' goat skins, "sewn with much skill with intestine strings".

What makes the passage extraordinary, however, is the cause which, according to Boccaccio and likely to the first-hand accounts on which he based the text, prompts the Europeans who had descended on their boats to turn away from the shore and back towards the main ship: we are told that, "unable in any way to understand [the natives'] idiom, [the crew] did not have the heart to land." The Europeans are discouraged by linguistic difference, perhaps one so radical as they had rarely experienced before, and which seems to cause a reaction close to fear. Not that the natives' speech sounds particularly aggressive or hostile to the newcomers, since Boccaccio notes that "according to the reports about it, it was very gentle and, similarly to Italian, it was spoken very fast" (75). Why should the sailors be afraid, then? To be sure, Niccoloso da Recco's expedition does not seem to be a particularly brave one, since on two other circumstances he admits either to "not having had the heart to penetrate inland" (73), or that, with a degree of superstition that will become much rarer among the *conquistadores* a century and a half later, upon sighting what seems to be a ship's mast atop the Teide volcano, "considering it to be effect of an enchantment, they did not dare to descend from their ships" (81). Partly, the fleeing reaction before the natives could be attributed to an utilitarian mindset, since Boccaccio explains that "finally, the sailors, having seen that no use would come to them, left from that place, and having gone around the island, they saw it was better cultivated in the northern part than in the south" (75). Perhaps, the sailors do not land because, having heard a language so foreign that it would allow for little or no communication, they realize that "no use would come to them" from such an encounter. This explanation, however, hardly lives up to Boccaccio's previous word choice, which, by specifying that the sailors "did not have the heart to land," suggests that linguistic difference signified a degree of alterity which is hard to imagine in today's polyglot and globalized world, prompting in turn all sorts of fears and speculations about the Other.

Aside from its chronological primacy over the accounts of Atlantic sea voyages that were to flood Europe's imagination in the coming ages, Boccaccio's text is relevant to this study as it contributes a tessera to the mosaic of the question of language in the moment of 'discovery', foreshadowing centuries of transatlantic exploration in which such a question played a central role. Over and over, whether they had to name uninhabited lands or communicate with native populations in the 'New World', the fact of language itself was brought to the surface by and for Europeans, who were forced to face it and to reconsider their "powerful, unspoken belief in the isomorphic relationship between language and reality" (Greenblatt, 28). It became increasingly harder, for a culture in which travel literature quickly developed a large readership, to consider one's own language as the natural and proper emanation of the world itself, rather than as a construct which was entirely arbitrary and which varied from place to place. At the same time, the most common immediate response of the traveller (and colonist) was precisely the refusal of the Other's language, and the compulsive act of naming and inscribing the unknown within a familiar linguistic horizon. Even more sharply than in the scene depicted by Boccaccio, the encounters which took place in the 'New World' lacked, at least at first, any kind of cultural and linguistic mediation between the two parties involved, even in the form of mere information, however inaccurate or fictitious, about the Other. Partly due to such a real or perceived lack of common ground with the American Natives, European travellers/writers were eager to "define, name and rewrite the other within an area known and familiar" (Fortunati, 20) — acts which constitute the basis of a modern colonialist epistemological approach towards the colonized, in which "to know" the Other is to know them in one's own terms, as one's linguistic property (even before 'legal' or material property).

While the mental canvas I have just described applies to the Spanish voyages and early colonial enterprise, to say that the English, by the time they set out on their first

transatlantic explorations in the second half of the 16th century, lacked "any kind of cultural and linguistic mediation," would be incorrect, and it prompts a more detailed contextualization. Richard Eden's translation of Peter Martyr's *De Orbe Novo*, entitled *Decades of the newe worlde*, the first comprehensive work in the English language concerning European explorations of the American continent, had been available in print since 1555. While Peter Martyr's work focused mostly on Spanish exploration, the French and the Dutch, too, had set out on the colonial enterprise before England, and had inevitably produced a number of narratives concerning the 'New World'. The most notable of these is perhaps the work of French Franciscan friar and cosmographer Andrè Thevét, author of *Les singularitez de la France antarctique* (1557), an account of his journeys to Eastern Canada and Brazil, which was translated into English and published in 1568, under the title *The New Found World, or Antarticke*, and to which I will return later in greater detail. Retrospectively, these translations should not be understood as isolated events, but rather as the tangible evidence of a larger discursive field: through them, the 'New World' was entering the English imagination. The books, along with the oral information that would have circulated through the stories of merchants, sailors, and other travellers, as well as more fragmentary written evidence, provided a first discursive link between England and the American continent, flooding the English language with native American terms, such as 'hurricane' and 'cannibal', which "came into the European languages via Spanish and were adopted relatively rapidly" (Hulme, 100). Both words "ultimately displaced words from an established Mediterranean discourse that were clearly thought inadequate to designate phenomena that were alien and hostile to European interests" (100). Before the English ever set out on their ships to reach the 'New World', the latter had made its entrance into England under the guise of literature.

Although the discursive filter the Spanish had produced provided a later English explorer with a frame of reference for the 'New World', it could also prove to be an unavoidable and cumbersome obstacle for the latter's linguistic acquisition of the new lands, peoples and natural elements, which often came to simultaneously bear three names: the denomination in the native language (often quickly disregarded or forgotten, if ever learned), the Spanish denomination (usually a corruption of the native term), and the English name. Of course, the American encounter between Spanish and English did not solely take place in language. The two met briefly on American soil, on very unfriendly terms, as in 1595, when Walter Raleigh seized the Spanish citadel of San Josè de Oruña, in Trinidad, and captured the Spanish governor Antonio de Berrio. Although there was an exchange at this stage, it constituted mostly of extorted strategic information (as in de Berrio's conversations with Raleigh), and was extremely limited by the conflict which was taking place between the two countries. In language and literature, instead, we may trace a consistent co-existence of English, Spanish, and native American terms, usually with no recurring hierarchic pattern. While flags could be changed overnight, buildings could be burned, and lands could pass from the hands of a number of contending colonizing powers over short periods of time, linguistic traces of native presence and of each European invader lingered more persistently throughout these changes. When discussing in retrospect the European assimilation of the 'New World', then, names could be considered as at once the tip of the iceberg, emerging as evidence of much invisible colonial history, and as the latter's earliest and deepest basis. Like toponyms, words that belong to the ecological lexicon deserve special attention, since they constitute markers of the sedimented layers of history.

A hint at the history of the word 'pineapple' serves well to illustrate the dislocation undergone by many English words in the age of transatlantic explorations, in a series of "shifts in meaning and expanded meaning, calques and semantic borrowings" (Tomei, 9).

‘Pineapple’ was commonly employed to refer to the fruit yielded by pine trees — now referred to as pine cones. What we currently refer to in English as ‘pineapple’ (the Spanish *piña* or *ananá*, the Italian and French *ananas*), was first named thus simply due to its (superficial) resemblance to pine cones (then referred to as ‘pineapples’). Eventually, the exotic ‘pineapple’ from the American continent came to displace, in common usage, the familiar ‘pineapple’ yielded by pine trees. There has been, however, a phase in which no single term had yet settled, in English, as the signifier for the new fruit. While John Smith, in 1624, will apply the word “pineapple” to the tropical plant, as late as 1613, in Samuel Purchas’ *Purchas His Pilgrimage*, we can still find the employment of the native term: the “Ananas,” among all fruit, is reputed “one of the best: In taste like an Apricocke, in shew a farre off like an Artichoke, but without prickles, very sweet of sent” (Purchas, qtd in *Merriam-Webster*). Clearly, the “Ananas” was still sufficiently outside of England’s world, and, linguistically, its fate in English was yet to be determined. Furthermore, precisely because of the exoticness or otherness of the fruit, much like Carletti had done in his passage on the banana, the description breaks down the different aspects of the pineapple, evoking, in relation to each of them, a significantly different term of comparison, such as the “Apricocke” and the “Artichoke,” which relate to the pineapple exclusively for a very specific quality (“taste” or “shew”), but are otherwise rather misleading associations.

The case of the word “Artichoke,” by contrast, provides an opportunity to reflect on how foreign, non-American items were often assimilated in the English language and culture in the late medieval and early modern period. The English term derives from “*articiocco*, Northern Italian variant of Italian *arcicioffo*, from Old Spanish *alcarchofa*,” which in turn was a calque of “the Arabic *al-hursufa* [الخرشوف]” (Harper). The “blossom of the thistle,” in fact, in the final form in which we know it today, had been “improved by the Arabs” (Ketcham Wheaton, 67), and introduced to Southern Italy in the fourteenth century. From

there, Italy is thought to have been "the bridge for the diffusion of artichoke in Europe" (Sonnante et al., 1096). The fact that in *Purchas His Pilgrimage* the artichoke is devised as a term of comparison for the pineapple, suggests that the author could assume its audience's familiarity with the vegetable— and indeed, the cultivation of the artichoke was "was introduced into England in the reign of Henry VIII" (Harper). To 'receive' the artichoke from Italy, whether in the form of a physical product, at court or at the market, or of a mere linguistic entity, as a word on a page or on the mouth of newly-returned merchant, is different than finding a natural element in a foreign land, where it often bears a name in a radically different language (as in the case of many items in Hariot's inventory of Virginia), or, more rarely, no known name at all (as with some of Strachey's findings in the uninhabited Bermudas). Needless to say, Italy and England already had well-established political and mercantile relations, and Italian culture, from fashion to literature and much more, had had an enormous influence on the English aristocratic and educated class (although not always one that was deemed edifying, as in Roger Ascham's famous rant against the "Italianite Englishman" in his 1563 work, *The Scholemaster*). The fact that Queen Elizabeth herself spoke fluently in Italian (Leach, 721) well illustrates the extent of such an influence. The same could be said, to varying extents, about the French and the Dutch. It is no surprise, then, if the "*articiocco*" was smoothly integrated into the English language, merely undergoing the inevitable anglicization of its spelling and pronunciation, without the appearance of multiple, often heteroglossic, co-referential terms. The same could not be said for the pineapple/ananas, and even less so, as we will see, for the prickly pear (whose English name had to be invented, rather than integrated from a different language). Furthermore, as a plant of Mediterranean origins, "[b]oth Greek and Roman writers reported the consumption of [the artichoke] species" (Sonnante et al., 1095-96). Some of Pliny the Elder's comments about the artichoke in his *Naturalis Historia*, "have been interpreted to indicate cultivated artichoke in

south Italy and south Spain." (1096), and the Greek botanist and philosopher Theophrastus, instead, "reported cultivation of artichokes in Sicily but not in Greece" (1096). Current debate about the history of the artichoke concerns its domestication and cultivation, not Europe's familiarity with the species, since Mediterranean populations had been acquainted with several variants of the plant for centuries. Even if this did not necessarily include England, by the time the artichoke travelled North, it came from relatively familiar hands, and could be easily digested — linguistically, that is.

When it comes to the heteroglossic texts, instead, Thomas Hariot's *Briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*, published in 1588, is perhaps the most significant example, partly due to the text's privileging of its descriptive tasks over its narrative function. Hariot sets out to redact a detailed inventory of Roanoke's "marchantable commodities" (Hariot, 9), as well as, more broadly, of the local flora and fauna, and of the natives' customs. Many items of his inventory overlap, linguistically, with elements previously encountered and described by other European adventurers, who introduced them into the European conscience with their own chosen name, often in their own language. He mentions, for example, "an hearbe which in Dutch is called Melden" (18). Other components of the inventory, instead, are listed under their Pamlico (Carolina Algonquian) name, and usually either accompanied by an English equivalent, or by an admission of inability to produce the latter. The "*Macòcqwer*", Hariot reports, are "according to their seuerall formes called by vs, *Pompions*, *Mellions* and *Gourdes*, because they are of the like formes as those kindes in England" (18): not *all* the flora in the 'New World', after all, was different than that in Europe. When the "*Macòcqwer*, *Melden* and *Planta solis*" (20) — the latter being a Latin name attached to the marigold — are bundled within the same sentence, however, the heteroglossic blend typical of the early stages of the invasion of the 'New World' becomes dizzying. For each of these terms, the reader must remember the relative English term, if

there is indeed one available. In the case of "an hearbe which is sowed a part by it selfe & is called by the inhabitants *uppówoc*" (21), for example, the English language has not yet devised or borrowed a name. Hariot notes, however, that "[i]n the West Indies it hath diuers names, according to the seuerall places & countries where it groweth and is vsed: The Spaniardes generally call it *Tobacco*" (21). Although we know that eventually the Spanish term would permanently make its way into the English language, Hariot's passage is not any less extraordinary. Not that the English were not aware of the plurality of the world's languages, of course, but upon reaching the 'New World', they were forced to disentangle their way out of previously-named landscapes, which confronted them with a wide range of choices to pick from in order to linguistically assimilate novelty, while simultaneously prompting an epistemological reaction which often strove to understand the 'New' within the standards of the 'Old'. Perhaps counter to a contemporary reader's expectations, in the enthusiastic praise of tobacco which follows its first mention — Hariot declares himself an avid consumer (22), and is indeed suspected to have died from consumption-related nose cancer (Moran) — the author does not refer to the plant with its Spanish name, but with the native term *uppówoc*. While the history of tobacco as a commercial product will contribute to determine the Spanish term's adoption into the English language, Hariot is writing in a context in which no fixed signifier has yet been assigned, in English, to the marvellous herb "of which the relation woulde require a volume by it selfe" (Hariot, 22). Since no single term has yet sedimented into the English language, the traveller/writer can still choose which foreign word to employ, a fact which produces at once an unusual linguistic agency, and an instability within the writer's own language, whose failure to cover certain aspects of the world is suddenly exposed.

Over and over, in his *Briefe and true report*, Hariot is forced, for the sake of clarity, to include all the possible names by which a given plant or animal might be known. The

"*Pagatowr*," for example, is "a kinde of graine so called by the inhabitants;" but "the same in the West Indies is called *Mayze*: English men call it *Guinney wheate* or *Turkie wheate*, according to the names of the countreys from whence the like hath beene brought." (17). To acknowledge a name means, of course, to acknowledge the history of its referent, and therefore, more or less explicitly, the political and commercial dynamics that determine it. In the English early modern travelogues, such examples of co-existing terms from several languages are countless, and certainly not limited to Hariot's text. In John Hawkins' account of his second voyage to Guinea and the west Indies, for instance, the author comments on the Island of Alcatrasa, in the Cape Verde archipelago, claiming to have found "nothing but sea-birds, as we call them Ganets, but by the Portugals, called Alcatrarses, who for that cause gave the said Island the same name" (Hakluyt, vol.7, 12). Later in the text (and in the voyage) the author reports about "50 boates called Almaydes, or Canoas" (14). Similarly, he notes that during the voyage his crew encountered "many sharkes or Tiburons" (18): the nonchalant manner with which he includes the Spanish term suggests that, for a relatively exotic creature as a shark, "Tiburon" was not perceived as an intrusive term, and could comfortably share a sentence with the English "shark".

In a formidable and brutal passage on crocodile fishing (with a live dog as bait), instead, Job Hortop, who embarked on Hawkins's third voyage in 1568, refers to the reptile as "a monstous Lagarto or crocodile" (Hakluyt, vol. 6, 340). Like Hawkins had done for sharks, Hortop mentions the Spanish term for crocodiles and provides an English equivalent. As in Hawkins and Hariot, the inclusion of the foreign term could be factored to Hortop's meticulousness and desire for clarity, but the impression, with him as with the other travellers, is that neither of the two terms — "*lagarto*" and "crocodile"— has yet gained predominance over the other. An implicit question emerges from Hortop's passage on the crocodile: what names should one use for a land that "belongs" to another language? If

naming is an act of appropriation, as I will discuss later, what are the implications of Hortop's choice to opt, in the rest of the paragraph on the crocodile, for the Spanish term, as he writes that "the Lagarto came & presently swallowed up the dogge" (340)? I do not mean that Hortop is necessarily posing himself these questions as he reports on his adventures in the 'New World', and he is certainly not posing them to the reader. Despite this, I would argue that the constant shifting of terms across languages that is so common in the voyagers' texts is itself an implicit attempt to grapple with those questions — an answer, we might say, although no question was explicitly asked. When Hortop mentions the crocodile for the second time solely under the signifier "Lagarto", his choice of the Spanish term seems to acknowledge the Spanish's (historical, and therefore linguistic) dominance over the lands in which him and the rest of Hawkins' crew are roaming.

The linguistic fallacy inherent to those accounts which seek to convey the unfamiliar by accumulating terms of comparison generates chimaeras. Hortop's passage on the crocodile becomes even more interesting, if considered in relation to this tendency. As we have seen in the case of Carletti's banana, whose various aspects are likened to the "*cucumber*," the "*home-grown fig*," the "*ripe melon*," and the "*pears*," writers followed a common epistemological practice, but often produce a descriptive and linguistic surplus in order to compensate for the reader's lack of empirical reference for the thing described. Hortop's description of the crocodile, too, adopts this strategy, but with such a lack of nuance that the result appears to be a relatively clear image, but also an entirely misleading one. The crocodile is "headed like a hogge," Hortop writes, "in body like a serpent, full of scales as broad as a sawcer: his taile long and full of knots as bigge as a fawcon shotte: he hath foure legs, his feete have long nailes like unto a dragon" (340). It is easy to imagine early modern naturalists such as the Swiss scholar Conrad Gessner, compiler of an *Historia animalium* (1551-1558), or the English Edward Topsell, author of *The History of Four-footed Beasts*

(1607), who, setting out to redact their bestiaries on the basis of second-hand accounts, as well as first-hand observation and classical sources, would take the information of a beast "headed like a hogge, in body like a serpent" quite literally, and produce a Sphinx-like chimaera whose sharply different body parts belonged to different animals. Both bestiaries, after all, include sphinxes, lamias, satyres, manticores, and other mythological creatures, and Topsell's *History* features, alongside other imaginary creatures, a dog-like, seemingly feather-tailed "Wilde beast of the New-found World called Su" (Topsell, 511), whose visual depiction he admittedly borrows from André Thévet. Although Topsell's "Su" is not extraordinary in its appearance, it does nonetheless signal the author's attention towards the accounts which were pouring out of the 'New World'. Hortop's hog-headed serpent is a somewhat extreme example of how descriptions could accidentally generate new, composite images in the unaware readers' minds. Throughout many early modern travelogues, this descriptive approach is extremely diffused, and applied to a wide range of subjects — from the flora and fauna to the local peoples' customs and artifacts— although not always with such vivid results as in the case of Hortop's "Lagarto".

The case of the 'prickle pear', too, might serve to illustrate how, faced with the linguistic challenge of having to render unfamiliar objects in their texts, the voyagers/writers produced chimaeric images through bulky accumulations of comparative terms. In his *True reportory of the wracke*, published in 1610, William Strachey writes of "[a] kind of pea of the bigness and shape of a Catherine pear [which] we found growing upon the rocks, full of many sharp subtle pricks (as a thistle) which we therefore called the prickle pear, the outside green, but, being opened, of a deep murrey, full of juice like a mulberry" (Strachey, 26-27). Within a single sentence, the fruit, lacking a signifier in the English language, is likened to "a Catherine pear," a "thistle," and a "mulberry." Adding to the confusion, in what seems to be a typographic error from the first printed reproduction of the manuscript text in Samuel

Purchas's 1625 *Hakluytus Posthumus*, the fruit is initially referred to as a "kind of pea," instead of the more logical 'pear' which is employed shortly after ("pease" for "peare" in the original [mis]spelling). Bound within this quick succession of associations, is also an account of the naming moment, which, possibly prompted by a pragmatic necessity (that of having to refer to something in the physical world), produces the approximate moniker of "prickle pear" that will eventually sediment in the English language. This naming act, which, one could speculate, was performed lightheartedly, contains very significant contextual implications. To understand them we must first attempt to at least superficially sketch the different perceptions of the world that set us apart from an early modern person. From a European perspective, we could say that today's world is generally regarded as being at once logistically open, since many of its parts are easily accessible, either physically or virtually (in the form of information, photographs, videos, etc.), and epistemologically closed, since the process of geographical reconnaissance and ethnographical discovery, radically begun in 1492, has long come to something close of completion, or to the illusion thereof (Todorov, 7). If I travel to a foreign land and come across a plant I have never seen before, it is more likely that I will be prompted to acknowledge my own ignorance in its regards, rather than assume that the lack resides in language itself. In other words, I may not be familiar with a given plant or fruit, but I can be almost certain that it has already been identified and classified, and that it already bears a botanical denomination as well as a common name in one or more languages. The same was not necessarily true for the early-modern European traveler who ventured towards the 'New World'. When Strachey, shipwrecked on the uninhabited Bermudas, notices various species of fish with which he is not familiar, he may well assume that those fish have never been named — at least, not in his own language. Indeed, after listing the kinds of fish he recognizes, he adds that there are "other kinds for which we have no names" (Strachey, 28). This peculiar predicament explains the facility with

which Strachey and his fellow crew-members assign names to animals, plants and locations. He states, for example, that "as occasions were offered, so we gave titles and names to certain places" (20): an endeavour which, since Columbus' first voyage, had been common among European travellers in the 'New World', regardless of whether places already bore a name in an indigenous language. In Strachey, however, this propensity towards naming is extended to the flora and fauna of the Bermudas. For instance, in reference to a species of birds which his crew, in order to survive, hunts down to near-extinction, he writes that the birds, "for their blindness (for they see weakly in the day) and for their cry and hooting we called the sea owl" (32). "*We called*" is the premise to many of the items in Strachey's account of the Bermudas, which constantly exposes names as arbitrary products of their speakers, rather than a quality intrinsic to their referents (the latter being a notion which, as I will discuss later, is deeply embedded in the Christian view of language, stated explicitly in the Book of Genesis).

As we have seen, for Strachey, the *Opuntia*, is still a nameless fruit, and therefore one which, due to its appearance and vague resemblance to a familiar object, "we (…) called the prickle pear," as he writes. In 1588, however, twenty-two years before Strachey's report, Thomas Hariot had provided a more eloquent description, without relying as heavily on comparisons prompted by the prickly pear's resemblance to other fruit, and referring to it solely with its Native American name, "*Metaquesúnnauk*" (Hariot, 25). Although he, too, notes that this "pleasante fruite " is "almost of the shape and bignes of English peares," he then proceeds to add that

> they are of a perfect red colour as well within as without. They grow on a plant whose leaues are verie thicke and full of prickles as sharpe as needles. Some that haue bin in the Indies, where they haue seen that kind of red die of great price which is called *Cochinile* to grow, doe describe his plant right unto this of *Metaquesúnnauk*, seeing that also as I heard, *Cochinile* is not of the fruite but

> founde on the leaues of the plant; which leaues for such matter we haue not so specially obserued." (25-26)

Hariot is in possession of the correct information regarding cochineal worms, and he is sharp enough to link the information he has to the plant he is observing, although he admittedly does not find any such worms himself. Strachey, too, had access to the same information, but he fails to connect it with the plant which yields the "prickle pear," once he comes across it. Instead, his mention of the cochineal worms is accidental, provided in passing as he is describing the palms he encounters in the Bermudas, on whose leaves him and his fellow crew members "oftentimes found growing (...) many silkworms involved therein, like those small worms which Acosta writeth of, which grew in the leaves of the tuna tree, of which, being dried, the Indians make their cochineal" (Strachey, 25). Interestingly, the passage also contains a mention of the "tuna tree", the fruit-bearing cactus which was thus referred to by Spanish chroniclers such as Josè de Acosta, author of a *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (1590), but Strachey does not employ this denomination for the "prickle pear" plant.

Strachey's description of the palms on which he finds silkworms, too, deserves some attention, as it is yet another example of several of the descriptive problems and strategies typical of early modern travelogues. The palms, whose leaves are as broad "as an Italian umbrella" (25), are

> not the right Indian palms such as in San Juan, Puerto Rico, are called cocos and are there full of small fruits like almonds (of the bigness of the grains in pomegranates), nor of those kind of palms which bear dates, but a kind of simerons or wild palms, in growth, fashion, leaves, and branches resembling those true palms (25).

Even upon a first reading, denominations seem totally arbitrary and easily overlapped: different kinds of palm trees are referred to as "the right Indian palms such as in San Juan,

Puerto Rico, are called cocos," "those kind of palms which bear dates," "simerons or wild palms," "true palms." Far from being clear, the passage must be disentangled: the palms Strachey is describing are not the "right Indian palms" or "cocos", nor are they date-bearing palms; rather, somehow, they are closer to "simerons" (from the Spanish *cimarrón*, a kind of walnut tree!) or "wild palms," resembling in nearly every aspect "those true palms" — a specification which could refer again to "the right Indian palms," thus creating a confusing loop, or simply to the "wild palms." While the current scientific name for the kind of palm Strachey is describing is *Sabal Bermudana*, the name that eventually settled in common English speech is "palmetto," which is a corruption of the Spanish *palmito* (meaning little palm), and which is not yet used by Strachey to refer to the plant as a whole, but only to its "inmost part" (24) or "soft top thereof" (25).

Unlike Strachey, who comes across the "prickle pear" and the Bermuda palmetto while he is shipwrecked on an uninhabited island, Hariot can resort to Pamlico words to refer to the natural elements he describes in his *Briefe and true report*. But Hariot's extensive catalogue presents a different challenge to the reader, since it often omits significant details as to the actual aspect of the plants and animals it mentions. All we learn about the "*Saquenúckot*" and the "*Maquówoc*," for example, is that they are "two kindes of small beastes greater than conies which are very good meat" (Hariot, 27), an information which leaves almost no visual reference for the reader to attach to the creatures' names — themselves uncertain linguistic entities, since the transcriptions of Pamlico words are doubly filtered: by Hariot's aural perception, as well as by the spelling parameters he devises specifically for the task, as he "engineers an interpretation of the natives' vocabulary, whose transcription often derives from onomatopoeia" (Fortunati, 11). But what exactly lies behind Hariot's choice to employ Pamlico words in his text? Is it merely a way to "give authenticity or credibility" (11) to his report? Or else, can the practice be entirely and satisfyingly be

ascribed to the fact that "in his own language there are no terms to express the objects, manners and customs that cannot be found in the reality he comes from" (11)? Finally, should we consider his study of the Algonkian language as the effort of a brilliant and (comparatively) open-minded ethnographer, or as the tactic of a pragmatic and methodical colonist, since, as the Spanish humanist Antonio de Nebrija writes in the Introduction to his grammar, published in 1492, "'[l]anguage has always been the companion of empire'" (qtd in Todorov, 123)?

Nebrija's statement refers, of course, to the propagation and imposition of a nation's own language over the lands within its dominion, but it is interesting to consider it in light of Hariot's linguistic undertaking, which represents perhaps a subtler strategic approach, since it provides the colonists the insight into the colonized culture which they generally lack — hence the crucial role played by the figure of the interpreter for Europeans in the 'New World'. Beginning with Columbus' first voyage, indeed, "[t]he first of the endless series of kidnappings (...) was plotted in order to secure interpreters; the primal crime in the New World was committed in the interest of language" (Greenblatt, 17). Likewise, Doña Marina (also known as 'la Malinche'), an enslaved Aztech woman offered as a gift to the Spanish *conquistadores* during their first encounters with the natives, is widely recognized as a fundamental actor in the Spanish victory over Moctezuma, initially acting as an interpreter for Cortès in his exchanges with nahuatl speakers, but eventually taking on an active role as a mediator and becoming "much more than an interpreter" (Todorov, 101) — so much that "the conquest of Mexico would have been impossible without her (or someone else play the same role)" (101). Hariot is not an interpreter, however, but a scientist. He claims that his purpose in cataloguing the species found in Roanoke is "to open the cause of the varietie of such speeches; the particularities of them" (Hariot, 8), for the "Aduenturers, Fauourers, and Welwillers of the enterprise for the inhabiting and planting in Virginia" (5). The enterprise,

he adds, “will enrich your selues the prouiders; those that shal deal with you; the enterprisers in general; and greatly profit our owne countrey men” (9). As was “common to the travellers and explorers of the New World, and to the culture that sustained them,” Hariot displays “a continuous desire that moves between curiosity over the new and the determination to take possession of it” (Fortunati, 16). His scientific and linguistic pursuits are inextricable from the discourse on profit with which he solicits English participation in the colonial enterprise. He epitomizes, in this sense, two of the principal “approaches to knowledge” which were typical of the early modern European voyagers: “the curious and the utilitarian” (Elliot, 32).

Hariot’s employment of terms from the Pamlico language, however, far from being a smooth process, exposes a number of fallacies in the colonists’ linguistic assimilation of the ‘New World’. Even when Hariot provides seemingly plain and linguistically unproblematic information, a careful analysis of his sentences invariably discloses the contradictions and vague meanings that crowd his report. He writes, for example, about the “*Okindgíer*,” which, he adds, is “called by vs *Beanes*, because in greatnesse & partly in shape they are like to the Beanes in England; sauing that they are flatter, of more diuers colours, and some pide” (18). First of all, the very order in which he arranges the two available denominations for the legume in question suggests an unusual linguistic predicament. Had Hariot simply listed the legume as “Beanes,” providing, as a mere supplement, the native term, the reader would have had no doubts as to what is being discussed. Elsewhere, for instance he writes about “*Sassafras*, called by the inhabitantes *Winauk*” (11), thus establishing a hierarchy in the co-existence of terms, and clearly identifying the object of his description with the Sassafras, a plant well-known to his readers. The legume, however, is first and foremost “*Okindgíer*,” and, according to Hariot, the English term is conjured based on the fact that the “*Okindgíer*” is “in greatnesse and partly in shape” similar to the beans found in England. But they are not necessarily beans: they are only “called by vs *Beanes*,” Hariot says, more or less consciously

expressing the fundamental arbitrariness of language, as well as its profound approximation. Indeed, while the *Okindgíer* only resembles English beans in size and "partly in shape," Hariot admits that "they are flatter, of more diuers colours, and some pide": not a tremendous difference, perhaps, but one that, botanically, might suffice to set apart the object of Hariot's description from the term "*Beanes*," especially since he notes that the "leafe also of the stemme is much different" (18). The closing sentence of the passage on the *Okindgíer* does not provide any further clarity on the legume's proper botanical realm, stating instead that "in taste they are altogether as good as our English peaze" (18): not only is the term of comparison suddenly switched from "*Beanes*" to "peaze," but the very ground upon which Hariot bases his comparison is subjective and unquantifiable, and ultimately devoid of any real quality. Instead of noting affinities in taste or texture between the two, such as sweetness or softness, Hariot simply claims that the "*Okindgíer*" are "as good" as peas — a statement which leaves the reader with virtually no information.

The passage discussed above is further complicated by the one that immediately follows in the text. Hariot introduces the next item of his list, "*Wickonzówr*," which, he adds, was "called by vs Peaze, in respect of the beanes for distinction sake, because they are much lesse; although in forme they little differ; but in goodnesse of tast much, & are far better then our English peaze" (18). As with the "*Okindgíer*," the precedence Hariot gives to the Pamlico name "*Wickonzówr*" suggests the uncertainty of the English term that follows. But while the imprecise term "*Beanes*," although an approximation, is a product of observation and still bears visual relationship with its referent, the term "peaze," which Hariot attaches to the "*Wickonzówr*," stems primarily from the necessity to distinguish the latter from the previously mentioned "*Okindgíer*," which is greater in size, "although in forme they little differ." Based on the explanation Hariot provides, what he calls "peaze" does not necessarily bear a significant relationship to actual peas, but rather a differential one towards the

previously employed word "*Beanes*," which, as we have seen, was itself admittedly imprecise. In other words, Hariot is devising a small apparatus of approximate, pre-existent English terms whose primary relationship is towards each other, in the particular context in which they are employed, rather than to their referents — a parallel lexicon hovering precariously and temporarily over a landscape, without necessarily referring to it correctly or being sufficiently precise to attach itself to it. What is striking, furthermore, is the persistence with which, according to Hariot's report, the English colonists cling to names from their own language, even when their accuracy is uncertain or clearly at fault. While this attitude can partly be attributed to the fact that Algonkian words might have been particularly difficult to learn for people who had likely never experienced such a radical degree of linguistic difference, it also hints at the type of encounter which took place in Roanoke: the colonists speak *of* the Roanoke Island, not *to* its inhabitants, who, from the English perspective, simply happen to inhabit a land rich with "marchantable commodities."

Hariot himself appears to be an exception to this trend, precisely due to his substantial knowledge of the Pamlico language, which suggests he was able to actually establish an exchange with the natives, thus avoiding, or at least limiting, the typical epistemological approach of his contemporaries to the Other, in which "difference is corrupted into inequality" (Todorov, 146). In other words, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was able to acknowledge the natives' speech as a proper language, rather than as a barbaric gabble. To be sure, his text is still informed by the paternalistic perspective through which most Europeans, including well-meaning ones such as the great Bartolomè de Las Casas, conceived of the American natives. However, although still far from the relativist positions of his contemporary Michel de Montaigne, Hariot is surprisingly sparse in judgement, and is able to acknowledge difference without systematically condemning it. He writes, for example, that "[n]otwithstanding (...) the want of such meanes as we haue, they seeme very

ingenious; For although they haue no such tooles, nor any such craftes, sciences and artes as wee; yet in those thinges they doe, they shewe excellencie of wit" (Hariot, 36). The most indicative passage of Hariot's sympathy for the Roanoke Algonkians (or simply, perhaps, of his ethnographic detachment), is the one in which he discusses the locals' religious practices. Whereas other European travellers in all corners of the world had been swift to identify the Other as an idolatrous devil-worshipper — the German comsographer Sebastian Munster, for example, relating second-hand accounts on the city of Calicut, in India, claims that "[t]he Kynge of this citie is geuen to Idolatrie, and honoureth the deuyll himself" (d'Anghiera, 17), while the Vicentine traveller Antonio Pigafetta, having reached the southernmost territories of South America with Ferdinand Magellan's expedition and imprisoned some local men by means of deceit, reports that "they rored lyke bulles and cryed vppon theyr greate deuyll *Setebos* to helpe them" (d'Anghiera, 252) — Hariot, by contrast, omits all mentions of devils and idols, referring instead to the Algonkian's divinities as "Gods" (Hariot, 36). While he does introduce the topic by stating, somewhat perfunctorily, that "[s]ome religion they haue alreadie, which although it be farre from the truth, yet beyng as it is, there is hope it may bee the easier and sooner reformed," (37), the rest of his description proves the depth of his exchange with the natives, venturing in great detail about how the Roanoke Algonkians, too, "beleeue also the immortalitie of the soule" (37), and reporting their divinities' names, as well as including two stories the natives tell him about the "*Popogusso*" (37), a place "which they thinke to bee in the furthest partes of their part of the worlde towarde the sunne set," where the wicked go "to burne continually" (37) in the afterlife. Perhaps, Hariot is modelling the information he receives according to his own Christian notions of heaven and hell, but his account is almost unique in its refusal to operate the identification between the Other's god(s) and the Christian figure of the devil.

Furthermore, more than most other chroniclers of the 'New World', Hariot seems aware of the deep linguistic uncertainty that characterizes his account, and, in general, the first European experiences in the American continent — although, as we have seen, he himself inevitably falls prey to many of the contradictions of his contemporaries. At times, however, he appears to purposefully distance himself from certain naming practices, as when he mentions the "*Coscúshaw*," which, he reports "some of our company tooke to bee that kinde of roote which the Spaniards in the West Indies call Cassauy, whereupon also many called it by that name" (24). The sentence is a brief history of a possible misnaming: at first, only "some" of the members of Hariot's company operate the identification between "the *Coscúshaw*" and the cassava root, whose name Hariot traces back to "the Spaniards in the West Indies." The employment of the third plural person, rather than the first singular or the first plural, suggests that Hariot does not entirely agree with the identification, preferring instead to attribute it to others. If the identification of the "*Coscúshaw*" with the cassava is initially practiced only by "some," subsequently "many called it by that name," thus spreading and normalizing a denomination that, according to Hariot's phrasing, is not reported as being necessarily correct.

At other times, the linguistic overlap with other previously known elements of the natural world is blurrier, and Hariot's report reads more confusingly. Among other Pamlico names for the roots he finds in Roanoke, he lists the "*Tsinaw*, a kind of roote much like vnto the one which in England is called the China root brought from the East Indies. And we know not anie thing to the contrary but that it maie be of the same kind" (23). The term "*Tsinaw*," however, as Paul Royster notes, is "probably a native pronunciation of "China" (n.23.23, 54). We can imagine, then, a purely hypothetical exchange between Hariot and an Algonquin interlocutor, in which the English author mentions the China root in reference to the root in question, and the native person, as it happens during conversations with little or no common

linguistic ground for understanding, returns the word "China" distorted into "*Tsinaw*," which Hariot then sets down as though it were a Pamlico word. But the misrecognition of the English word for a native term, granted that the etymology proposed above is indeed plausible, is only the first glitch in the passage. After explicitly establishing a connection between the "*Tsinaw"* root and that "which in England is called the China root brought from the East Indies," Hariot provides a short description of the former, which he concludes by claiming that

> [t]his *Tsinaw* is not of that sort which by some was caused to be brought into England for the *China roote*, for it was discouered since, and is in vse as is aforesaide: but that which was brought hither is not yet knowne neither by vs nor by the inhabitants to serue for any vse or purpose; although the rootes in shape are very like." (24)

Suddenly, Hariot breaks the similitude with the China root that he had himself established at the beginning of the passage. Attempting to rectify past misidentifications of the root, he produces an even more confusing distinction, which hardly sets apart the various terms he is discussing. When he mentions "that sort which by some was caused to be brought into England for the *China roote*," for example, the phrase inevitably prompts a question: from where? When he says "that sort," does he mean the actual China root, brought from the Far East, or a third kind of root — neither the "*Tsinaw*" nor the China — which has been mistakenly labeled "*China roote*" after being imported from the American continent? In the former case, why would he contribute to the association of the "*Tsinaw*" with the China root, going as far as declaring that he knows "not anie thing to the contrary but that it maie be of the same kind," only to insist upon a distinction between the two rootes at the end of the paragraph? I have no answer to these questions, in part because I believe the confusion is due to Hariot's taking for granted his reader's direct knowledge of his references to the various

objects he mentions, often in passing, in his report (something which, as a modern reader undertaking a retrospective analysis on the text, I cannot have — hence the convoluted nature of the deconstructions I have performed on Hariot's sentences). I also believe, however, that the confusion is largely intrinsic to the text, as it is to all those early modern travelogues dealing with the sheer quantity of new natural elements and their relative non-standardized nomenclatures, which in turn could change according to each writer's language, education, and previous knowledge of the lands encountered, through other 'New World' texts. To be sure, the degree to which Hariot's namings and descriptions can be taken apart is a testament to their depth, which far surpasses that which is found in most texts from his contemporaries, where "so often the physical appearance of the New World is either totally ignored or else described in the flattest and most conventional phraseology" (Elliott, 19-20).

Given the dual nature of Hariot's text as at once an inventory and a glossary, despite reporting the names generally used by the English colonists to refer to the flora and fauna of Roanoke, when it comes to the unfamiliar, Hariot generally prioritizes employing Pamlico words rather than attempting to sew potentially confusing patches over those exposed areas of the world which the fabric of the English language does not cover. As he describes the fruit which he lists under the English term "[*m*]*edlars*" (Hariot, 25), however, he explains that they were

> so called by vs chieflie for these respectes: first in that they are not good vntill they be rotten: then in that they open at the head as our medlars, and are about the same bignesse: otherwise in taste and colour they are farre different: for they are as red as cheries and very sweet: but whereas the cherie is sharpe sweet, they are lushious sweet. (25)

As Paul Royster remarks in his notes to the text, "[t]he Eurasian medlar tree (*Mespilus germanica*) bears a fruit resembling the crab-apple; Hariot refers here to the persimmon" (n.25.20, 54). For Hariot, however, 'medlars' is the best available definition. Otherwise, as he

does elsewhere, he would speak of fruit "whose names I know not but in the countrie language" (29), or simply produce a transcription of the apt Pamlico word. And yet, instead of proceeding with his remarks after having provided a name, as in the case of "[*g*]*rapes*" (26), "[*b*]*eares*" (28), "[*o*]*ysters"* (30) and several others, the description of the "[*m*]*edlars*" is itself framed as a justification for the employment of the term, thus signalling hesitation on the author's part to completely identify the object of his description with the English word he nonetheless attaches to it. The fruit in question are opened and eaten after bletting just like medlars, they are "about the same bignesse," but they are ultimately not medlars, since "otherwise in taste and colour they are farre different." In order to describe the fruit's colour, instead of simply using the adjective "red," Hariot opts for another comparison — "as red as cheries" — only to reject the latter term immediately after in his comment on the fruit's taste, which differs from a cherry's "sharpe" sweetness. Here, once again, not only do we find a descriptive surplus (why mention cherries at all?), but also the unresolved semantic overlap of the word "medlars," attached both to what Hariot calls "our medlars," and to the new, somewhat resembling fruit which he encounters in Roanoke . By using the word "medlars," then, is Hariot consciously misnaming the fruit he is referring to?

The answer to this question might have to do with the expectations with which many European newcomers approached the 'New World'. In order to overlap the *Opuntia* and a pear, or a medlar and a persimmon, it seems likely that the traveller/writer was operating under the underlying assumption that the two terms of comparison were essentially related, and constituted merely two superficial variations of the same species. Similitude, as we have seen earlier, in a wide range of intensity, was structural to the formation of sixteenth and early seventeenth century knowledge. In the Things could be 'convenient', their qualities intersecting; they could mirror one another; they could exist in hierarchic relation; they could be complementary; equal; continuous; in proportional relation, and often they could be

connected by more than one type of link at once. But when such a "grid" of relations is bent to include entirely new elements, the risk inherent to this epistemological attitude is that of creating an erroneous ecological lexicon (even by early modern standards), which confusedly blends European and American species without distinguishing their essential difference. In the sixteenth century, the acute Spanish chronicler Josè de Acosta, "who saw the danger, specifically warned against the assumption that American species differed accidentally, and not in essence, from those of Europe. The differences were sometimes so great, he said, that to reduce them all to European types was like calling an egg a chestnut" (Elliott, 41). It is no coincidence, perhaps, if key figures like the Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, one of the fathers of modern natural history and founder of Bologna's botanical garden, or the Swiss botanist Gaspard Bahuin, as well as German botanists Otto Brunfels, Hieronymous Bock, and Valerius Cordus, all operate and gain prominence in the 16th century, an era in which Europe was flooded with an unprecedented flow of novelty and diversity from various parts of the world. By no means would I regard the work of these scientists as a mere consequence of the influence of the 'New World', since they obviously acted within a much more complex network of knowledge and information. Even before the 'New World' had entered the horizons of the 'Old', among scientists and natural historians, "[a]chieving any sort of agreement on the specific workings of the natural world was a difficult process and fraught with contention" (Schleck, 57). Rather than interpreting the "dramatic shifts in the construction of natural philosophic knowledge across the seventeenth century" (54) solely in light of the 'New World', then, I have been trying to analyze what kind of contribution, if any, transatlantic travel literature might have given to the "potentially acrimonious debate" which lead natural philosophers to envision and employ "forms that would eventually come to be the trademarks of an 'objective' and 'fact-based' discipline" (54). While it would be impossible to isolate any historical phenomenon from all the other circumstances in which it

sinks its roots, the large amount of discordant information produced by the accumulation of travellers' texts (as in the case of the cochineal and the cactus or tuna tree, discussed earlier), might have contributed to a larger and more complex intellectual climate in which Europe was eager to classify, assign names, and re-establish an order in the discourse on the natural world— moved perhaps by a sense that it, too, was "'all in pieces, all coherence gone" (qtd in Fortunati, 36), as John Donne laments in "An Anatomy of the World," a poem written in 1610. A mistake such as the one Hariot commits when referring to persimmons as "medlars" is in itself insignificant, but it becomes problematic, for the formation of a botanical and biological lexicon, when the misrecognition is replicated over and over, as it happened for a substantial quantity of American items discussed in the travellers' text, as well as, one may assume, in the oral accounts which circulated at the time.

Framed thus, the matter may still appear trivial. Why, in tracing the diffusion of approximate and epistemologically frayed practices in the European linguistic assimilation of the 'New World', should I choose to focus on such narrow details such as prickly pears, bananas, or Hariot's persimmons? There had been namings, renamings and misnamings of much greater consequence. For instance, "the first gesture Columbus makes upon contact with the newly discovered lands (hence what will be the first contact between Europe and America) is an act of extended nomination" (Todorov, 28). The official act declaring Spain's newly gained possession of the island of *Guanahanì*, redacted before a crowd of probably perplexed natives, coincides with Columbus' christening of the island as San Salvador. But whereas Europeans could confidently assign place names in a "manifestation of power through eponymous titles" (Greenblatt, 82), the implications of misnaming elements of the natural world would have been portentous for a colonial enterprise that, as in Columbus' case, relied on "the appropriative power of naming" (Greenblatt, 83), a concept which is deeply embedded in the Scripture. In his gloss to Genesis 2: 19, in fact, Martin Luther notes

that “because of the excellence of his nature, [Adam] views all the animals and thus arrives at such a knowledge of their nature that he can give each one a suitable name that harmonizes with its nature” (qtd in Greenblatt, 82). At this stage, “language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them” (Foucault, 40). According to the Scripture, names “were lodged in the things they designated, just as strength is written in the body of the lion, regality in the eye of the eagle, just as the influence of the planets is marked upon the brows of men: by the form of similitude” (40). If it comes from knowledge of its referent, naming generates harmony. But it is also an instrument of control. Luther continues: “From this enlightenment there also followed, of course, the rule over all the animals, (...) since they were named in accordance with Adam’s will” (82). In early modern, Protestant England, ideas such as these were not confined to the work of theologians and religious scholars, but, they seemed to be relatively well-spread among those who had access to higher education (such as Hariot himself did have). In the Epistle Dedicatory which precedes his *History of Four-footed Beastes and Serpents* (which was published posthumously in 1658, and combined the contents of his previous *History of Four-footed Beastes* and *History of Serpents*), for example, Edward Topsell writes that

> “the knowledge of Beasts, like as the knowledge of the other creatures and works of God, is Divine... [T]heir Life and Creation is Divine in respect to their Maker, their naming Divine, in respect that *Adam* out of the plenty of his own divine wisdom, gave them their several appellations, as it were out of a fountain of Prophesie, foreshewing the nature of every kind in one elegant and significant denomination, which to the great losse of all his children was taken away, lost and confounded at *Babel*. When I affirm that the knowledge of Beasts is Divine, I do mean no other then the right and perfect description of their Names, Figures, and Natures.”

The origin myth of Babel, narrated in Genesis 11:1-9, in which God punishes mankind’s haughty ambitions by diversifying their speech into countless languages, thus

rendering communication and collaboration impossible, is the narrative through which, at least theoretically, Christians made sense of linguistic difference. Since Babel, human languages have been speaking "against the background of [a] lost similitude"(Foucault, 40) given that Adam's single "elegant and significant denomination", as Topsell writes, was "taken away, lost and confounded." The paradox is obvious, in Topsell's case, since he is acknowledging a myth illustrating human linguistic faults as a preface to his own enormous and encyclopedic effort which seeks to provide "the right and perfect description of [the animals'] Names, Figures, and Natures". Whether or not Adam's denominations could be retrieved, however, seems to have been up for debate. Francis Bacon, for example, stated that when man "shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them" (qtd in Greenblatt, 82). But to have "no names," then, as Strachey does for the fish he catches in the Bermudas, is, in a sense, to have no control over the world(s) in which one finds himself. Worse, perhaps, is to have the names only "in the countrie language," as Hariot does for "seuerall sortes of beasts" and "al sortes of foule" (Hariot, 28) which he encounters in Roanoke: what if the natives, in the prelapsarian state they are so often described as inhabiting by the very authors I am discussing, are the ones who have the "true names"? In an age that, save for a few, notable exceptions, almost entirely lacks a notion of cultural relativism, the question of the correct nomenclature of Hariot's medlars and of the "two kindes of small beastes greater then conies" suddenly becomes a challenge to a Eurocentric perception of the world, and to the English's fitness to rule over their "new found land of Virginia."

II. *The Tempest*: Historical and Critical Contexts

> "... through cause of the diuersitie of relations and reportes, manye of your opinions coulde not bee firme, nor the mindes of some that are well disposed, bee setled in any certaintie"
>
> THOMAS HARIOT, *A briefe and true Report*

1. *Shakespeare and the voyagers*

In the years 1610-11, as Shakespeare wrote his last single-authored play, *The Tempest*, England was riddled by many of the intellectual problems connected with travel accounts from the 'New World' which I have mentioned in the first chapter, much like Spain had begun to be in the early sixteenth century. The texts I have discussed so far — especially Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde*, Hariot's *Briefe and True Report* — enjoyed a relatively wide circulation at the time of their first publication (Hariot's text had even been reprinted in a luxurious edition featuring John White's illustrations), as did Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations* (1589), which had been preceded by his *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America and the Ilands Adjacent*, published in 1582. The interest of the English public in transatlantic exploration had just been unexpectedly revived in 1610 by the return of the *Sea Venture* expedition, which was deemed lost after its shipwreck in the Bermudas in 1609. For a long time, William Strachey's *True Reportory*, dated July 15th, 1610 and written as a letter addressed to an "Excellent Lady," in what might have been "an early experiment in the form which, in the 18th century, became known as the epistolary novel" (Strittmatter et al., n.5, 449), has been identified as a direct source for Shakespeare's play by critics such as

R.R. Cawley, who set out to trace verbal overlaps between the two texts, and to discuss "the extent to which Shakespeare (...) used Strachey's *True Reportory*" (Cawley, 689). More recent studies have perhaps definitely invalidated Strachey's text as a possible source, a fact which, however, does not undermine the impact the story of the *Sea Venture*'s shipwreck might have had on Shakespeare and on his contemporaries. While the present study owes its core concept — that of the relationship between the voyagers' texts and Shakespeare's writings — to the initial intuition of Edmund Malone, to Morton Luce, to R.R. Cawley, and to subsequent elaborations on the same topic by other authors, I believe that such a relationship mentioned above cannot be reduced to Shakespeare's 'lifting' passages and expressions from his sources. Not only because the verbal parallels are often rather questionable in the extent of their resemblance, but because, unlike the presence of other classical sources (such as the Ovidian echoes in Prospero's final speech, which draws heavily from Medea's speech in Book 7 of the *Metamorphoses*), contemporary discourses on the 'New World' were likely to bear a much more dynamic and elusive influence on *The Tempest*, of which written documents may offer a clue, but are by no means the only possible vehicle. In other words, Strachey's text or another contemporary source may have had a role in shaping ideas and even entire passages in *The Tempest*, but such a role is more interesting if considered within the "linguistic and narrative force-field we should bring to the play to disclose its meanings" (Frey, 33), rather than on "the positivist grounds that only verbal parallels can count as hard evidence" (Hulme, 92). The large production of travelogues which incurred in the same linguistic, narrative, and epistemological problems as the *True Reportory*, generated *a way* of speaking and writing about the 'New World', which, as I will attempt to show, Shakespeare may have identified, reproduced, and even parodied in *The Tempest*, and particularly through the character of Caliban.

The first (questionable) links between Shakespeare and the Virginia Company were outlined by Edmund Malone in his *Account of the Incidents from which the Title and Part of the Story of Shakespeare's Tempest Were Derived* (1808). Malone's hypothesis received little recognition from his contemporaries, who saw a stronger textual link between Antonio Pigafetta's firsthand account of Magellan's travels, a translation of which had been included in Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde*. Over a century after the formulation Malone's hypotheses, a number of critics in the early twentieth century turned once again to the Virginia pamphlets to seek answers about the play's origin. Morton Luce was the first to do so, but Charles Mills Gayley was perhaps the most enthusiastic, with a particular investment in what he identified as the play's colonial politics. According to him, "Shakespeare knew many of the men who were active in the Jamestown venture and, as an 'aristo-democratic' meliorist, supported such vaguely defined colonial ideals as independence, freedom, and a sense of obligation to society" (Frey, 30). While "Gayley's thesis that Shakespeare acquired liberal views from men of the Virginia company was swiftly countered and partially refuted by A. W. Ward" (30), in 1926, less than a decade after Gayley's claims, Robert Ralston Cawley went on to write a deeply influential essay on the links between Shakespeare and the voyagers, which others had proposed only in passing, significantly furthering the case for Strachey's *True Reportory* as a possible source. According to Cawley, "[in] the comparison of *The Tempest* with *A True Reportory* incidental parallels can be taken account of because other parallels make it virtually certain that Shakspere was following the document closely" (690). To back his statement he produces passages from the play such as the following, paired with excerpts from Strachey's text:

> *Temp*.: To run upon *the sharpe winde* of the *North* (I, II, 300).
> *Strach*.: .... (*the sharpe windes* blowing *Northerly*).

Temp.: 'tis best we *stand upon our guard*; Or that we quit this place: let's *draw our weapons* (II, I, 357-58).

Strach.: Every man from thenceforth commanded to *weare his weapon* .... and .... to *stand upon his guard*. (qtd in Cawley, 690)

The resemblance of some of the paired passages included in Cawley's essay are more striking than the ones reported above, but many others are even less effective. The close textual overlap Cawley proposes, which sees Shakespeare carefully quoting words and expressions from his supposed source, is understandable when it comes to very specific lexical areas (such as nautical terms) or key, meaning-laden monologues (such as Prospero's final speech), but it makes little practical sense in the case of the rather prosaic passages which Cawley points us to. Furthermore, the supposed textual parallels between *The Tempest* and *A True Reportory* do not proceed linearly, but are disseminated in various orders across the play. Thus, Cawley individuates a resemblance between lines spoken in Act II of the play and an early section of Strachey's text, for example, only to find the next reference to the same section in Act IV, and then, backtracking, a third one in Act I. For what purpose would Shakespeare have followed the text so meticulously, in instances in which his own imagination and vocabulary would have provided a speedier and equally vivid resource? Even the idea of open allusions to *A True Reportory*, perhaps to cue in the play's audience, seems unlikely, since Strachey's pamphlet became known to the public only in 1625, when it was included in Samuel Purchas' *Haluyt Posthumus*. It is more plausible, instead, that "Shakespeare shared with (...) the Bermuda pamphleteers, (...) an interest in tempests, shipwrecks, and mutinies, (...) in exotic fish and fowl,(..) in native manners and native music — in short, an interest in the same matters that absorbed all the travelers of his day" (Frey, 37). Inevitably, if this were the case, he also shared the lexicon with which such matters were described, one of whose aspects, that of problematic epistemological circumstances, I have discussed in the previous chapter.

The tendency to indiscriminately collect all incidental textual overlaps as evidence of a connection between Shakespeare and the voyagers prompted Elmer Edgar Stoll to vent his frustration in a somewhat reactionary statement, in which he claimed 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, like Tokio or Mandalay" (Stoll, 487). If Cawley's hypotheses were dubious, Stoll's position was simply wrong: even "[his] incidental facts are off," since "in act 2, scene 2 each of the 'low' characters Stephano and Trinculo momentarily imagines Caliban an Indian" (Knapp, 220). More importantly, the name of Caliban's god, Setebos, is taken directly from Antonio Pigafetta's account of Magellan's voyage around the world, translated by Richard Eden and included in his *Decades of the Newe World* — perhaps the only traceable or "virtually certain" intertextual tie between *The Tempest* and travel literature from the 'New World'. Today, Stoll and Cawley represent two surpassed critical attitudes towards *The Tempest*, seeking respectively to blindly write the 'New World' out of it, or, conversely, to nail the play firmly against a single travel account, "as if only his reading could make the accounts inform *The Tempest* and, further, as if his reading necessarily would make a given account inform the play" (Frey, 33). Indeed, "[w]hether or not Shakespeare had read Eden's narrative of Magellan's voyage," Strachey's *Reportory*, or Hariot's *Briefe and true report*, "such accounts can inform or illuminate the play because they provide models of Renaissance experience in the New World" (34), as well as models of *writing* about such an experience, which included "St. Elmo's fires in ship's rigging, (...) Caliban-like natives who seek for grace, Utopian, golden world innocence, strange roaring sounds heard in woods, dogs used to pursue natives, natives interested in music, mutinies suppressed, and so on" (31).

Since Cawley's essay, a great deal of productive scholarship has relied, more or less explicitly, on the link between Shakespeare and the Virginia enterprise. For some, however,"[t]he chief problem regarding the Strachey manuscript" is precisely "the way it has served to block further investigation, offering enough so that critics of early Stuart culture have not bothered to consider [alternatives]" (Kinney, 167). Albert Kinney, for example, laments the fact that even scholars like Stephen Greenblatt, who were careful to maintain due distance from the assumption of Shakespeare's familiarity with *A True Reportory*, have been "unwilling to surrender entirely the printed cultural document which has also been universally declared the primary basis of Shakespeare's play" (166). Kinney himself, however, goes on to convincingly establish connections between *The Tempest* and a pamphlet by English explorer James Rosier, entitled *A True Relation of the most prosperous voyage made this present yeere 1605, by Captaine George Waymouth, in the Discovery of the Land of Virginia*. While philological inquiries such as these offer a precious contribution to the effort of establishing just exactly what Shakespeare may have read and 'used', and the echoes of Rosier's text in *The Tempest* are undeniable, it would be difficult to ascribe them with confidence to anything more than the fact that texts dealing with shipwrecks, newfound lands, and the perceived strangeness of the natives, more or less consciously replicated one another, often adopting the same terminology and the same descriptive strategies, and eventually blending together into a broader narrative of the New World.

Almost more relevant, somewhat paradoxically, have been those philological studies which helped to establish what texts Shakespeare did *not* read, clearing them from the field of possibilities and avoiding much subsequent scholarship based upon errors. In this sense, Roger Strittmatter and Lynne Kosintsky's essay "Shakespeare and the Voyagers Revisited," published in 2007, provided a crucial and probably definitive contribution to the debate around the plausibility of Strachey's *True Reportory* as a source for *The Tempest*. First of all,

their essay points out that the "[c]ircumstances in Jamestown during the weeks Strachey allegedly composed the letter could not have been worse," noting that "[w]hen the Bermuda survivors returned to Virginia in May 1610, they had discovered a settlement burnt and in ruins. Under such circumstances, paper and books must both have been in limited supply" (Strittmatter & Kositsky, n.8, 451). However, "Strachey's letter, approximately 24,000 words in length, makes copious use of at least a dozen external sources, some mentioned by name, others silently appropriated" (n.8, 451). In addition to this circumstantial evidence, they note that "[a] second factor relevant to ascertaining the composition date and historical significance of *True Reportory* is William Strachey's reputation as a plagiarist" (453), which "does more than cast a on doubt the Gayley-Wright transmission model" (456). Indeed, Strachey's appropriation of other contemporary sources, such as John Smith's *Map of Virginia* (1612), inevitably binds the composition date to the date starting on which such sources would have been available. While Strachey may have had access to materials from John Smith's text before its publication date, "one of *True Reportory*'s sources, the anonymous *True Declaration Estate of the Colony in Virginia*, was not entered into the Stationer's Register 8 November 1610" (456). *A True Reportory*, instead is dated July 15th, 1610 — the same day on which Sir Thomas Gates left from Virginia back to England, and, as it was generally believed for many years, brought back a copy of Strachey's text. However, since "Strachey "refers to [the *True Declaration*] by name, acknowledging that it is already published, it might seem that there can be no question that he is the borrower" (456). Therefore, Strittmatter and Kositsky suggest that *A True Reportory*, "in some form, was written some months later than generally supposed, completed between the sailing of Gates' boat in July [1610] and the return of the ships in spring, and transported back to England during the summer or fall of 1611" (453). This scenario, if accurate, would already significantly undermine the text's link with *The Tempest*, since, even granted that

Shakespeare had immediate access to the text upon its arrival in England, it substantially narrows the time frame during which he might have composed and prepared the play, whose first recorded performance, at Whitehall, is dated November 1st, 1611. But other clues place the composition of *A True Reportory* even later, since, for example, "in the introduction to his 1612 *Laws* Strachey himself alludes to an uncompleted work about the Bermudas" (453), as he writes:

> I have both in the Bermudas, and since in Virginea beene a sufferer and an eie witnesse, and the full storie of both in due time shall consecrate unto your viewes... Howbet many impediments, as yet must detaine such my observations in the shadow of darknesse, untill I shall be able to deliver them perfect unto your judgements... I do meane time present a transcript of the Toparchia or State of those duties, by which Colonie stands regulated and commaunded. (qtd in Strittmatter & Kositsky, 453)

The allusion to events in the Bermudas and in Virginia of which he has been "a sufferer and and eie witnesse" fits perfectly the contents of *A True Reportory*, and indeed it seems to point precisely to this text, especially since, in the remaining nine years of his life, Strachey never wrote of such events again. Strittmatter and Kositsky then proceed to elaborate on a number of other incongruities which allows them to declare, quite convincingly, that "Strachey's *True Reportory* is no longer even a *possible* source for Shakespeare's *Tempest*" (461). This does not mean, of course, that the text is no longer a perfectly relevant ground of analysis for the discourse on Virginia and on the 'New World', and, indirectly, for the latter's influence on *The Tempest*.

2. The Tempest*'s performances in 1611 and 1613*

While the first known performance of *The Tempest* in 1611 has served as the *terminus ante quem* for the play's composition, thus determining the plausibility of its proposed sources, it has also served to further the discussion regarding the origin and appearance of some of the play's characters. Michael Baird Saenger, for example, suggests that the characters of Caliban and Ariel were created by Shakespeare in order to re-purpose certain expensive stage costumes which had come into possession of his company. Taking the appellatives attached to Caliban throughout the play quite literally, he states that "Caliban is part man and part fish, and in general a 'monster'. In an important scene, Ariel is a sea-nymph. Two such costumes fell into the hands of the King's Men in 1610, just before *The Tempest* was composed" (Baird Saenger, 334). The costumes had originally been designed for one of the entertainments which took place in 1610, during Prince Henry's progress along the Thames, "from Richmond to London, (...) culminating in his formal creation as Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester" (334). One of the spectacles, written by Anthony Munday and entitled *Londons Love, to the Royal Prince Henrie*, thus introduced two of its characters, Corinea and Amphion:

> "Wherefore let vs thinke of Neptune, that out of his spacious watrie wilderness, he then suddenly sent a huge Whale and a Dolphin, and by the power of his commanding Trident, had seated two of his choycest Tritons on them, altring their deformed Sea-shapes, bestowing on them the borrowed bodies of two absolute Actors, euen the verie best our insta[n]t time can yeld…" (qtd in Baird Saenger, 334).

The "borrowed bodies" were those of actors "Richard Burbage and John Rice, (...) both of the King's Men" (334). The *Repertory of Records of the London Corporation* (xxix, fo, 235) informs us that the two actors spent "Seauenteen powndes tenn Shillings six pence"

for the costumes — a significant amount, fitting the importance of the occasion — and that they were allowed to "reteyne [the robes] to their owne uses" (qtd in Baird Saenger, 335), which most likely meant that "they brought their costumes back to the King's Men for future plays" (335). Based on Munday's description of the characters, Baird Saenger remarks that "[u]nlike traditional tritons, Burbage and Rice had to have separated legs, in order to bestride their 'fishes'" (335), and notes a possible connection to Trinculo's description of Caliban as being "legg'd like a man; and his fins like arms (II.ii.33-4), claiming that "[t]he most straightforward reading of this line would be a description of green sleeves and trousers with fins attached to them, precisely what one would imagine for Amphion" (335-336). From here onwards, however, Baird Saenger's hypothesis is based increasingly on suppositions, implicitly accepting the "Gayley-Wright transmission model" (Strittmatter & Kositsky, 456), which identifies Strachey's text as the primary source for determining the timeline of *The Tempest*'s composition, and which, as we have seen, is most likely incorrect. After pointing out the well-timed arrival of the costumes into the possession of the King's Men, Baird Saenger has little more evidence to sustain his claims, other than the remark that "[a]s the premier playwright of the company, Shakespeare would likely had had the priority of use [of the costumes]" (335), and a few lines from a passage in *Coriolanus* might support the idea of Caliban as a 'triton'. His suggestion that "perhaps Shakespeare found Caliban just as Prospero and Miranda did, a mute monster, and taught him how to speak" (336), however remains a charming and plausible idea among the vast realm of hypotheses regarding the play and its characters' origins. Furthermore, the notion of a triton-like Caliban, developed on the basis of the material resources available to Shakespeare, does not clash in the least with the much debated ties which *The Tempest* might bear with the 'New World' or, more generally, with travel literature: Caliban's appearance, as I will discuss in the next chapter, might matter less than the language which is employed to describe it.

The second recorded instalment of *The Tempest* has been equally useful, for some, in order to advanc theories about the significance of certain aspects of the play. Interestingly, "*The Tempest* was performed at court with [George] Chapman's similarly exotic *Memorable Masque* for the marriage, in February 1613, of the princess Elizabeth to the Elector Palatine" (Gillies, 673). Chapman, like Ben Jonson, believed and stated in his *Memorable Masque* that "all these courtly and honouring inventions… should expressively arise out of the places and persons for and by whom they are presented" (qtd in Gillies, 673). The occasion which provided a common theme for the two theatrical pieces was the marriage: in what would have been a direct allusion to it, Shakespeare is "supposed to have inserted the betrothal masque (...) into act 4 of *The Tempest*" (Gillies, 673) specifically for this performance. But another possibly coincidental connection might have linked *The Tempest* to Chapman's masque: "the sheer novelty of their Virginian imagery" (673). The *Memorable Masque* is populated by native American protagonists, whom the play describes as "Virginian knights… altogether estrangeful and Indian-like" (qtd in Gillies, 673), who reach England under the guidance of Plutus, whose symbolic presence might be explained by the fact that, according to George Sandys — "translator of Ovid and resident treasurer of the Virginia Compnay" (673) — the climate of Virginia "abounded with gold and silver, wrapt in the secret bowels of the earth" (qtd in Gillies, 674). The *Memorable Masque*, in the heavily rhetorical and celebratory style which characterized the genre of the court masque, tells an idealistic tale of magically appearing goldmines and of American natives who renounce their "superstitious worship" (qtd in Gillies, 674) and obediently submit to British Law, which is represented by the character of 'Eunomia'. By contrast, in this context "*The Tempest* must have seemed almost parodic" (674). Whether or not it was meant to be a commentary on the Virginia enterprise, since "what is understated and seemingly peripheral in Shakespeare is bolder and more substantial in Chapman," it is totally plausible that the pairing of the two courtly

entertainments had “the interesting consequence of heightening the audience’s response to the Virginian dimension of *The Tempest*” (673). In many ways, indeed, Shakespeare’s play would have worked as a comic reversal of the *Memorable Masque*, for “[w]here Chapman’s Britain is visited by a suitably opulent delegation of Virginian priests and knights, Shakespeare’s only Virginian intourist is Trinculo’s “dead indian’,” and, more importantly, “[w]here Chapman’s native knights obligingly hand over their gold-mine, even when benevolently inclined, Caliban is able to offer nothing more marketable than ‘young scamels from the rock’”(674).

Chapman’s *Memorable Masque*, despite its Virginian references, was “essentially an adaptation of [his] earlier celebration of the Guianan venture in *De Guiana* (1595)” (675). But the mood had changed significantly since the first, far-fetched English expedition in search of El Dorado: “tales of hardship, mismanagement, hostile natives and a dawning awareness that Virginia was no El Dorado were so effective in dispelling the myth of Virginia as to deprive Raleigh of funds for a major venture in 1587” (675). Walter Raleigh himself, leader and main promoter of both the Guianan expedition and the exploration of Virginia, had been attacked and slandered, and was now imprisoned, under the charge of treason, in the Tower of London, where he would remain until 1617 (the verdict had actually been a death sentence, but James I himself intervened to convert the penalty). In 1613, the memory of the *Sea Venture* wreck and of the initially ruinous development of the Jamestown colony was still fresh, especially since “the wreck had marked a nadir in the affairs of the Virginia Company and, in the following year, became a focus for debate about the wisdom of the Plantation” (675). Furthermore, as we have seen, “even before the wreck, events had not been going well. The colonists were starving, disease was rampant, order was disintegrating and the natives were unaccommodating” (675). Compared to Raleigh’s accounts of Guiana, reports from Virginia, such as Thomas Hariot’s, had been much more sparse and less

confident in their mentions of gold and silver: the motif of the gold mine mentioned in Chapman's masque, then, was "certainly Guianan" (675). In general, granted that the audience did indeed grasp the play's subtext, "Shakespeare's idea of Virginia should have seemed far more contemporary than Chapman's" (675), since "*The Tempest* can be seen to reflect not only the events of 1609, but the mood which gave them significance. Initially, (...) the play may well have been perceived in terms of the polemical milieu of the wreck, rather than the other way around" (676).

While Gillies provides an excellent account of what would have been an "ideal opportunit[y] to experience the Virginian dimension of *The Tempest*" (676), his own confidence in the existence of such a dimension seems at times excessive, as he states that "[t]he shipwreck scene, the accompanying scenarios of providential deliverance, and indeed the very title of the lay, clearly allude to the wreck of the *Sea Adventure* in 1609" (675), especially since one of the texts he cites as evidence is Strachey's *True Reportory*, which recent studies discussed earlier have invalidated as a source for the play. His reading of the *The Tempest* as a text structured largely around the themes of "fruitfulness and temperance" (676), however, makes sense of many aspects of the play which would otherwise remain obscure. For Gillies, "the play translates into poetic and dramatic terms a pair of rhetorical *topoi* that are crucial in forming the official portrait of Virginia" (676). He notes, for example, that "in 1594, when Raleigh successfully petitioned Elizabeth to allow him to rename as 'Virginia' an indeterminate area of North America then known as 'Wingandacoa'," this christening was "more than a courtly gesture — more even than a shrewd promotion — for it created a potent figure, and a way of imaginatively possessing an area that was virtually unknown but for its Indian name and its compass coordinates" (677). The name very soon grew into the archetypal character of "a savage, yet nubile nymph who longed for the English embrace" (676), charged from the start with sexual undertones. While

in George Donne's *Virginia Revisited* she is described as a "beautifull daughter of the creation… whose virgin soile was never yet polluted by any Spaniards lust" (qtd in Gillies, 676), in 1625, Samuel Purchas invites his readers to

> looke upon Virginia; view her lovely lookes (howsoever like a modest Virgin she is now vailed with wild Coverts and shadie Woods, expecting rather ravishment then marriage from her Native Savages) survay her… so goodly and well proportioned limmes and members; her Virgin portion nothing empaired,... and in all these you shall see, that she is worth the wooing and loves of the best Husband (qtd in Gillies, 677).

Purchas' erotically charged description of Virginia, with its "combination of innocence, docility and quasi-erotic availability" (678), is quite startling, if we keep in mind that he is talking about a landscape, and not a woman. But the discourse on the landscape of Virginia is inextricable from this similitude. Possibly related to "[Queen] Elizabeth's favourite mythological character" (678), that of Astraea, a "virgin goddess of justice and patroness of the Golden Age" (678), the character of Virginia had the advantage, typical of propagandistic narratives, of shifting the discourse on the newfound lands on an allegorical and rhetorical level, thus overriding some of the skepticism and bitter attacks to which the English's early colonial attempts had been subjected to at home. A virgin, at once pure and desirable, Virginia embodied the "golden attributes of temperance and fruitfulness" (678), which appear rather frequently in Hariot's *Briefe and true report*, in Arthur Barlowe's account of the first voyage to Roanoke in 1984, and in the cluster of later Virginian pamphlets which are generally associated with *Tempest*. Pointing out the presence of the themes of temperance and chastity in *The Tempest*, particularly in the exchanges between Miranda, Ferdinand, and Prospero (in I.2; III.1; and IV.1), Gillies suggests that what inspired them was "external rather than internal to the play's essential nature — an external context in which temperance, chastity and landscape are necessarily combined" (700). If this is the case

the play contains “more than a happily random series of Virginian echoes, but a conscious parody of the discursive portrait of Virginia” (683).

3. Alternatives to the ‘New World’: the Lincolnshire fens and the Mediterranean

Gillies is not alone in noticing a parodic dimension in the play, which extends beyond the realm of mere farce (such as the one put on by Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano), to touch upon more significant concerns. For Greenblatt, for example, through the character of Caliban, “[i]n *The Tempest* the startling encounter between a lettered and an unlettered culture,” so typical of ‘New World’ contacts, “is heightened, almost parodied” (Greenblatt, 23). Without narrowing the field of investigation solely to the Virginian enterprise, I, too, will attempt to show how the play parodies, or at least dramatizes, certain aspects of the discourse on the ‘New World’, and of travel literature more at large — particularly the profound uncertainty in which early modern travel accounts were rooted, as documents purporting to relate the truth, and the epistemological problems generated by the accumulation of narratives in which both the writer’s language and the reader’s empirical references were at fault. However, “[a]ny examination of European history” and of its cultural products, “in the light of an external influence upon it, carries with it the temptation to find traces of this influence everywhere” (Elliott, 7). The early phase of the European presence in the American continent seems to lend itself particularly well to this inviting misrepresentation, perhaps due to the facility with which one may circumscribe it in both time and space. The 1980s saw a significant increase of this tendency in academia, especially since much of the highly

influential work of the new historicists, some of whom I have included in the present study, focused precisely on the early modern period, in which the Foucauldian motifs of power, control, and surveillance, became particularly relevant, along with the beginning of English imperialism and the emergence of colonialist and increasingly racist discourses. Critics such as Peter Hulme and Francis Barker, in the pivotal essay entitled "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discoursive Contexts of *The Tempest*", have also highlighted how earlier responses to the play have participated in (and at times fabricated) such discourses. At times, however, the tendency towards "figuring history principally as a series of discursive speech acts" maybe have generated "a rhetorical façade that, while undeniably present, may not have had anywhere near the significance it assumes in the process of critical deconstruction" (Klein, 129). John Cox, for example, in his critique of Stephen Orgel's interpretation of the play, which he dubs as being "consistent with the materialist assumption that power relations are what really matters in human affairs, and (...) virtuous action or romantic love are mere occlusion of power" (Cox, 37), suggests that "to ascribe merely political motives to Prospero's forgiveness is to miss the moral significance of what he does when possessed with virtual omnipotence" (37). It may be hard not to sympathize, at least in part, with Cox's frustration towards a widespread scholarly attitude which, in response to a surpassed tradition of celebratory literary criticism, systematically discards the text's declared narratives (of redemption and forgiveness, for example) as a mere rhetorical disguise. Extending the question to the field of postcolonial studies, "[t]wo unwanted side effects of this critical bias have been the inability to see motivations other than colonial or imperial desire in European activities overseas" (Klein, 130). At times, the generally well-meaning attempt to hold European cultural products accountable for their participation in colonialist or otherwise oppressive ideologies has been carried out at the detriment of a lucid analysis of

wider ranges of influence, thus undermining the very demystifying project which some of these critics set out to perform.

When it comes to *The Tempest*, "while the political attitude of [new historicist] critics has been generally hostile to the perceived colonial politics of the play, their concern to situate [the play] in relation to the earliest moments of Anglo-American relations has a significantly longer lineage, stretching back as far as the late nineteenth century" (Brotton, 25). Alden T. Vaughan, who has devoted an impressive amount of scholarship to the study of *The Tempest* and of its reception, points out that "[t]he trend toward an American-focused interpretation (...) by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic drew much of its inspiration from a concurrent cultural and political rapprochement between England and the United States" (qtd in Brotton, 25). In this sense, the insistence of a Virginian dimension in Shakespeare's play is not entirely free from slightly problematic implications. Perhaps, eager as they are "to emphasize the 'American' context of *The Tempest*, while distancing themselves from the morally prescriptive nature of its supposed colonial politics," the new historicists may indeed "reproduce a long-held preoccupation defining the play as part of America's own cultural heritage and abiding relationship with one of its colonial creators, early modern England" (25). Indeed, "in claiming an exclusively American context for the play's production," American new historicist critics risk to "overinvest something of their own peculiarly post-colonial identities as American intellectuals within the one text that purports to establish a firm connection between America and the culture which these critics analyse with such intensity: early modern England" (25). In other words, the treatment of *The Tempest* as an American text (of English authorship), performed by American scholars, has been seen in more recent years as an implicit and problematic — though generally well-intentioned — reclamation of a cultural continuum between England and America, which is obviously bound up in colonial histories. Such a continuum doubtlessly exists, but the perceived

appropriation of the play's context by the hands of a few American scholars has prompted others to reinstate how "in dismissing the significance of the Mediterranean, or Old World references in *The Tempest*, colonial readings have offered a historically anachronistic and geographically restrictive view of the play" (24), misrepresenting the cultural weight which the 'New World' actually bore among Shakespeare's contemporaries.

In a somewhat contentious jab at certain previous interpreters of *The Tempest*, Todd Andrew Borlik has recently stated that, "[d]uplicating the mistake of early modern colonialists, modern critics have assumed that barbarism only figures in discourse about cultural Others, thus neglecting its persistence within ostensibly civilized borders" (Borlik, 22), aptly suggesting that "[a] colonial dynamic can also arise within a nation-state when the centre invades the periphery, or an urban elite seizes the communal wilds of the rural poor" (22). Turning his attention to the fens of the English region of Lincolnshire, then, he points out that "[t]o outsiders, the fens appeared a disease-infested, brackish morass, peopled by uncouth cottagers and, according to local legend, grotesque bogeys" (23) — in other words, as he sees it, Caliban-like figures — and that in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century, "the push to colonize Virginia was accompanied by a corresponding drive to salvage the desolate fens of eastern England" (22), when "developers launched an ambitious and controversial construction project to drain and enclose these wetlands" (23). In an interesting but highly speculative attempt at source hunting, Borlik proceeds to identify *The Tempest*'s textual origins in "a lost play based on the life of the Anglo-Saxon hermit and fen-dweller St Guthlac," in which "a learned hermit travels to a remote island surrounded by fens where he is tormented by misshapen demons and confronted by a murderous servant, but overcomes them with the aid of his supernatural powers" (22). Whether or not *The Tempest* draws direct inspiration from such a text or from other folklore tales from the Lincolnshire region, Borlik provides sufficient evidence that, at the time of the play's composition "England was in the

midst of a heated debate about the logistics and the ethics of draining its fens“ (29). In light of this, it is possible that, when, in Act I.2, Caliban curses Prospero and reclaims his ownership of the island, “to many in Shakespeare’s audience, (...) the speech would also chime loudly with the frustrations of the rural poor in England at the theft of their commons” (28).

While some of Borlik’s links between the question of the Lincolnshire fens and Shakespeare’s play appear purely incidental, such as his mention of the fact that “[o]pponents of the fen-draining cited the numerous failures to reclaim the Pontine Marshes near Naples, one of the two Italian dukedoms featured in *The Tempest*” (30), his remains one of the few studies that attempt to read the play within England’s national borders — something rather unusual, for one of the plays by Shakespeare that has been most consistently interpreted in light of events which took place abroad. Not all the foreign settings proposed for *The Tempest*, however, are as remote and exotic (from an English standpoint) as Virginia or the North African coast. Dympna Callaghan, for example, has suggested that “Ireland provides the richest historical analog for the play’s colonial theme” (Callaghan, 100). Insisting on the island’s hybridity and liminal status, she remarks that, being“[o]n the edge of Europe, in the semiperiphery of the Atlantic world, Ireland occupied an unspecified conceptual space, somewhere between the Old World and the New” (100). The connection with *The Tempest* for Callaghan, is not established by a “direct and specific correspondence between Ireland and the isle, but precisely the play’s resolute nonspecificity, its haziness and imprecision on matters of both geography and, especially, as we shall see, of history; its deliberately bad memory” (100). This interpretation focuses on three aspects of the play which were extremely relevant to the relationship between England and Ireland in the early modern period: music, language, and memory. “Ireland,” Callaghan writes, “was quite literally full of noises, a culture of sound” (108). Discussing Ariel’s role as the island’s instrumentalist in

The Tempest, Callaghan notes that "the music emanates from his tabor and pie and from unspecified strange, 'twangling' (.e., stringed) instruments" (108), and that "[h]arp music, (..) perhaps because it was associated with the upper echelons of Irish society, was felt to be so powerful that the English (...) tried to eradicate it in 1571" (108). A similar repression characterized English attitudes towards the Gaelic. As a background for Miranda's claim that Caliban, before the lessons she imparted him, would "gabble like/ a thing most brutish" (I.2. 358-9), we are reminded that, for the English, "Irish, the language that allows access to indigenous cultural memory, was (...) 'gabble'" (117). The word had been historically associated with the Irish language, and its first recorded use in the *OED* "is from Palesman Richard Stanihurst's *Description of Ireland* in Holinshed's *Chronicles* (I.iv), a text which argues that three things should accompany conquest, law, *language*, and clothing" (117). Much like Prospero and Miranda do with Caliban, the English took pains to make the Irish speak — or rather, to impose their language and limit the use of the 'gabbling' Gaelic, as an Act for the English Order, Habit, and Language, written in 1537 and cited by Callaghan, insistently recommends (118). If we adopt this Irish context as a background for *The Tempest*, "Trinculo's question about Caliban, 'Where the devil should he learn our language?' (II.66-71), displays staggering naiveté about the coercive requirement that indigenous cultural memory be erased by establishing English as the only tongue that constitutes a language" (118). A short historical memory and collective obliviousness towards colonial practices are at the core of Callaghan's charting of Ireland onto *The Tempest*: England's first colony is alluded to in the play precisely in the characters' failure to acknowledge the outcomes of colonialist processes on the island. The weakness of reading Ireland *in absentia* into Shakespeare's play, however, is precisely the lack of references upon which such an interpretation rests. Unlike the 'New World' or the Mediterranean, Ireland has

no explicit mention in the text, relegating hypotheses as to its relevance or influence upon *The Tempest* to the realm of interesting speculation.

Partly in response to the 'Americanization' of the play, especially since the mid-1990s, critics have increasingly returned to emphasize "[t]he presence of a more definable Mediterranean geography which runs throughout the play," and which "suggests that *The Tempest* is much more of a politically and geographically bifurcated play in the negotiation between its Mediterranean and Atlantic contexts than critics have recently been prepared to concede" (24). These claims are unassailable: although much scholarship has too easily refused to take the play's spatial coordinates at face value, more or less implicitly disregarding them as mere theatrical stand-ins for other, more obscure contexts, *The Tempest*, along with *The Comedy of Errors*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, and a few others, is one of Shakespeare's most explicitly Mediterranean plays. After all, Caliban has a "specifically African lineage" (32), and while his island remains geographically unspecified and ecologically ambiguous, it is also placed amid a constellation of Mediterranean landmarks, such as Naples, Tunis or Carthage, and Algiers, which leave no doubt as to the play's actual setting. A purely geographical situation and a few classical echoes from Virgil and Ovid, however, would hardly be of interest, in the face of the complex and vibrant narratives from the 'New World' which had begun to flow into England's political and intellectual milieus. Jonathan Bate, who wrote extensively on the presence of contemporaneous Mediterranean political scenarios in Othello, remarks that "Shakespeare wrote all his later plays in the knowledge that the King's Men were required to five more command performances at court than any other theatre company" (Bate, 299). Quite poignantly, he asks whether Shakespeare would have not "paused for a moment to consider the diplomatic resonances of such names as Bohemia and Sicilia in *The Winter's Tale*, Milan and Naples in *The Tempest*" (299). While today we may imagine Milan and Naples as mere

fantastic settings lightheartedly chosen by the playwright among other equivalently exotic locations, they were actually (and obviously) real places, tied to England through more or less direct diplomatic and geopolitical ties. Jerry Brotton, claims that, by omitting any mention of the dominating presence of the Ottomans in the Mediterranean and replacing it instead with that of Italian dukes and courtiers, "*The Tempest* offers a conveniently imprecise but sanitized version of the Mediterranean World, imbued with an aura of suitably familiar and assimilable myths of classical imperial travel and conquest, personified in its overdetermined references to Virgil's *Aeneid*" (Brotton, 36). As inviting as this simplification may seem, however, to unearth a deeper involvement of *The Tempest* within the Mediterranean, one must turn to England's own involvement in Mediterranean scenarios in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, which Brotton's statement about the play completely disregards.

Richard Wilson has turned to the first recorded performance of the play, on November 1st, 1611, which, he suggests, must have taken place in an atmosphere of "feverish diplomacy over the proposed marriage of the Prince of Wales to Caterina, daughter of Grand Duke Ferdinand of Tuscany" (Wilson, 339). Preparation and general excitement for this wedding, which eventually never took place, were palpable in the months preceding the play's staging on November 1st: "[i]n August 1611 portraits were exchanged; in September the bride won freedom of worship in consideration of a dowry of 600,000 crowns; on 21 October the Medici envoy gloated how English Catholics were rejoicing that the 'prince now turns to Tuscany for a bride'" (340). Lamenting the fact that "the Americanization of *The Tempest* has been accompanied by obliviousness towards its festive occasion" (333), which was accompanied by the "firework display of All Saints' Day"(339), Wilson proceeds to retrace the fascinating and intricate narrative which would have made *The Tempest* such a topical play at the time of its performance. First of all, he notes that "the match depended at that moment on a pardon offered to an exiled duke whose story was precisely Prospero's" (340).

The duke in question was one of the most adventurous and extravagant figures of Shakespeare's time: Robert Dudley, illegitimate son of the omonimous 1st Earl of Leicester — or "Don Roberto Dudleo, Duca di Northumbria" (347), as he styled himself in Florence, where he landed in 1607 and remained to serve Ferdinand I, Grand Duke of Tuscany, until his death. A brief and by no means exhaustive mention towards Dudley's life is necessary in order to situate him as a key figure of the English presence in the Mediterranean, as well as to put him in any relation with *The Tempest*'s plot and characters. In 1605, in a sensational series of events, after proving unable to sustain his claims over the earldoms of Leicester and Warwick "in a melodramatic Star Chamber trial" (341), Dudley had abandoned his wife for one of Queen Elizabeth's maids, Elizabeth Southwell, and had eloped with her to France. From there,

> [a]fter converting to Catholicism, the couple sailed to Pisa early in 1607 (...). In Florence, however, Ferdinand had instantly made Dudley overlord of the Tuscan shipyards (...). At Dudley's instigation the Grand Duke then began "to entice English mariners and shipwrights into service," Sir Henry Wotton relayed, buy "ordnance from English ships and take English pirates under his protection," until his "fleet consisted principally of English sailors." One of these "sailors corrupted from religion and allegiance" was the corsair, Ward, whom James condemned in January 1609, as it became clear that Dudley, declared a rebel by the English envoy, planned to rig a blockade between Tunis and Leghorn, which he had fortified. This private war would eventually lead the renegade to secure a papal embargo on English trade, "by reason of the unjust occupation and confiscation of his Dukedom" (341)

Dudley, like Prospero, laid claims on an unjustly usurped dukedom. Like Prospero, although his attempt eventually fails, he oversees the orchestration of a marriage — between Caterina de' Medici and Prince Henry — whose main outcome, at least for himself, would have been that of reconciliation with his nation and, possibly, repatriation. Indeed, thanks to his relationship with Sir Thomas Chaloner, Prince Henry's Chamberlain, Dudley "was first in

a position to ‘require’ his dukedom, as Prospero does (...), in 1611, because it was he who was charged with securing papal indulgence for a Medici to marry the militant Protestant Prince” (340). Furthermore, “Prospero’s plot to regain his dukedom does coincide exactly with Tuscan policy, which was to restore independence to Milan, whose usurping Duke was actually Philip II, and to blockade Naples, the other Italian city under Spanish occupation” (339-40). Beyond providing inspiration for the *The Tempest*’s main character, then, and an occasion for the playwright to make a case for the pardon of the “pirate, redemptor, and renegade Lord of Shakespeare's Stratford” (352) which was Robert Dudley, the latter may have also informed the play’s geopolitical background, in both its Mediterranean and American aspects.

The English presence in the Mediterranean sea was tied to piracy — both perpetrated and suffered — at least as much as it was to trade. According to the Italian historian Alberto Tenenti, “it was the irruption of English piracy that precipitated the decline of the Republic [of Venice]” (335), since, as Fernand Braudel estimates, “over 3000 Venetian ships were captured (...) between 1592 and 1609” (335), causing insurance rates in Venice to soar “to 20 percent in 1611 and 25 percent in 1612” (335). By contrast, “[i]n 1593 and 1594,” the average premium rates for a single outward or return trip to Syria — one of the longest Mediterranean routes from Venice — “were regularly 5 per cent” (Braudel, n.79, 291). Interestingly, “insurance rates did not budge during these difficult years at least until 1607” (Braudel, 291), when, increasingly, in the Mediterranean world, “pirate superseded privateer” (Wilson, 335), a shift in which Robert Dudley had a central role. English ships were not spared from the incursions of Dudley and the ensemble of English ex-soldiers and outcasts he had enrolled as part of his impressive fleet, which, as King James’ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic* reports, counted “40 ships and 2,000 men at their place of rendezvous in Barbary” (qtd in Wilson, 346). So, although “it was reckoned that some 466 English ships were seized

and their crews enslaved in the Berber states between 1609 and 1616, the irony was that they fell victim to a system commanded by Christians" (335). Interpreting *The Tempest* against the background of this "discursive context of brigandage" (334), Wilson remarks that "the specific problem of Mediterranean piracy had been staged already in London" (339), and precisely in Anthony Munday's *Londons Love*, whose possible link to *The Tempest*, suggested by a pair of possibly recycled stage costumes, I have mentioned above, and which, for Wilson, was meant "to publicize the need for armed convoys to protect English shipping from the "spoil and rapine" of the Barbary corsairs" (339). In 1611, Robert Dudley would have been the best known and most ambivalent figure when it came to the English involvement in Mediterranean affairs, being at once an exile and a captor, a man with power over the seas, but powerless and wronged in his homeland. His "[d]iplomatic correspondence from the time of *The Tempest* is punctuated by signals in which the disgraced duke promises London that in return for pardon he will "deliver all . .. calm seas, auspicious gales, / And sail so expeditious that shall catch / Your royal fleet far off' (5.1.313-16)" (345). For the fate of many of "the estimated 1500 English slaves" in the Mediterranean (348) depended, more or less directly, on Dudley, and on the successful outcome of the marriage he was piloting. On July 19th, 1611, commenting on "the goods plundered from English vessels and sold at Leghorn," the Venetian Ambassador in England affirmed that "many see the only remedy in the marriage of the Tuscan woman to the Prince of Wales" (qtd. in Wilson, 347). Perhaps, then, "Prospero's exacting negotiations to free Ariel, Caliban, Ferdinand, and his aristocratic hostages," must be read in light of contemporary narratives of capture and enslavement in the Mediterranean, "which confounded Eurocentrism by revolving not on the enslavement of Africans, (...) but the bondage of Europeans, captured in raids on Naples, Provence, or even, in 1627 on Iceland." (336). For Wilson, finally, the identification of Prospero with Robert Dudley is the only one that, allusively bridging from text to context, "accounts for

[Prospero's] otherwise gratuitous plea, kneeling beside his own victims, for mercy from the London spectators: 'As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free' (5.1.337-38)" (334). Whether or not *The Tempest* had any role in the dispute, "[t]hree weeks after Shakespeare's play was acted, (...) having had his crime mitigated from treason to contempt, Dudley signed a contract with [Prince] Henry drafted to expedite his pardon" (348).

The figure of Robert Dudley also remains important for those who believe in the presence of a transatlantic dimension in *The Tempest*, though not necessarily or exclusively a Virginian one. Still a seventeen-year-old, Dudley "gave himself to the study of navigation and of marine discipline and war," and at only twenty years of age, he had "sailed in command of an expedition to the West Indies in November, 1594" (Dudley, iv). In 1608, instead, he had played a crucial role in organizing the only attempt funded by an Italian state power to explore the Americas, which was commanded by another Englishman, Robert Thornton. For this occasion, the Grand Duke of Tuscany had asked Dudley to draw a chart of the Amazon, which the latter had explored in his youth (Sanfilippo, 7). Thanks to this chart, the preface to Dudley's 1646 encyclopedic navigation treatise *Arcano del Mare* reports, "Captain [Thornton] went and returned prosperously, and although he had never been in the West Indies before, yet he achieved his voyage without loss" (qtd in Wilson, 342). Dudley's map, "[d]edicated to Ferdinand II" and based on Dudley's earlier written account of his experience in the 'New World', which was constellated by mentions of cannibals and tempests off the shore of the Bermudas, "provides a perfect analogue of the overdetermined text of *The Tempest*, with its inscription of English and Italian politics onto a New World geography and people" (342). While, in lack of evidence confirming or dismissing it, Richard Wilson's proposed background for the play must remain hypothetical, it is also the only one to provide a firm political basis for *The Tempest* and for its first performance, as

well offering one the most credible candidates for a possible real-life Prospero. Most importantly, his hypothesis does not clash with other valuable interpretations of the play, such as John Gillies', which I have discussed above: it would entirely plausible that, having been composed as work in the vein of "the genre of pirate adventure" (Wilson, 33), Shakespeare's play was chosen (and possibly adjusted) two years later, in 1613, in order to match and contrast the Virginian setting of George Chapman's *Memorable Masque*. If anything, such a recontextualization of the play would confirm Peter Hulme's claim that, in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century, "the discourses of the Mediterranean were still adequate for the experience of the Atlantic" (Hulme, 97). The historical moment in which *The Tempest* is supposedly written and performed is "precisely situated at the *geopolitical bifurcation* between the Old World and the New" (Brotton, 37), between a complex scenario of political intrigue, kidnappings, indulgences and rebellions, on one hand, and the at once uncertain and inviting perspective of a 'brave new world', on the other.

4. The uncertainty of travel narratives and their reception in early modern England

Since the present study operates under the premise of a relationship between Shakespeare and the voyagers, and since, while I will elaborate on the implications of such a relationship, I will not, for the most part, reiterate dubious textual comparisons which would attempt to "casual and fragmentary borrowings" (Frey, 29), on Shakespeare's part, from the voyagers' texts, I should at least clarify those aspects of the historical and cultural context which informed Shakespeare's writings and which, I believe, justify my assumption. Those

critics who, especially in the 1980s, read *The Tempest* almost exclusively in light of the ideological and political implications of England's colonial efforts in the 'New World', have understandably been accused of overrating the extent of the influence which this newborn enterprise exercised on early seventeenth-century English society. As William Hawkins, member of the East India Company and ship commander, once reported, "in 1608, the Portuguese sense of their own superiority was still healthy enough to deride the English monarch as a 'King of Fishermen, and of an iland of no import'" (Klein, 131). Although there had been earlier trips to the American continent, from Raleigh to Dudley and a number of others, "the date usually given as marking of the first permanent English settlement in America is 1607, the founding of Jamestown" (Hulme, 89). There is no doubt, then, that "Shakespeare lived and wrote at a time when English mercantile and colonial enterprises were just germinating," and that "[a]lthough the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch ventures began earlier, European colonialism as whole was still in its infancy" (Loomba & Orkin, 1). This "infancy," however, "was also an aggressive ascendancy" (1), meaning that, precisely because it had not yet become a fully assimilated and systematic process in Elizabethan and Jacobean society, the irruption of new worlds into English culture bore the shattering force of novelty, bound up in uncertainty and in the exotic aura of the unknown. In other words, while colonial patterns may not have yet sunk into the national imaginary (despite the already well-established English presence in Ireland), the news concerning natural and cultural aspects of the 'New World' narrated in travel literature did have a portentous impact on the imagination of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Britain. After all, as the Spanish chronicler Francisco Lopez de Gomara put it in his *Primera Parte de la Historia General de las Indias* (1552), "[t]he greatest event since the creation of the world (excluding the incarnation and death of Him who created it) is the discovery of the Indies" (qtd in Elliott, 10).

The scope and complexity of such an impact is revealed especially by those who were most adverse, for a number of reasons, to the travellers/writers who produced such a large body of information about exotic lands. In 1610, in his address "To the Friendly Reader", from *The Manners, Lawes and Customes of all the Nations*, Edward Aston complained about the "multitude of Mandivels" who "wander abroad in this pampletting age in the habite of sincere Historiographers," relating "meere probabilities for true," and generating skepticism about all the reported "ceremonies & customes used in certaine countries, which seeme so absurde, monstrous and prodigious, as they appeare utterly voide of credit" (qtd in Parker, 90). Aston was by no means alone in voicing his resentment towards travel narratives and their authors; his was but one of "the many early modern complaints about unreliability of travelers' testimony" (Schleck, 53). Similarly, possibly echoing Theseus' statement in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* that "the lunatic, the lover and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact" (IV.1, 8-9), in 1631, the poet Richard Braithwaite claimed that 'travellers, poets and liars are three words of one significance'" (qtd in Sell, 23). Modern critics have often been of the same opinion, pointing out deeper structural fallacies in early modern travelogues. Greenblatt, for example, states that the travelers he discusses in his own investigations "were liars — few of them *steady* liars, as it were, like Mandeville, but frequent and cunning liars nonetheless, whose position virtually required the strategic manipulation and distortion and outright suppression of the truth" (Greenblatt, 7). While scholars such as Steven Shapin and Barbara Shapiro have convincingly argued that in early modern England, social status, gender and ethnicity determined *a priori* each subject's credibility in the process of forming knowledge — be it in the courtroom or during the production of scientific truths — when it came to travel reports, "those whose social credit was the highest did not necessarily receive the greatest trust for their profession of knowledge about distant places and cultures" (Schleck, 57). On the contrary, "the conditions of

production and reception of such travel knowledge by gentlemen hoping to gain credit at court could in some cases make high status a liability for a traveler seeking credence from his peers" (57). It would be a mistake to imagine the production and dissemination of early modern travelogues in the same way in which we think of other literary genres less implicated in national economic strategies and in their authors' social advancement. Elizabethan and Jacobean travel accounts "were composed with an eye firmly fixed on increasing credit at court, financially and socially, and should be read within that context" (59), since any personal monetary profit from the publication of such accounts "would be negligible in comparison to the rewards held out by rising at court" (n.15, 59). At the same time, "the heavy scrutiny such tales would receive by a court audience" (63), which, as in Raleigh's case, would include a significant score of rivals and enemies, would have particularly exposed travellers/writers to mockery and discredit — much like the one Gonzalo undergoes repeatedly in *The Tempest*, at the hand of the other courtiers, who do not share his optimistic views on the ecological features of island in which they have shipwrecked.

If the travelogues were themselves often hardly believable, even when truthful (let alone when self-deceived or purposefully deceiving, as in the case of Raleigh's *El Dorado* legend), and produced a large body of dubiously reliable information about the 'New World', much effort was made, during this period, to redouble the atmosphere of uncertainty which surrounded such accounts. Indeed, "although no one could openly and directly question the veracity of the events reported without receiving a challenge from the traveler for giving them the lie, those hostile to that traveler could and did seek to undermine or mitigate the impact of such claims at court" (61). This oblique campaign of counter-information, actuated largely through the spreading of "false rumours" which Raleigh and other travellers so often lament, resulted in the "unstable system of knowledge" (61) through which the 'New World', as well other faraway lands, entered the English mental landscape. To be sure, alertness

towards the veracity of travellers' accounts is not unique to early modern period, and is traceable throughout the middle ages. But whereas Columbus did not seem troubled by this attitude, and was still capable of making nonchalant mentions of "three mermaids who rose very high from the sea, but they were not as beautiful as they are depicted, for somehow in the face they look like men" (Columbus, 321), by the late XVI century, with the massive increase of travelling and of the production of travel narratives which characterized the age of exploration, although the voyagers still include fantastic anecdotes and legendary creatures in their travelogues, their anxiety regarding the reception of their marvellous accounts seeps constantly into the narration. In Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, for example, we find a Mandevillian reminiscence of "a nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders" (Raleigh, 111). Raleigh's self-conscious narrative, however, produces an amount of justifications and reserves which would be unthinkable in Columbus' confidently delivered reports:

> though it may be thought a mere fable, yet for mine own part I am resolved it is true, because every child in the provinces of *Arromaia* and *Canuri* affirm the same (...). Such a nation was written of by *Mandeville*, whose reports were held for fables many years, and yet since the East *Indies* were discovered, we find his relations true of such things as heretofore were held incredible (...). [F]or mine own part I saw them not, but I am resolved that so many people did not all combine, or forethink to make the report. (111)

Raleigh's resolution could hardly rest on less stable ground: not only does he rely on second-hand information, but such information is (supposedly) offered in a foreign language which, in a typical early modern epistemic stance, he purports to understand without significant obstructions. Is Raleigh misinterpreting the natives' speech and engaging in "absurd and imaginary dialogues," as had been the case with Columbus, who persisted in

“hearing familiar words in [the native’s] remarks, and in speaking to them as if they must understand him” (Todorov, 36-37) ?

Whether or not Raleigh’s narrative is itself a victim of its author’s self-deception, the *Discouerie* obsessively defends the veracity of its content with frequent interpositions such as “[b]ut because there may arise doubts... ” (Raleigh, 85), “[n]ow although these reports may seem strange...” (86); “it shall ill sort with the many graces and benefits which I have received to abuse her highness, either with fables or imaginations” (122); “...which I protest before God to be true...” (123); “I trust in God, this being true, it will suffice” (123). This attitude is not unique to Raleigh. Thomas Hariot, who indeed provides one of the most reliable and unspectacular accounts of the ‘New World’, appears so worried that his credibility may be called into question as to somewhat hyperbolically declare that “things vniuersally are so truly set downe in this treatise by the author therof, (...) a man no lesse for his honesty then learning commendable: as that I dare boldly auouch it may very well passe with the credit of truth euen amongst the most true relations of this age” (Hariot, 3-4). His account is punctuated by bitter references to the “diuers and variable reportes with some slaunderous and shamefull speeches bruited abroade by many that returned from thence” (5). Directly addressing the problem of epistemological uncertainty that plagued much of the information available about the ‘New World’, and particularly of Virginia, he states that “through cause of the diuersitie of relations and reportes, manye of your opinions coulde not bee firme, nor the mindes of some that are well disposed, bee setled in any certaintie” (6). The self-consciousness instilled by such an atmosphere of skepticism, uncertainty, doubt, and contrasting information, can be traced in the very titles of many early modern travelogues. Thomas Hariot purports to write a *Briefe and true report*. In 1584, George Peckham had similarly published his observations on Newfoundland in *A true report of the late discoveries*. Strachey promises *A true reportory* of his misadventures, and, in 1612, Robert Coverte, an

English traveller to the far East, signals his self-awareness by explicitly declaring his text to be *A true and almost incredible report*. True, and almost incredible: the narrative matter these travellers/writers are presenting is, in the words Dante employs to uphold the fabrications of his own fictions, "quel ver c'ha faccia di menzogna" (*Inferno*, XVI, 124) — that truth which has the semblance of a lie.

If *The Tempest* is indeed informed by contemporary travel narratives, as many clues suggest, Shakespeare may have caught on some of the linguistic and epistemological short circuits which took place in the discourse around the 'New World', as well as to the deeply uncertain grounds on which the information contained in such narratives stood, among his contemporaries. As I will argue in the next chapter, linguistic and epistemological issues are repeatedly brought to the forefront of the *The Tempest*'s action through the relentless attempt by nearly all of play's characters to name Caliban, to define him and account, in words, for his physical appearance and biological status. Furthermore, Shakespeare might have recognized the dramatic potential of the figure of the traveller, which was able to elicit at once fascination and mockery, being regarded at home as an experienced and brave adventurer (as in the case of Francis Drake, or the character of Othello), but also, as we have seen, as a liar, or worst, even, as a sort of buffoon (as in the case of Thomas Coryate). One of the reasons which put the traveller's credibility in such a vulnerable position, when it came to relating their experiences, was "[t]he problem of description," which "reduced writers and chroniclers to despair" (Elliott, 22). Not only did the facts they related often seem too extraordinary to be believed, but there was also "too much diversity, too many new things to be described, as Fernandez de Oviedo constantly complained" (22). Relating the appearance of a bird encountered in the Caribbean, for example, he admitted that '[o]f all the things I have seen, this is the one which has most left me without hope of being able to describe it in words'" (qtd in Elliott, 22). It may be useful, perhaps, to consider Gonzalo as foreigner

attempting to appraise the nature of the island, Trinculo, Stephano, and even Prospero, for what, among other things, they are: travellers in a foreign land, groping after a definition, a description, for what might be the principal novelty or unfamiliar shape found in the island: Caliban.

III. Staging the travellers' language and epistemology in *The Tempest*

"No, he doth but mistake the truth totally"
The Tempest, II.1. 59

1. Distinguishing the text from the stage

"Four hundred years ago Shakespeare wrote plays for performance and today we read them" (Egan, 1). As far as we know, Shakespeare himself never set out to publish his plays, and those texts that were published during his lifetime were often obtained without the author's consent. *Titus Andronicus*, for example, "the first Shakespeare play to be published (...), was printed [in 1594] by a notorious pirate, John Danter, who also brought out, anonymously, a defective *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), largely from shorthand notes made during performance" (Lewis). As obvious as Gabriel Egan's opening statement appears, commentators have sometimes departed from its fundamental premise in order to tease out contexts and meanings from the plays, forgetting that, to our knowledge, a reader's access to such texts was not contemplated at the time of their composition. *The Tempest*'s critical reception, I would argue, has been particularly affected by this "problem of retrospective imposition" (Klein, 131). Adding to the ambiguity of the play's literary and geographic coordinates, the character of Caliban, "perhaps the most disputed character in the Shakespearean canon" (Sharp, 267), has been "susceptible to drastic fluctuations in interpretation" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 7). One consistent attitude, however, equates almost all of the hypotheses advanced in regards to Caliban: the tendency, more or less implicit, to consider the unusually large ensemble of epithets, names and references applied to the

character as indications towards his physical appearance. To be sure, such references *may* provide a clue or even an indication as to what he should look like, but we would be mistaken in assuming that the primary purpose of the language applied to Caliban is to aid a spectator's (or reader's) visualization of the character — or, as some have done, to take it as an indicator of the author's own lack of knowledge of or agency over the character's appearance.

In 1793, Samuel Johnson and George Steevens remarked in passing that "[p]erhaps Shakespeare himself had no settled ideas concerning the form of *Caliban*" (Johnson & Steevens, 158). This suggestion, while not entirely implausible, overlooks the dynamics of the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, as well as those internal to the King's Men, the theatre company to which Shakespeare belonged and of which he was one of the principal shareholders. Being at once a playwright and an actor (in the royal patent conceded to the King's Men in 1603, Shakespeare is listed as one of the company's main players), he would have been involved in both the composition and the production of his works: it makes little sense, therefore, to think he would have postponed dealing with the character's appearance, as though by means of self-interpretation, until the staging phase. A similar consideration of Caliban as a mere textual entity, rather than as a creature of the stage, informs more recent interpretations. Peter Hulme, for example, writes about "Caliban's resistance to visualization" (Hulme, 107): he is referring, of course, to the Caliban modern readers have access to, not the Caliban Shakespeare's contemporaries would have seen on the stage in 1611. Just as the numerous texts, discourses and contexts associated with the play might have informed its meaning, so the text's 'destination' — the stage — should be taken into account when considering Caliban and the language through which we try to piece together his physical appearance. Otherwise, we risk mistaking Caliban for a creature who was meant to exist *only* in language, as Julia Reinhard Lupton seems to imply when she discusses the "inchoate muddiness at the heart of Caliban's oddly faceless and featureless being" (Lupton, 166).

However, virtually all characters are “faceless” and “featureless”: about Miranda, Prospero, or Ferdinand’s appearance, for example, we know nearly nothing. Caliban is no exception. To be sure, the stern Prospero and the innocent Miranda, Ferdinand the courteous prince and Trinculo the jester, all belong to a repertory and tradition of theatre characters in ways that Caliban does not. But even if we see him as *new*, the insistent (and discordant) references to his aspect heighten our awareness towards the facelessness inherent to all theatrical characters, until portrayed by an actor. Although he acknowledges several possible sources, Martin Butler claims that “Caliban is a creature made completely from Shakespeare’s imagination, compounded of many different species and fitting into no single category of animal or mankind” (Butler, xxiv). The statement, once again, presupposes a complete identity with the Caliban borne out of the other characters’ language, and his actual physical appearance (thus the confident mention towards Caliban’s compound of “different species,” which seems to accept “tortoise and “fish” as valid descriptors). Even Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Vaughan, in what is perhaps the most balanced and comprehensive study on the character to this date, do not entirely renounce a retrospective attitude when they lament that “[w]hereas *The Tempest* is precise about Caliban’s slavery, it is annoyingly imprecise about his deformity” (Vaughan & Vaughan, 9). The claim is doubtlessly justified, but it takes for granted a mode of accessing the play — that of reading its text — which was not necessarily contemplated at the time of its composition.

The Tempest’s text did not *need* to be clear in regards to Caliban’s appearance. The King’s Men (for whose performances the text was written) would have likely constructed the character’s appearance from Shakespeare’s verbal suggestions, whereas the audience would have known what he looked like the moment he strode onto the stage. Whether he wore the costume of a triton (as Baird Saenger suggests), or was meant to resemble an American native, or was instead a composite chimaeric figure which somehow compounded all the

attributes associated with him throughout the play, the text needed to provide little or no verbal supplement — not, at least, for the purpose of a reader's visualization. We should consider, then, that the language applied to Caliban in the text may have some other function: far from being a superfluous ornament or a redundant reiteration of the character's visual (and, during the performance, visible) appearance, it always *does* something. But what, exactly, is the dramatic purpose of this linguistic surplus which, like the wooden logs he is made to carry, burdens Caliban throughout the play? One primary and undeniable function of nearly all the appellatives attached to Caliban clearly resides in their antagonizing and vilifying nature. To cite only some of the least ambiguous epithets, Caliban is spoken of as a "villain" (I.2. 308) and an "abhorred slave" (I.2. 352) by Miranda, and as "filth" (I.2. 346) by Prospero. This consistent attitude, in turn, may be interpreted as a comical device (though not by our contemporary standards of humour), and as a dramatic strategy that highlights either the baseness of his character or the tyrannic tendencies of virtually everyone else who interacts with him, beginning with his slave-master Prospero. Indubitably, however, another function of the language applied to Caliban is to define him, to produce some sort of foothold for the speaker's understanding of him — hence the omnipresent epithets and the surprising associations, made explicitly or in passing, as though every mention of or interaction with Caliban were bound up in an attempt to fit him in some category. The problem, as I will try to demonstrate, might not be Caliban's appearance, whatever he may have been meant to look like. Perhaps, instead, *The Tempest* dramatizes the very language employed by the newcomers to refer to Caliban, their awkward attempt to grapple with the unfamiliar. The most significant correlative, in Shakespeare's time, for this epistemological struggle, would have been the abundant reports from faraway lands which had begun to pour into England since the second half of the sixteenth century, and in which travellers-writers strove to make relation of landscapes and customs existing beyond the reach of the English language.

2. Marvels and mockery: travellers on the Shakespearean stage

In early modern England, travellers represented an inviting dramatic resource, especially for comedic purposes. Throughout his plays, Shakespeare did not pass on opportunities to jab at such a fascinating and often extravagant figure, redoubling on what would have been well-known stereotypes among Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences. At this point, however, it is worth making a crucial distinction between continental (and often Italy-bound) travellers such as Thomas Coryate, William Lithgow or Fynes Moryson, and the voyagers to the 'New World'. As a general tendency, epitomized by Roger Ascham's rant against the "Italianite Englishman," the former were subject to criticism for their imported, flamboyant habits of dress, their employment of foreign words and customs, and their ties with other rivalling countries, which could elicit suspicion both at home and abroad (Lithgow, believed to be a spy, is held prisoner in Malaga, where he suffers torture and mutilation before being finally able to return to England, forever embittered against the Spanish, so much as to eventually assault the Spanish Ambassador in London [Hadfield, 106]). A clear reference to this kind of traveller can be found in *As You Like It*, when, departing from Jacques, whom she has already mocked for his claims of having gained experience from travelling, Rosalind tells him:

> Farewell, Monsieur Traveller.
> Look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all
> the benefits of your own country, be out of love with
> your nativity, and almost chide God for making you

> that countenance you are, or I will scarce think you
> have swam in a gondola (IV.1. 36-41).

Although Rosalind's mockery contains a hint at the distrust to which travellers' tales were subjected ("...or I will scarce think you/ have swam in a gondola"), it focuses primarily on the affectation that seems to have been so characteristic of English gentlemen who travelled across Europe. Charges of charlatanism and exaggeration, instead, were more often directed at those travellers who returned from remote and unknown lands, since their audiences would have had little or no information to contrast the traveller's claims. Indeed, "the more exotic the place visited, the greater the problem of credibility" (Shapiro, 71) — but also, often, the higher the stakes. While the continental traveler was usually a solitary adventurer, travellers to the 'New World' were part of an expensive enterprise, and were compelled to embellish their experience and exaggerate the potential of the lands discovered (as Raleigh's myth of El Dorado), as well as to defend the content of their accounts. Whereas Coryate could produce tongue-in-cheek accounts of dubious sincerity that seemed devised precisely to offer entertainment at court (as in the famous episode of his supposedly chaste visit to a Venetian courtesan), we have seen in the last chapter how preoccupied Raleigh is in regards to his own credibility, and how fiercely Hariot insists on the veracity of his report. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Shakespeare provides a concise version of the skeptical (yet fascinated) reception exotic travel narratives received at home, when Lafew claims that

> A good traveler is something at the latter
> end of a dinner, but one that lies three thirds,
> and uses a known truth to pass a thousand nothings
> with, should be once heard and thrice beaten (II.5. 28-31)

Lafew sees the traveller as a storyteller in bad faith, intentionally distorting or inflating the information he provides. Without necessarily relinquishing this stereotype, a few

years later, Shakespeare complicates it, possibly hinting at the epistemological and linguistic paradoxes inherent to travel narratives. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, a play dated around 1607, the traveller-storyteller is portrayed as being fully in control of the descriptive process, but only insofar as he refuses to actually disclose information. In the scene I am referring to, Antony's sojourn abroad becomes the object of interest precisely "at the latter end of a dinner." After a drunk and generally unwitting Lepidus remarks that he has "heard the Ptolemies'/ pyramises are very goodly things; without/ contradiction, I have heard that" (II.7.35-7), he inquires about the "strange serpents" (II.7. 24) which are to be found in Egypt, and asks Antony about "what manner o' thing is [his] crocodile" (II.7:40). The question prompts a farcical exchange between the two characters:

> ANTONY It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad
> as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is,
> and moves with its own organs: it lives by that
> which nourisheth it; and the elements once out of
> it, it transmigrates.
> LEPIDUS What colour is it of?
> ANTONY Of it own colour too.
> LEPIDUS 'Tis a strange serpent.
> ANTONY 'Tis so. And the tears of it are wet (II.7. 44-8).

As if aware that his description of a crocodile will fail to conjure, in the mind of a man who has just been likened to "the holes where eyes should be" (II.7:15-16), anything but a bizarre chimaera (not unlike those found in Topsell's *History of Four-footed beasts* or in Gessner's *Historiae Animalium*), Antony chooses instead to mock the very attempt to describe something for which his listener lacks an empirical reference. Although the passage has the immediate function of providing a brief comedic interlude amid the fast-paced turn of events of the play, Antony's jesting may be read as a cynical display of epistemological nihilism. The rest of his "circular description of the crocodile" (Adelman, 1) is built upon a

series of perfect equivalences, none of which could properly be said to constitute a lie, but rather a tautological truth whose deceit lies in the very pretense of conveying information: Antony produces a series of incontestable truisms, but dispenses them as though they were the incredible reports his interlocutor expects to hear. When he states that the crocodile "is as broad as it hath breadth; it is just so high as it is, and moves with it own organs," by mirroring "is broad" with "has breadth" or inserting two adverbs indicating measure ("*just so* high"), Antony voids his speech of meaning while making perfect grammatical and even idiomatic sense. The result is a linguistic *mise en abyme*, which produces an illusory depth while remaining on the surface; it feigns movement while remaining still. The scene is somewhat reminiscent of a tale in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, a source we know that Shakespeare more or less direct access to, since *All's Well That Ends Well* is based on Day III 9, and *Cymbeline* is crafted largely around Day II 9 of the *Decameron* (Lee, 49). In Day VI, 10, Friar Cipolla, in a fraudulent attempt to describe the supposedly marvellous qualities of the faraway lands he claims to have visited, refers of a place "where all the waters flow downwards" (Boccaccio, VI, 10: 42) and where "[he] saw the feathered fly" (VI, 10: 43). Friar Cipolla is telling the truth, and his lie resides in the sleight of hand of his delivery, which claims to be revealing foreign wonders while stating obvious laws of nature. Like Friar Cipolla's tale, Antony's description functions in light of the general alertness, throughout the middle ages and into the early modern period, towards the veracity of the travellers' accounts. Indeed, "[w]hen Shakespeare's Antony regales (...) the inebriated Lepidus with descriptions of the crocodile and the Nile, he is doing no more than any Elizabethan Englishman would have been expected to do, in exchange for his supper, on his return from faraway places" (Jones, 31). In terms of parody, the dramatic potential of the traveller was enormous, since "[t]ravelers and travel writers had reputations for exaggeration and even dishonesty" (Shapiro, 71). Perhaps, *The Tempest*, as a "skillful mediation between Old World romance narrative style and New

World news" (Schmidgall, 437), stages a different, equally comical aspect of travel literature: not the bad faith of its authors, but the actual epistemological difficulty in dealing with the unknown, and the inevitable uncertainty that results from it.

3. The Tempest*'s travellers: truth and uncertainty in the play.*

Depending on the "discursive force-field" we bring to *The Tempest*, as Peter Hulme puts it, the text will disclose different and often interconnected meanings. Such different interpretations are not mutually exclusive, and vary according to the importance we place on any given element of information the play provides. When we give priority to the figure of Prospero, his books and his engineering of the other characters' actions on the island, it makes perfect sense to see *The Tempest* as an allegory for the theatre ("the great globe itself" [IV.1. 153]), and Prospero as a stand-in for Shakespeare himself — a prominent and accepted perspective especially until the second half of the twentieth century. The notion of Prospero as an exiled Duke with powers to control the circulation of ships in the southern Mediterranean, instead, guides Richard Wilson's identification of the character with the English navigator and pirate Robert Dudley, and determines his tuning of *The Tempest* to the diplomatic plots which involved Dudley in 1611. In the second half of the twentieth century, thanks to postcolonial authors and critics who recognized the colonial dynamics at work in *The Tempest*, the centre of the play has shifted towards Caliban. The character has prompted numerous associations, ranging from American natives and the colonized Irish to the dispossessed people of England's Lincolnshire fens and the bog creature of their folklore,

such as “Tiddy Mun” (Borlik, 26), while some, preferring to probe the copious references to witchcraft and the realm of the occult made throughout the play, have proposed “King James’ *Daemonologie* as a possible source” (Latham, 151). I, too, in suggesting one possible key of interpretation for *The Tempest*, will focus largely on Caliban. However, I will consider Caliban (or rather, the score of epithets and definitions which refer to him) as a mirror for the other characters’ language and epistemological framework. I believe that, as much as it may help or obstruct a reader’s visualization of Caliban, the extraordinary amount of descriptive, explanatory and interpretive expressions attached to him also reveals something about the speakers’ cultural assumptions and beliefs, as well as about the possibilities inherent to the language he or she employs.

What defines, then, the ‘mirrored’ characters — Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, Sebastian, Trinculo, Stephano, and the rest of their company? They are an assortment of sovereigns, courtiers, sailors, conspirators, Italians from Naples and Milan, wedding guests, drunkards, jesters, puppets in Prospero’s play. Depending on how we frame our answer, we will be lead to follow a different interpretative path, and we know that the play offers many. I have settled for the most general answer, which I believe is able to encompass all of the characters mentioned above: they are travellers on a foreign, unfamiliar land, “representatives of old Europe [who] find themselves unexpectedly at the edge of the familiar” (Butler, xxiii). At some point, this is true of Prospero and Miranda as well, although their extended presence on the island sets their relationship with their environment apart from that of the shipwrecked newcomers. The next question I have asked concerns precisely the response of the shipwrecked party to their new and unexpected surroundings. How do the newcomers relate to the unfamiliar landscape of the island and to Caliban, the only non-European islander (aside from the invisible Ariel and the quickly-vanished “strange Shapes”)? They relentlessly try to assess the nature of the land and of its inhabitants, as well as the potential profit that

may be gotten out of them; they struggle to define, to agree upon or settle for a single truth in regards to what they encounter; they are overwhelmed by a sense of wonder, they admittedly lack words to describe what they see. Their predicament, in this sense, is nearly identical to that of the travellers-writers who tried to make sense and render the 'New World' with words (especially since, while the island is clearly situated in what would have been a familiar Mediterranean Sea, its ecological features are atypical and imaginatively unique). Rather than a play about the 'New World' itself, *The Tempest* is, among other things, a play about travellers, about their language, and their problematic position as witnesses and storytellers.

Links between the attitudes of the shipwrecked party's attitudes and those of the voyagers are drawn repeatedly throughout the play. A few lines into their first appearance on the island, the Italian lords are already arguing about their different assessments of the new environment. Adrian begins by claiming the island appears "to be desert" (II.1. 37), "uninhabitable, and almost inaccessible" (II.1. 40), and an entertaining quarrel ensues:

> SEBASTIAN Yet—
> ADRIAN Yet—
> ANTONIO He could not miss 't.
> ADRIAN It must needs be of subtle, tender, and delicate temperance.
> ANTONIO Temperance was a delicate wench.
> SEBASTIAN Ay, and a subtle, as he most learnedly delivered.
> ADRIAN The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
> SEBASTIAN As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
> ANTONIO Or as 'twere perfumed by a fen.
> GONZALO Here is everything advantageous to life.
> ANTONIO True, save means to live.
> SEBASTIAN Of that there's none, or little.
> GONZALO How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!
> ANTONIO The ground indeed is tawny.

SEBASTIAN With an eye of green in 't.
ANTONIO He misses not much.
SEBASTIAN No, he doth but mistake the truth totally (II.1. 41-59)

Without an external context, the fast paced exchange might appear gratuitous, even for the comedic standards of farce. Although the argument establishes a dynamic among the group which will remain for much of the play — with Adrian and Gonzalo offering wisdom and hope, while Antonio and Sebastian display irony and apathy — the object of discussion itself seems to hold some mysterious relevance. Among the various interpretations of the scene, Gonzalo's lines, which build up to his "vision of a place without 'bourn, bound of land, tilth' (2.1.158)," have been seen as evoking the "unenclosed English wetlands where cottagers could subsist without intensive agriculture" (Borlik, 29) — a plausible reading, which, however, finds little resonance throughout the rest of the play. John Gillies, instead, suggesting that "a Virginian subtext was legible as parody to a degree of depth and precision that we have not been used to contemplate" (Gillies, 683), views the scene in light of the "Virginian motifs of temperance and fruitfulness" (686). In Gillies' version, Adrian and Gonzalo's remarks on the landscape echo the enthusiastic (and at times inflated) reports with which the investors in the Virginian settlements sought to generate momentum for the colonial enterprise, whereas Antonio and Sebastian voice the skepticism with which such reports were met in England, particularly among those who wished to discredit a rival involved in the enterprise. Gillies notes how writers like Hariot insisted upon the qualities of "temperance" and "fruitfulness" when discussing Virginia's ecological features, and how, in colonial propaganda, these qualities were attributed to the embodied figure of Virginia as a young virgin woman, both chaste and fertile. This context reverberates strongly in Adrian's remark, in which he claims that the island "must needs be of subtle, tender, and delicate/ temperance" (II.2. 44-5), and in Antonio's sarcastic gib: "Temperance was a delicate wench" (II.2. 46). I find this reading very convincing, but I would like to draw attention to an

important nuance in the scene's allusion to the discourse of travel writing and colonial propaganda. Unlike Rosalind, who, in *As You Like It*, mocks the traveller for his pretentiousness and affectation, or Lafew, in *All's Well That Ends Well*, who portrays the traveller as someone who consciously alters the truth, Sebastian does not charge Gonzalo with the accusation of purposefully distorting the truth. In his response to Gonzalo's praise of the island's lushness, Sebastian remarks about how the latter "doth but mistake the truth totally." Gonzalo is thus framed as someone with a faulty epistemic stance, rather than as a liar: a subtle shift which, perhaps, suggests a deeper meditation on the relationship between truth and travelling, beyond the stereotype of the traveller as one who lies for fame or for profit.

In what might be an implicit reference to the marvels featured in travel reports from faraway lands, the problems of truth and credibility continue to be interwoven in the actions and dialogues of the scene:

> GONZALO But the rarity of it is, which is indeed almost
> beyond credit—
> SEBASTIAN As many vouched rarities are.
> GONZALO That our garments, being, as they were,
> drenched in the sea, hold notwithstanding their
> freshness (...).
> ANTONIO If but one of his pockets could speak, would it
> not say he lies?
> SEBASTIAN Ay, or very falsely pocket up his report (II.2. 60-9)

The positions are suddenly complicated, since Gonzalo's "rarity," despite being "almost beyond credit," corresponds to the truth: as Ariel tells Prospero, the tempest leaves "on their sustaining garments not a blemish,/ But fresher than before" (I.2. 218-9). Sebastian and Antonio, instead, like rivals who seek to discredit a traveller's "vouched rarities" at court, deny the evidence of Gonzalo's "report." Later in the play, however, in the scene that most

explicitly establishes a connection between the shipwrecked characters and the early modern European travellers, they, too, will abandon their cynical disbelief and give in to an overwhelming sense of wonder. Indeed, after the apparition of the "strange Shapes," who dance about the stage and set a banquet for the bewildered Italians, Sebastian and Antonio are the first to voice their unflinching faith in the veracity of the "rarities" they had mocked, and to relinquish their former attitude:

> SEBASTIAN
> A living drollery! Now I will believe
> That there are unicorns, that in Arabia
> There is one tree, the phoenix' throne, one phoenix
> At this hour reigning there.
> ANTONIO I'll believe both;
> And what does else want credit, come to me
> And I'll be sworn 'tis true. Travelers ne'er did lie,
> Though fools at home condemn 'em (III.2. 21-7).

This comical conversion promises to be as blind as their initial skepticism had been in Act II, 2, when they outright rejected each of Gonzalo's remarks. In their amazement, Sebastian and Gonzalo vow to accept with acritical credulity *all* the exotic marvels that were regularly featured in travel literature, such as unicorns and the legend of the phoenix. Outdoing Sebastian's statement, Antonio even promises to swear on the veracity of any tale that lacks credit elsewhere. The irony in his remark about how "Travelers ne'er did lie,/ Though fools at home condemn 'em," would have been palpable for a culture that balanced its fascination towards travel narratives with a generous load of mockery and doubt. However, *The Tempest* does portray wonderful events, and, on the island, its characters' newfound faith in marvels is justified. What is striking, in this scene, is that the unfolding of events "almost beyond credit" is immediately and insistently tied to the travellers' tales,

clearly hinting at the topicality of the travel literature both within *The Tempest* and among Shakespeare's audience.

Following Sebastian's and Antonio's excited remarks, Gonzalo's response to the apparition of the "strange Shapes" is in line with the thoughtful attitude maintained by the character throughout the play, and contains a reflection rather than an outlandish vow:

> GONZALO If in Naples
> I should report this now, would they believe me?
> If I should say I saw such islanders—
> For, certes, these are people of the island—
> Who, though they are of monstrous shape, yet note
> Their manners are more gentle, kind, than of
> Our human generation you shall find
> Many, nay, almost any (III.3. 27-34).

Since their first argument with Gonzalo, and even in the midst of their astonishment, Sebastian and Antonio are associated with the audience of travel narratives, rather than with the storytellers themselves (hence Antonio's pledge to become a more credulous listener in the future). Gonzalo, on the other hand, understands his position as a witness to extraordinary events, and, much like the travellers to distant and previously unknown lands, is concerned about the impact an account of his strange sights and experiences would have at home, should he ever return there. As we have seen in the first chapter, Gonzalo's question, "would they believe me?", had plagued Raleigh during the composition of his *Discovery of Guiana*, prompting him to produce frequent self-conscious assurances of his sincerity and good faith, even as he sought to defend the veracity of second-hand information about "a nation of people whose heads appear not above their shoulders."

Stripped of any information in regards to their appearance, which would have simply been supplied during the performance, the "strange Shapes" leave a contemporary reader wondering what they may have looked like, and whether their "monstrous shape," as Gonzalo

puts it, were meant as a consequence of their costumes, or of the bewildered newcomers' offset perception. Gonzalo's own words, however, spoken shortly after as he attempts to reassure a staggered Alonso, do suggest some anomaly in the shape of Ariel's spirits, since they are implicitly associated to a score of (literally) strange shapes of medieval mould:

> Faith, sir, you need not fear. When we were boys,
> Who would believe that there were mountaineers
> Dewlapped like bulls, whose throats had hanging at 'em
> Wallets of flesh? Or that there were such men
> Whose heads stood in their breasts? Which now we find
> Each putter-out of five for one will bring us
> Good warrant of (III.3. 43-9).

The emphasis of Gonzalo's speech is once again on truth and credibility, but the introduction of a temporal frame in relation to these problems is of particular interest. The two temporal coordinates contained in Gonzalo's speech and associated with contrasting attitudes towards travellers' tales — "when we were boys, who would believe…", and "...Which now we find/ Each putter-out of five for one will bring us/ Good warrant of" — might have been relatable for many, among Shakespeare's audience, who had witnessed the repentine increase in the diffusion of 'New World' news within the span of a few decades in Elizabethan England. Indeed, Gonzalo's remarks about "men/ Whose heads stood in their breasts" are reminiscent of Ralegh's claim that "[s]uch a nation was written of by *Mandeville*, whose reports were held for fables many years, and yet since the East *Indies* were discovered, we find his relations true of such things as heretofore were held incredible." Although Gonzalo makes no explicit mention of the "East *Indies*," the general increase in overseas exploration and travel writing that took place in England in the second half of the sixteenth century looms large behind the shift in the reception and diffusion of "rarities" to which the Neapolitan councillor refers. Furthermore, regardless of the Shapes' physical appearance, it is

tempting to read Gonzalo's description of their "gentle, kind" manners as an allusion to the peoples encountered by Europeans during transatlantic voyages, especially since the praise of the Shapes is framed in a comparison which goes to the detriment of his fellow humans (in 'New World' literature, the reproach would more commonly be directed at the traveller's compatriots or, more broadly, at Europeans, but Gonzalo evidently understands the Shapes as non-human, thus extending one of the terms of his comparison to his entire "human generation"). Similarly to Gonzalo, Arthur Barlowe and Philip Amadas, two delegates sent by Raleigh to assess the territory of Virginia in 1584, "without understanding a word that has been said to them" (Greenblatt 1991, 94), describe the natives as "people most gentle, loving, and faithfull, voide of all guile and treason, and such as live after the maner of the golden age" (qtd in Greenblatt 1991, 94). Adding to Gonzalo's echo of the rhetorical patterns with which the 'New World' and its peoples were discussed, Alonso's remarks about the Shapes' language also seems to bear traces from scenes in contemporary travel reports, depicting communication between Europeans and American natives:

> I cannot too much muse
> Such shapes, such gesture, and such sound, expressing—
> Although they want the use of tongue—a kind
> Of excellent dumb discourse (III.3. 36-9)

To be sure, Alonso's words are perfectly in tune with the magic atmosphere of an island "full of noises,/ sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" (III.2. 136-7), haunted by Ariel's seemingly disembodied voice. Reading them with a 'New World' context in mind, however, it is difficult not to make an immediate association with the signed exchanges that, in Shakespeare's time, were still taking place on American shores, between indigenous peoples and European colonizers. The voyagers seem "at least fitfully to share Augustine's conviction that there is 'a kind of universal language, consisting of expressions

of the face and eyes, gestures and tones of voice'" (Greenblatt, 93) — or, in Alonso's words, an "excellent dumb discourse," which was supposed to compensate for the linguistic abyss between the two parties involved. Amadas and Barlowe, for example, are confident "in their ability to make themselves understood and to comprehend unfamiliar signs" (93), despite the vast array of contradictions that emerges in the information they have supposedly gathered from the Roanoke people. Surely, Alonso's remark, *per se*, would not be sufficient to sustain the association with 'New World' encounters, but it is spoken amidst a series of speeches which, as we have seen, heavily thematize travel narratives, and particularly those dealing with exotic, non-European lands. There are, however, more profound and explicit ways in which *The Tempest* deals with language and linguistic alterity, beginning with Caliban's first appearance on the stage.

4. "My language? Heavens!": Old words in new worlds

The word "language" itself appears six times in *The Tempest*, more than in any other Shakespeare play (equalled only by *All's Well That Ends Well* — a text which, however, is about one and one-half times longer than *The Tempest*). More importantly, language is at the core of three nodal dramatic situations in the play. First, it constitutes the ground of argument for the play's only exchange between Miranda and Caliban, which culminates with the latter's eloquent dismissal of Miranda's supposedly disinterested pedagogic efforts: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (I.2: 363-364). Miranda's reminiscence contains one of the most explicit illustrations of the nature and workings of

language out of all the forty-one mentions of the word that can be found in Shakespeare's works, as she tells Caliban:

> [I] took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
> One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
> With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
> Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
> Could not abide with. (I.2.354-60)

The passage is one of the densest in the play, hinting (from Miranda's perspective) at a number of debated circumstances of the play's backstory, as well as at aspects of Caliban's nature. In a synecdoche for language as a whole, "words" are referred to as making one's "purposes" known to oneself. To teach someone language, then, is to provide them with the tools to understand the circumstances of the reality in which they live, and their relationship with it. Language allows (or forces) one to understand what place he or she occupies in the world they inhabit, or, as Miranda puts it, one's "meaning." Her gift, however, comes with the imposition of her own colonial viewpoint, as it becomes apparent in her reference to Caliban's prelinguistic state: "thou didst not, savage, /Know thine own meaning." The insertion of the word "savage" in a vocative parenthetical clause suggests that the sentence could be correctly rephrased as "thou didst not know thine own meaning, which is that of being a savage." Caliban recognizes the fraudulence of Miranda's rhetoric, and, instead of the gratitude he is expected to show, he produces one of the curses which, with bitter irony, he claims as his "only profit" obtained from Miranda's language: "[t]he red plague rid you," he exclaims, "for learning me your language!" (I.2. 364-5). It is worth noting, however, how Miranda, too, is depicted as living in a state of existential ignorance and lack of self-knowledge, when Prospero refers to her as being "ignorant of what thou art, naught knowing/

Of whence I am" (I.2.18-9). Her response confirms the impossibility, given her circumstances, to even conceive of a world beyond the island, as she admits: "More to know/ Did never meddle with my thoughts" (I.2. 21-2).

Miranda's s tirade against Caliban also contains the ambiguous reference to the latter's "gabble," which has left much room for interpretation, as it seems to imply that he did have *some* language. In the last chapter I mentioned Dympna Callaghan's suggestion that "gabble" might be a direct allusion towards Gaelic, since, among other evidence Callaghan produces, the first recorded use of the word is shown to be a reference to the Irish language. However, the specificity of the word within the Irish context may be called into question by the fact that Shakespeare employs the word in two other plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* (IV.1. 20) and *Twelfth Night* (II.3. 89), where it is used, respectively, to indicate the attempt to mock up a foreign language, and the speech of drunkards, gabbling "like tinkers" (*Twelfth Night*, II.3. 90). While neither of these plays presents a particularly Irish frame of references, it is nonetheless possible that the presence of the word in *The Tempest* may have contributed to point towards Caliban's Irishness for early modern audiences. The shadow of the 'New World' however, looms equally large, if not behind the word itself, at least behind the context in which it is spoken and the circumstances to which Miranda alludes. Along with the Irish, American Indians were "the ethnic groups most newsworthy in Tudor-Stuart times" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 8-9), and both were labelled as 'savage' people, whose "supposed shortcomings (...) often were enumerated in long list of negatives: (...) no religion, (...) no refined habits of dress, speech, and eating" (8). To be sure, other ethnic groups who fell under the category of 'savage' were also described in a similar manner, as Edward Topsell's discussion of Equatorial Africa's Pygmy people clearly shows. The pygmies, Topsell claims, "are not men, because they have no perfect use of Reason, no modesty, no honesty, nor justice, and although they speak, yet is their language imperfect: and above all they cannot be

men because they have no religion" (qtd in Pfister, 40). Like Gaelic and African Languages, Native American languages were repeatedly relegated to the realm of "gabble," in the European's peculiar "failure to recognize the diversity of languages" (Todorov, 30). Such a failure, as I have discussed in the first chapter, was not always malicious, but rather a direct consequence of the "belief in the isomorphic relationship between language and reality" (Greenblatt 1990, 28). Since the very first European contact with the 'New World', this attitude permits Columbus, "when he confronts a foreign tongue, only two possible, and complementary, forms of behaviour: to acknowledge it as a language but to refuse to believe it is different; or to acknowledge its difference but to refuse to admit it is a language" (Todorov, 30). Indeed, on the day of the first encounter in Guanahaní (which he christens San Salvador), Columbus writes, in reference to the indigenous inhabitants: "If it please Our Lord, at the moment of my departure I shall take from this place six of them to Your Highnesses, so that they may learn to speak" (qtd in Todorov, 30). Perhaps, Miranda's perception of Caliban's "brutish," alingual state, is affected by just the same epistemological fallacy that characterized the European settlers' perception of the American natives' speech, which, despite enormous evidence to the contrary, was often deemed to be a meaningless and incoherent array of sounds.

I am not claiming, as it might be tempting to do, that Shakespeare was immune to such assumptions. The text seems to support Miranda's view of a languageless Caliban, rather than challenge it, since the latter, in his recollection of Prospero's early days on the island and of the steps which lead to his own present enslavement, bitterly recalls how he was taught "[t]o name the bigger light, and how the less,/ That burn by day and night" (II.2. 335-6). But the image of a "savage" Caliban is complicated, as are Miranda's takes on language, by another parenthetical clause, which could pass unnoticed amid Miranda's angry tirade at her father's slave. As she is accusing Caliban that his "vile race" contains something — lust,

possibly — that “good natures/ could not abide to be with,” she also admits: “though thou didst learn [language].” Framed thus, the admission might suggest an inherent moral quality in language, bestowed onto those who learn it. In this case, Caliban’s nature is portrayed as being so base that he attempted to rape Miranda *despite* having acquired language. On the other hand, Miranda’s admission also casts a light, however reluctantly, on Caliban’s nature, situating him uncomfortably close to the standards of civilization: if he *did* learn language, his supposed savagery is not so unshakeable after all. The allusion to Caliban’s “vile race,” of course, is equally problematic in terms of interpretation, and it is certainly inviting for those who read Caliban against a specific background, be it Ireland, as in Callaghan’s case, Virginia, as with Gillies and many others, or Africa. I shall return to the question of Caliban’s proposed ethnicity later in this chapter, but first I wish to observe the other ways in which language figures as a theme in *The Tempest*, discussed and remarked upon by the very characters of the play.

If the inability to recognize the speech of supposedly ‘savage’ people as coherent and complex languages may have been dramatized (or simply reproduced) in the exchange between Miranda and Caliban, the opposite tendency, which consisted in accepting the natives’ speech as a language but to disregard its fundamental difference from European languages may undergo a comic reversal in two closely related scenes in the play: the encounter between Ferdinand and Miranda, and that between Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban. To be sure, obliviousness towards linguistic difference was not limited to the civilized-savage dynamic that is so frequent in ‘New World’ accounts. Already in Mandeville, for example, the author “never registers the problem of cross-cultural communication. He claims to speak with Saracens, Jews, Armenians, Copts, Chaldeans, Indians, Tibetans, and the like with unmediated fluency” (Greenblatt 1991, 91). The earliest example of this attitude among the transatlantic voyagers, instead, is once again Columbus,

who, already during the second voyage, “persists in hearing familiar words in [the natives’] remarks, and in speaking to them as if they must understand him, or in censuring their poor pronunciation of the words and names he supposes he recognizes,” to the point where, “with this distorted understanding, (...) he engages in some absurd and imaginary dialogues” (Todorov, 30). Similarly, in 1564, describing the habits of the Samboses, inhabitants of the West African island of Sambula who are said to practice cannibalism, John Hawkins reports: “when they espie the enemie the Captaine to cheere his men, cryeth Hungry, and they answere Heygre” (Hakluyt, 16). While it is possible that the Samboses’ battlecry could indeed be transcribed as Hawkins does, it seems suspicious that a tribe of supposed man-eaters should charge their enemy at the sound of the English word “hungry.” Upon encountering Miranda and receiving from her a response to his inquiries, Ferdinand exclaims: “My language? Heavens!” (I.2. 428). If we read Ferdinand’s legitimate surprise within the context of the linguistic misconceptions cited above, the scene seems to point towards the ‘New World’, where the unexpected sound of a European language would have indeed been a rare and startling occurrence, rather than towards the polyglot Mediterranean, in which certain Italian dialects would not have been an extraordinary sound, given the significant presence and circulation of merchants from places such as Venice, Genoa, Florence or Naples.

The initial emphasis of the encounter is placed on a perception of unfamiliarity and difference (or lack thereof), so strong as to generate “wonder” (I.2. 426), a word Ferdinand applies to Miranda upon first addressing her, and whose Latin equivalent happens to be the root of her own name. Both characters “mobilize a language of wonder to approximate the nature of the encounter, suggesting the pervasive utility of the term as a descriptor of cultural estrangement” (Thornton Burnett, 130). Indeed, “[w]onder, (...) is perhaps *The Tempest*’s most salient conceptual referent for the simultaneously entrancing and disquieting

peculiarities of the island experience (130). Expressions of wonder are disseminated throughout the play, but those who seem most subject to it are Miranda and Caliban, the two characters whose empirical knowledge of the world is limited to the island. In a misconception that was frequent among the American natives described in 'New World' literature, from Columbus to Hariot, they both mistake the newcomers for divine creatures, endowed with supernatural powers: for Miranda, Ferdinand is "a spirit" (I.2. 411) and "a thing divine" (I.2.416), while Caliban takes Trinculo to be "a brave god" who "bears celestial liquor" (II.2. 117). As much as one may insist on the speculative nature of some of the links that have been drawn between America and *The Tempest*, it is significant that similar scenes would have been highly unlikely in the busy and well-charted Mediterranean context of Shakespeare's day, whereas it was common and amply documented in the lands across the Atlantic. The most famous of such expressions of wonder in *The Tempest* belongs to Miranda, who, upon seeing the rest of the shipwrecked convoy, retains her slightly comical innocence as she exclaims:

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
> that has such people in 't! (V.I. 181-4)

As Martin Butler points out, "[o]ne irony of Miranda's 'brave new world' is that such an apostrophe would normally be directed by travellers to the exotic sights they had discovered" (Butler, xxv). In this sense, the scene likely echoes transatlantic travel literature, since the expression 'new world' could hardly be disassociated with the 'discoveries' in the American continent, as the title of Richard Eden's *Decades of the Newe Worlde* already took for granted in 1555. However, if we read the scene along with narratives of first encounters between American natives and Europeans, Miranda's expression is more than a reversal of

the voyagers' perspective. Rather, it is a plausible dramatization of the natives' own reaction upon seeing a "brave vessel" (I.2. 6) approach their shores, and wondering about the "world" whence it came. In the scene, the 'Old World' undergoes a paradoxical *mise en abyme*: Europe becomes the wonder-inducing Other, an unseen "new world" known only vicariously through its "goodly creatures," just as it may have been for the inhabitants of Guanahaní or Virginia. It is a paradox, of course, because in *The Tempest* such a perspective belongs to someone whose language and origins unquestionably make a member of the 'Old World'. In Miranda's case, the removed and fascinated gaze towards Europe comes from within it; the 'Old World' looks at itself in wonder. With Miranda's enthusiastic praise of the "new world," followed by Prospero's disenchanted remark, "'Tis new to thee" (V.1.185), Shakespeare stages the relativity of human epistemological frameworks, asserting how "[w]hat you take to be wonderful turns out to depend on where you stand to look at it" (Butler, xxvi). The question is doubtlessly too large to be assigned to any single historical context, but its topicality increases exponentially in the age of European exploration, when new and more radical alternatives to European customs, value systems and social structures suddenly crowd Europe's mental horizons.

5. Encountering Caliban

In a grotesque parallel with Ferdinand and Miranda's encounter, the familiar sound of his own language adds to Stephano's bewilderment when, contemplating Trinculo and Caliban as they lie hidden between the latter's cloak and taking their disguise to be a

"monster of the isle with four legs"(II.2. 65), he hears Caliban speak, and asks: "Where the devil should he learn our language?" (II.2: 66-67). Whereas Ferdinand invokes the "heavens," Stephano, in his puzzlement, mentions the "devil" — a detail that contributes to establishing the contraposition between the refined innocence of the prince and the farcical baseness of the two conspirators. The encounter can be read along the many symmetries of the play, with Caliban mirroring Miranda's easily impressed outlook. However, whereas Miranda and Ferdinand's coming to terms with each other's unexpected presence is resolved within a few lines, Shakespeare devotes almost an entire scene to the mutual sightings and misrecognitions between Trinculo, Caliban, and Stephano. Two of the play's four explicit references to the 'New World' — Trinculo's "dead Indian" (II.2. 33) and Stephano's "savages and men of Ind" (II.2. 58) — are concentrated in this relatively short scene, possibly hinting at the topicality of 'New World' narratives in the events that are being represented on stage. Indeed, the scene seems to dramatize precisely the voyagers' propensity towards misrecognition, or at least distortion and exaggeration, as a consequence of the heightened sense of alterity induced by new and unfamiliar lands. As with the voyagers, in *The Tempest*, the characters' "estrangement from their normal lives forces a reassessment that makes them see the everyday world through new eyes" (Butler, xxi). Thus, a man hiding beneath a cloak becomes a puzzling sight, whereas two men under the same cloak become "some monster of the isle with four legs." The remarks concerning Caliban's appearance and biological status, which have proved so puzzling for readers of the text, begin to be produced precisely under these circumstances. While Prospero, in his bitter rage, had mentioned how Caliban has been "got by the devil himself" (I.2. 319), he had also avouched his slave's humanity when, retracing the history of the exiled Sycorax, he recalled, with an often misread statement, how

> Then was this island —
> Save for the son that she did litter here,

> A freckled whelp, hag-born — not honoured with
> A human shape (I.2. 281-4).

The long list of epithets Prospero flings at Caliban before the arrival of Trinculo and Stephano does not contradict this information. "Thou earth" (I.2. 314), "thou tortoise" (I.2:317), and "filth as thou art" (I.2:347) appear to be insults, rather than definitions, which may nonetheless touch upon some of his slave's characteristics, such as his slowness or his connection to the natural world, perceived as a lack of civilization. With Trinculo and Stephano, instead, begins a systematic (though farcical) attempt to assess the nature of the 'discovered' Other, to define a new finding by advancing a series of misguided hypotheses. "What have we here," wonders Trinculo upon stumbling into Caliban, who is lying on the ground, beneath his gaberdine, "[a] man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell, a kind of not-the-newest-poor-John. A strange fish!" (II.2 . 24-7). Of all the appellatives attached to Caliban, "fish" has been perhaps the most consistently influential in later (mis)interpretations of the character, from William Hogarth's painting, *Ferdinand Courting Miranda* (1736-38), in which Caliban is portrayed as a scaled, web-footed monster, to more recent critical readings, which still confidently assert that "Caliban is part man and part fish, and in general a 'monster'" (Baird Saenger, 334). According to Frank Kermode, however, the word is attached to Caliban "largely because of his oddity, and there should be no fishiness about his appearance" (qtd in Vaughan & Vaughan, 14). Kermode's claim might be hard to accept, unless we refer once again to the travel literature of Shakespeare's time, in which the most unexpected (and at times inaccurate) connections were drawn between elements of the natural world, in order to convey one or more of their features. Thus, a crocodile is likened to a hog, a banana to a melon, and certain fish caught by John Hawkins' crew are said to have "heads like conies" (Hakluyt, 11).

If Caliban's "fishiness" has stuck with him, despite the fact that Trinculo's use of the word "fish," as he explicitly declares, is derived specifically from Caliban's smell (much like the melon is evoked by Francesco Carletti in relation to the texture of the banana, but not its shape), it may be because of Trinculo's later, much misinterpreted remark that Caliban is "[l]egged like a man, and his fins like arms!" (II.2. 33). Some have taken the words at face value, claiming that "the most straightforward reading of this line would be a description of green sleeves and trousers with fins attached to them (Baird Saenger, 336). While the effort to envision the play in performance is valuable, such a perspective should not disregard the subtleties of the text in favour of a blunt literal reading. Indeed, "Trinculo's description of Caliban's upper limbs as 'fins like arms' indicates that the presumed (by smell) fish has, in fact, arms, yet Caliban is often portrayed on stage and in illustrations with arms made to look like fins, thus reversing the import of Trinculo's observation" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 12). In the scene, Trinculo is a dismayed traveller whose perception of difference has been thrown off-balance by the novelty of his experience and the unfamiliarity of his surroundings, and who projects what he comes across into realms of total alterity: hence, Caliban the "fish," and the "monster" (II.2. 30), a word of whose employment he has primacy in *The Tempest*. Thus, "fins like arms" admits to Caliban's human shape, but refuses to entirely let go the initial categorization borne out of a single sensorial impression. It is also possible that Trinculo is himself aware of such an attitude, and that his remark is actually meant to be uttered with a certain degree of irony, much like Antony does in his description of the crocodile. To say that a person is "legged like a man" and has "fins like arms," is not very far off from saying that the crocodile "lives by that which nourisheth it": both are deceptive tautologies, feigning the disclosure of information while relating the obvious. If Trinculo were using these terms to describe Caliban to a company of curious Neapolitans, his statement would have precisely the same mocking effect as Antony's. The focus of the exchange between Antony and Lepidus is

not the crocodile, but the rhetorical pirouettes with which Antony mocks his listener. Likewise, when, in Boccaccio's novella, Friar Cipolla gulls his audience into believing the spiritually redeeming powers of a boxful of coal, which he claims to have been the burning embers on which St. Lawrence suffered his martyrdom, the centre of the narration is Cipolla's prodigious and fraudulent speech, with which he succeeds in endowing the carbons with an exotic and mystical aura — not the carbons themselves, which, as the novella makes clear, could just as well have been another object. Somewhat similarly the real protagonist of Act II, scene 2 of *The Tempest*, is not Caliban or his actual physical appearance, but Trinculo and Stephano's language, their shaken epistemological framework. Caliban is Caliban: the audience has already become acquainted with him during his earlier exchange with Prospero, and could hardly share Trinculo's bewilderment anew, granted that they did in the first place.

In various studies on Caliban, the associations Trinculo and Stephano produce during their first encounter with him are usually amassed along with the rest of the epithets and definitions the character receives throughout the play. This, however, tends to overlook the stage dynamics of the scene, as well as those internal to Trinculo's soliloquy, during which he sees Caliban for the first time. The words "fish" and "monster," as well as his fancy about bringing Caliban to England, where "they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar" but "they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (II.2. 31-3), are spoken while "Caliban is hiding under a gaberdine, his head and torso not clearly visible" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 12). Towards the end of his rambling speech, Trinculo changes his mind. No stage directions are provided here to indicate whether he lifts the gaberdine and is able to see Caliban in his entirety, but it seems plausible, given his remark about Caliban's legs and arms, as well as his exclamation, "[w]arm, o'my troth!" (II.2. 34), which suggests physical contact, as though Trinculo were placing a hand against Caliban's skin to verify the latter's condition, thus answering his own previous question, "[d]ead or alive?". Immediately after, Trinculo

declares: “I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer. This is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt” (II.2. 34-6) — “in sum, a human inhabitant” (Vaughan & Vaughan, 12). This admission of Caliban’s essential humanity comes after the closest contact any character has with him on stage. Although “[l]ater, Trinculo reverts to aquatic imagery” (12), in line with the confrontational and denigratory attitude which he adopts against Caliban for the rest of the play, he also implies Caliban’s rank among other humans when he tells him and Stephano, “there’s but five upon this isle: we are three of them” (III.2. 5).

Trinculo’s reference to the “thunderbolt,” instead, while it does not seem to question Caliban’s human appearance, has been seen as a possible indicator of his ethnicity. Kim Hall sees a possible link to the Ancient Greek myth of Phaeton, son of Helios, who rides his father’s sun chariot, losing control of the horses to disastrous results. In the myth, to prevent the whole Earth from being burned, “Jove killed Phaeton with a thunderbolt, throwing his body from the chariot” (Hall, 97). In the early modern period, “other versions of the myth were amended (...) to suggest that Phaeton actually landed in Ethiopia and made the inhabitants black when the falling sun ‘scorched’ them” (Hall, 97). Possibly through Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the story was well-known and particularly dear to Shakespeare, who references it explicitly in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (III.1. 153-8), *Romeo and Juliet* (III.2. 3), *Henry IV* (I.4. 33, and II.6. 12), and, most importantly, in *Richard II* (III.3. 178-9), where it is told by the king as an allegory of the descending parable of his own life (Merrix, 277). The scene in *The Tempest*, however, provides ample grounds for Trinculo’s impression that Caliban has been struck by a“thunderbolt,” without necessarily calling for an external explanation. Trinculo has just survived a shipwreck, caused by a storm (however magically fabricated and illusory) which the stage directions describe as featuring a “*tempestuous noise*

of thunder and lightning" (I.1). In an account of the storm he has enacted, Ariel tells Prospero,

> Sometime I'd divide
> And burn in many places. On the topmast,
> The yards, and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
> O' th' dreadful thunderclaps, more momentary
> And sight-outrunning were not (I.2. 198-203)

Notoriously, the passage echoes one or several of the descriptions of St. Elmo's Fire, made by various early modern travellers, from Pigafetta to those who related the Sea Venture expedition. Although the reference to Jove seems to be vaguely in tune with the reading of Phaeton's myth, as applied to Caliban, it is also an extremely common one in Shakespeare's works, appearing over eighty times throughout his plays, often in association to thunder and lightning, just as "mighty Neptune" (I.2. 204) is mentioned later in Ariel's speech to signify the sea. When Trinculo comes across Caliban, he is himself seeking shelter from "another storm brewing" (II.2. 19). Understandably, given his experience on the ship, he is specifically afraid of being struck by a lightning: "If it should thunder as it did before," he complains, "I know not where to hide my head" (II.2. 22-3). Caliban, in the meantime, has decided to "fall flat" (II.2. 16) on the ground, and appears to be playing dead, in order to avoid the torments of what he takes to be one of Prospero's spirits. Trinculo's impression that the islander has "lately suffered by a thunderbolt," therefore, although it may indeed contain an allusion to Caliban's appearance, does not so urgently call for an external source in order to justify its meaning. As Trinculo tells Stephano later in the scene, in reference to Caliban, "I took him to be killed with a thunder-stroke" (II.2 108).

After Trinculo hides beneath Caliban's gaberdine, the play redoubles its parody of first contact narratives by having Stephano, another shipwrecked traveller, replicate the same

comical misrecognitions which have just taken place on stage. Caliban and Trinculo, too, persist in their confused perception of the Other: the islander takes Stephano to be another spirit, whereas Trinculo, recognizing his friend's voice, but believing Stephano to be drowned, thinks he is being taunted by "devils" (II.2. 89). Stephano, as we have seen, mistakes the two men beneath a cloak for a four-legged monster, and wonders as to where it might have learned his language. Like Trinculo, he immediately comes up with a profitable scheme: "If I can recover him and keep him tame, and get to Naples with him," he plots, as he contemplates not Caliban himself, but the creature made up of two bodies beneath the gaberdine, "he's a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat's leather" (II.2. 67-70). Just as Trinculo's terms "fish" and "monster" did not refer to Caliban, but to the latter's disguise beneath his cloak, so Stephano's expressions, including his own first employment of the word "monster," refer to an imaginary chimaera borne out of his own distorted perception. As though unable to let go of their initial sense of radical alterity (which, simultaneously, they also explicitly disavow), they persist in calling Caliban a "monster" even when they can clearly contemplate his "human shape," no longer in disguise. Perhaps disregarding any attempt to accurately reference Caliban's aspect, the two newcomers call him a "puppy-headed monster" (II.2. 154), a "scurvy monster" (II.2. 155), an "abominable monster" (II.2. 159), a "man-monster" (III.2. 12), " half a fish and half a monster" (III.2. 29), among others. The word "monster" is "Caliban's most frequent sobriquet, but it comes only from Trinculo and Stephano and may therefore be less descriptive than simply pejorative — attempts by a jester and a butler to assert a modicum of superiority over their self-proclaimed 'foot-licker'" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 14).

Shakespeare's use of the term "monster" is not specific to *The Tempest*, although it recurs far more frequently in it than in any other of his works. Mark Thornton Burnett's *Constructing Monsters in Shakespeare's Drama and Early Modern Culture* provides one of

the most in-depth studies on the notion of monstrosity in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, along with Simon C. Estok's readings of monstrosity in *Othello* and *Pericles*, and Agnès Lafont's "Monstrous Hybrids in Shakespeare's *King Lear*", to name but a few contributions to this subject. Shakespeare uses the word "monster" in association to a variety of human actions, experiences and conditions, such as envy (*Pericles*, IV.0. 12), rumour (*Henry IV*, Part II, Prologue 18), jealousy (*Othello*, III.3. 196 and III.4. 182), adultery (*Othello*, IV.1. 77), ingratitude (*King Lear*, I.5. 39, and *Troilus and Cressida*, III.3. 152), ignorance (*Love's Labour Lost*, IV.2. 23), custom (*Hamlet*, III.4. 182), and death (*Romeo and Juliet*, V.3. 104), among others. While in all of these cases the word is meant allegorically, there are few cases, aside from *The Tempest*, in which "monster" references another character. In *Troilus and Cressida*, for example, in a statement that bears a striking resemblance to the attributes associated with Caliban, Thersites seeks to discredit Ajax by calling him "a very land-fish, language-less, a monster" (III.3. 276). There is nothing 'fishy', strange or deformed about Ajax's appearance (ironically, Thersites himself is described precisely as a deformed slave). Thersites's words, prompted by Ajax's silent and arrogant demeanour, are clearly figurative and exaggerated, in a way which Trinculo and Stephano's very similar remarks are rarely considered to be. In two other instances among Shakespeare's work, instead, "monster" is evoked in connection to the showcase of anomaly, diversity, exoticism, the marvellous. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, suspecting his lover's betrayal, Antony commands her to

> Vanish, or I shall give thee thy deserving
> And blemish Caesar's triumph. Let him take thee,
> And hoist thee up to the shouting plebeians:
> Follow his chariot, like the greatest spot
> Of all thy sex; most monster-like, be shown
> For poor'st diminutives, for doits (IV. 12. 36-41).

Cleopatra would be “monster-like” insofar as she is “shown” — an exotic spectacle attracting crowds on the grounds of her fame and, possibly, of her ethnicity. To be sure, the display of political or war prisoners was not uncommon in Ancient Rome, but Antony’s reference of the exhibited body as “monster-like” seems to point towards contemporary England’s own taste for the exhibition of unusual sights. In a passage which closely resembles Trinculo’s reminiscences of London’s showcase of oddities, the “fairground’s spatial choreography” (Thornton Burnett, 126) is clearly evoked when, in *Macbeth*, Macduff tells the defeated king,

> Then yield thee, coward,
> And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
> We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
> Painted on a pole, and underwrit,
> 'Here may you see the tyrant' (V.8.27-31).

American Natives too, were shown for paying crowds among “rarer monsters.” Aside from travellers’ accounts, the inhabitants of the ‘New World’ entered England’s imagination precisely as an exotic spectacle, thus establishing from the start a strong association with individuals who were reputed to be monstrous (such as those with physical anomalies and deformities). Indeed, “The closest analogue for Trinculo’s ‘dead Indian’ is Epinew [sic], a living native American who, captured at Martha’s Vineyard in 1611, was brought to England by Captain Edward Harlow at the Earl of Southhampton’s expense” (Thornton Burnett, 135). According to contemporary accounts, Epenow “was shewed vp and downe *London* for money as a wonder,” eventually learning “so much *English* as to bid those that wondred at him, welcome, welcome” (qtd in Thornton Burnett, 135). This sad report says much about a culture that spectacularized the Other “within the frame of a domestic theatrical culture” (126), as well as about the perception of difference in early modern England, in which, past a certain degree of linguistic and cosmetic alterity, humans fell into the realms of “wonder.”

Given Trinculo's, Stephano's and Antonio's remarks about a "marketable" Caliban (V.1. 266), it is possible to interpret the character's principal contextual domain as that of the fairground, as Thornton Burnett does. If that be indeed the case, Caliban did not need to be a monstrously deformed or animal-like creature to spark "wonder" among the play's characters and audience: it would have been sufficient for him to be portrayed as an imaginative compound of the men which had been kidnapped from any given faraway and unfamiliar shore to be showcased in London.

6. Caliban's strangeness

For a reader, or a director attempting to stage *The Tempest*, it may be hard to image Caliban without being influenced by the other character's insistence on his strangeness and deformity. However, such strangeness may be intended to reside precisely in the eyes (and words) of the characters who behold him and who produce the linguist surplus which, in turn, determines our own understanding of Caliban. Prospero alone seems to hint at an admission of his linguistic and epistemological deficiency, when it comes to Caliban's alterity. Before a curious crowd, entertained and puzzled by the appearance of his slave, he famously declares: "This thing of darkness /I acknowledge mine" (V.1. 275-6). The expression differs from most of the other appellatives in the play because it refrains from conjuring a precise image, juxtaposing instead two words that are rooted in the rhetoric of the unknown. The word "thing" is a semantic black hole: it can be applied to any physical and metaphysical entity, carrying a virtually infinite quantity of possible referents — and, therefore, no specific one. A

thing of darkness, in addition to (but not in place of) the possible racial connotations of the word "darkness," is perhaps an evil thing, belonging to the realm of the occult, but, even as such, one whose nature remains hidden. At the same time, the only unequivocal reference towards Caliban's deformity in the text is Prospero's "misshapen knave" (V.1. 268), and his later, slightly more ambiguous claim that Caliban is "as disproportioned in his manners/ As in his shape" (V.1. 291-2). "Mooncalf (II.2. 106), on the other hand, is more ambiguous: in Pliny's *Natural History*, translated into English in 1601, a mooncalf is described as "a lumpe of flesh without shape, without life, … Howbeit a kind of moving it hath" (qtd in Vaughan & Vaughan, 15). Stephano's employment of the term may suggest both "stupidity and an amorphous shape" (Vaughan & Vaughan, 15). However, just like the term "monster," its first employment is not based on a full and unobstructed view of Caliban, but on his disguise beneath the gaberdine, from which Stephano has just pulled out Trinculo. Shortly after, Trinculo echoes Stephano's word choice and explains how he hid "under the dead mooncalf's gaberdine" (II.2. 111), despite the fact that Caliban is clearly alive, and he has just heard him speak. As the scene proceeds, there is no sign of surprise, on Trinculo or Stephano's part, towards the fact that Caliban is indeed alive, suggesting that neither Stephano's use of the word "mooncalf" nor Trinculo's reinforcement of the image as a "dead mooncalf" are to be taken literally, but rather as epithets expressing their repulsion and scorn.

Seemingly more objective, instead, is the brief description that in the First Folio is attached to Caliban, who, in the dramatis personae, is listed as a "savage and deformed slave." It is worth remembering, as Martin Butler does, how, in compiling the First Folio, the "copy for the printer was written out by Ralph Crane, a scrivener who was employed by Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, on a number of projects" (Butler, 83). While Crane's copy was put together "either from the company's own prompt book of the play or from a text that derived in some more direct way from Shakespeare's working papers" (83),

modern scholarship has demonstrated how the scrivener "was inclined to introduce presentational polishing or 'improvements' of his own into the texts that he copied" (83). Indeed, as the first and most polished text of the First Folio, in *The Tempest*, "stage directions are unusually full and descriptive, and some may have been added by [Crane], perhaps on the basis of performances he had seen. He probably compiled the detailed list of characters and devised the descriptive glosses that it includes" (83). "Savage and deformed slave," then "is likely to be Crane's rather than Shakespeare's description of Caliban" (83). As a scrivener, Crane worked primarily for lawyers and court officials, only eventually claiming that his "useful pen" had found "some employment" from the King's Men (qtd in Wilson 1926, 201). He was not, therefore, as deeply involved in London's theatrical scene as his role in the compiling of the First Folio would suggest, and his work did not bind him physically to the playhouse. While it is certainly possible that he had seen *The Tempest* in performance, it is also not obvious. It is just as possible that Crane became acquainted with *The Tempest* only through its text, and that Caliban's caption in the cast of characters is simply the result of Crane's idea about him, based on the way other characters in the play refer to him, or on someone else's opinion. In this case, he would be the first of a long series of interpreters of the play's text, producing a piece of information about Caliban that will in turn influence the perception of subsequent readers.

My zeal in searching alternatives to Caliban's deformity or monstrosity might seem blind to the play's own investment in his strangeness. Surely, one or even a few of the characters' references towards Caliban may be exaggerated or mislead, but I am aware that to detach Caliban entirely from the language applied to him would be implausible. I do not wish, therefore, to erase the notion of Caliban's strangeness, but rather to adjust it in accordance to what, in early modern Europe, falls under the category of the "strange," and possibly to clear the ground from certain assumptions about Caliban that have become

automatisms in critical studies on the character. The semantic shift the word "strange" has undergone over time is itself telling: whereas today the word is almost univocally used to refer to the odd, the bizarre, in Shakespeare's time it was just as frequently employed to signify the foreign and unfamiliar. Furthermore, like the word "brave," used most memorably by Caliban and Miranda, in *The Tempest*, the word "strange" is so frequent and so readily employed by the characters that it eventually loses its specificity, becoming a token of wonder, vague and imprecise in its meaning, but effective in conveying the lack in which the speaker's language incurs. An impression of Caliban as a monstrous, fish-like or non-human creature will likely find validation when, contemplating Caliban, Alonso remarks, "This is a strange thing as e'er I looked on" (V.1. 290). If, however, we keep in mind the circumstances in which the line is spoken, as well certain contemporary texts which might illuminate our idea of the early modern "strange," our response to Alonso's words may be different. Virtually everything that Alonso and his party have experienced on the island, before their encounter, has been described as "strange." The Neapolitan King, in particular, has succumbed to the island's strangeness more than the rest of the newcomers: over a third of the twenty-eight mentions of the word are uttered by him or by others in reference to him, including Ariel's taunting and enigmatic words, sung for Ferdinand, about how his father "doth suffer a sea-change/ into something rich and strange" (I.2. 400-1). Alonso does indeed grow "strange," as Ariel foretells, but in the sense of becoming increasingly estranged from reality, however approximately such a term might apply to the illusory settings and events of *The Tempest*. By the end of the play, Alonso is lavishing the attribute of "strange" on almost everything that happens around him. After finding the boatswain alive and learning about the ship's safe landing ashore, he (understandably) remarks that "[t]hese are not natural events; they strengthen/ From strange to stranger" (V.1. 228-9). Immediately after, having learned the boatswain's account of the crew's rescue, he repeats, "This is as strange a maze as e'er

men trod" (V.1. 242). He is so transfixed by the island's magic apparitions and unexpected turns of events, that at one point, Gonzalo is lead to inquire, "I'th'name of something holy, sir, why stand you/ In this strange stare?" (III.3. 94-5). The seemingly absent-minded beginning of Alonso's response — "O, it is monstrous, monstrous!" (III.3. 96) — falls back on another concept, that of monstrosity, which, like the words "brave" and "strange," signals the reaction to an overwhelming degree of alterity and impenetrability. As the events of the play are being unravelled for the understanding of Alonso and the other newcomers, Prospero himself, with a note of apprehension towards the King's unshakeable bafflement, reassuringly tells him, "Sir, my liege/ Do not infest your mind with beating on/ The strangeness of this business" (V.1. 246-7). Later, just before the play's close and Prospero's final entreaty, Alonso still has not relinquished his slightly comical state of confusion, and as he asks Prospero to hear the story of his life, he adds, "must/ Take the ear strangely" (V.1. 313-4).

Shipwrecked on Prospero's (or rather, Caliban's) island, the King of Naples reacts to his surroundings with a sense of wonder that, at times, seems to replicate that of most European travellers to the 'New World', who, like Alonso in Act III, Scene 3, were often at loss with words to describe their sights and experiences. It is under these circumstances and in such a state of estrangement that Alonso refers to Caliban as being the strangest "thing" he has even set his eyes on. Even if we were to ignore Alonso's heightened perception of alterity at the moment of his remark, a glance at some early modern travelogues will offer a clue as to what, in Europe, Shakespeare's contemporaries considered to be "a strange a thing as e'er [they] looked on," and how they dealt with it in their descriptions. Jean de Léry, a French traveller to Brazil in 1557-8, reputed by some to be one of the most capable reporters of the 'New World' for his "unusual capacity for putting himself in the position of a European who has never crossed the Atlantic and is forced to envisage the New World from travellers'

accounts" (Elliott, 22), thus describes a member of the Tupinamba people in his *Voyage fait en la Terre du Bresil*: "[i]magine in your mind a naked, well-formed and well-proportioned man, with all the hair on his body plucked out… his lips and cheeks pierced by pointed bones or green stones, pendants hanging from his pierced years, his body painted… his thighs and legs blackened with dye" (qtd in Elliott, 22). Here, Léry does indeed produce a realistic portrait, without falling back on the categories of the "strange" or the "monstrous" which so often were employed to signify an unassimilable degree of difference. He explicitly states that the Brazilian natives were "not taller, fatter, or smaller in stature than we Europeans are; their bodies are neither monstrous, nor prodigious with respect to ours" (Léry, 56) — a specification that implicitly points at the general tendency to categorize 'exotic' natives precisely as "monstrous" or "prodigious." Eventually, however, even Léry renounces his descriptive enterprise, claiming the total alterity of the Tupinamba as his reason for doing so: "Their gestures and countenances are so different from ours, that I confess my difficulty in representing them in words, or even in pictures. So, to enjoy the real pleasure of them, you will have to go and visit them in their country" (qtd in Elliott, 22). Perhaps, with his insistence on the notion of strangeness, Alonso echoes a pattern which "seems constantly to recur in the European response [to the 'New World']. It is as if, at a certain point, the mental shutters come down; as if, with so much to see and absorb and understand, (...) Europeans retreat to the half-light of their traditional mental world" (14). With this, I do not mean to suggest that Caliban was necessarily supposed to look like an indigenous inhabitant of the Americas: as critics before me have tirelessly noted, the play's text hardly leaves us with a single, coherent idea. What it does leave us with, after we accept Caliban's alterity or 'strangeness', whatever it may have been, is the tangle of discordant names and definitions spoken by the other characters in reference to him. If, as if from a distance, we observe this linguistic mass without riddling ourselves about the mystery of what Shakespeare had in

mind for Caliban's physical appearance (which, during the play's original performance, would have been apparent), a rhetorical disproportion stands out, rather than a physical one.

Conclusion

What does the newcomers' incessant name-calling, assessing and defining to which Caliban is subjected tell us? It signals, I believe, a struggling epistemic and linguistic experience on the speaker's part — something to which, after all, Trinculo, Stephano, and Alonso, all admit. As with Carletti's banana, the greater the unfamiliarity of the thing observed, the more numerous the familiar terms one has to conjure in order to illustrate each aspect of it. The epistemic challenge would have been even greater for an early modern reader of travel narratives — someone who, like Shakespeare, had never been to the 'New World' or any other faraway shore where novelties and "rarities" were sighted, and had scarcely any empirical reference to support the visualization of the "marketable" items which the travellers attempted to relate, but for which they lacked a precise lexicon. It would be difficult for many twenty-first century readers to experience something similar to the degree of novelty and "wonder" perceived by someone in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, whether European or native American, upon first encountering a previously unknown Other, be it a landscape or a person — perhaps impossible. The same goes for the sense of mystery and puzzlement a reader of travel literature might have felt, as he or she attempted to piece together the appearance of the unknown lands and peoples described in the marvelous reports. Today, our enormous consumption of images and data has acquainted us, if even superficially, with countless aspects of the world's diversity, and most doubts of empirical nature can be resolved at an unprecedented velocity: the solution, for those who have access to the internet, is almost always available a few seconds away, listed, catalogued, explained, and, most importantly, photographed. As I read Hariot's *Briefe and True Report*, for example, any uncertainty or curiosity about the appearance of a given item was immediately satisfied through a quick search. Somewhat ironically, instead, to read *The Tempest*'s text as I had

initially done, trying to grasp Caliban's nature or appearance, was to involuntarily replicate the experience of an early modern reader of travelogues, who tries to piece together the approximate or incongruent elements of a description, while the item described disappears behind the folds of language. Only once I realized my own epistemological struggle with *The Tempest*'s text did I begin to notice how, like the voyagers on unfamiliar lands, the shipwrecked characters on the island are at fault with words to describe what they see. I have not gained an insight on Caliban's origins or "meaning," as Miranda puts it. But what began as a failed attempt to 'see' him, I hope, has helped me to more lucidly consider the gaze and language of those around him.

The Tempest's first contact subplots — such as the meeting of Ferdinand with Miranda, or of Trinculo and Stephano with Caliban — portray different outcomes in the encounter with the Other. If Ferdinand and Miranda are allowed a happy resolution, it is perhaps largely due to the immediate discovery of their cultural identity, which, after the initial surprise, removes the question of alterity from their shared narrative. Caliban, instead whether due to his deformity, racialization or some other perceived "strangeness," remains invariably Other throughout the play, which, near the end, sees Antonio and the other courtiers replicating the same questions, exclamations, epithets and misrecognitions that had earlier been produced by Stephano and Trinculo in regards to the islander. Just like the early modern travellers who reached the 'New World' and compiled long lists of "marchantable commodities" (Hariot, 9) to be obtained from the land, the newcomers' perspective is inclined to objectify the landscape and people they come across. Hence, Gonzalo assesses the quality of the land and fantasizes about establishing a plantation on the island, while Trinculo and Stephano immediately understand Caliban as a possible source of profit, were he to be successfully shipped back to Europe, as had been the case of Epenow, a Nauset man kidnapped from Martha's Vineyard and exhibited in England in the early seventeenth

century. On top of this attitude, which, plagued as it was by the unscrupulous pursuit of profit, rarely allowed for disinterested interactions with the people encountered, the early modern traveller's approach to the lands 'discovered' is hindered in a more elemental way by the linguistic and epistemological difficulty in the assimilation of the unfamiliar, which is either approximately fit into familiar categories of knowledge, or cast into a realm of total alterity. He is indeed "an eyewitness who (...) experiences a continuous crisis over his own language and classical rhetoric, often no longer capable of describing the new with words that can faithfully translate what is inexistent in the land and the culture he comes from (Fortunati, 11). *The Tempest*, by having Caliban speak some of the most touchingly humane and well-ordained verses of the entire Shakespearean oeuvre while other characters struggle to find a single satisfying term to define him, may point to the "crisis" in which 'New World' travellers incurred — a linguistic and epistemological one, even before a moral one.

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