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Final Thesis

**An Ecomusicological Analysis of  
Shakespeare's  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
and *The Tempest***

**Supervisor**  
Prof. Shaul Bassi

**Assistant supervisor**  
Prof. Ofer Gazit

**Graduand**  
Francesca Zordan  
Matriculation number  
877290

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## Introduction

The last year of my master's degree has been affected by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has been and still is the cause of devastating health, economic, psychological, and social issues for humans worldwide. As an English literature student, it occurred to me to think that several writers like Chaucer and Defoe recorded epidemics and that humankind has already faced it several times, even if it is a new experience for the last human generations. However, this pandemic distinguishes itself from the previous ones because it has shown humanity how much the ecosystem is suffering due to the global polluting carbon economy and how it is vital to slow down our activities to let the environment start breathing again. During the first lockdown period, many newspapers reported how animals worldwide were beginning to occupy urban areas, and it was widespread to hear people notice the pleasantness of convoluted and mesmerising birdsongs substituting the cacophony of cars and industries. Humans had the unique opportunity to feel an intrinsic nostalgia when listening to the sounds of the environment, which dates back to the primitive times when the sounds of the ecosystem were their only acoustic source to create their own cultures (Krause) and to choose what directions and decisions to take.

This renewed attention towards the ecosystemic sounds should be amplified by arts and sciences because, far from being just a pleasurable pastime, it permits a deeper understanding of and co-presence in the current environmental crisis. Soundscape ecologist Bernie Krause has recorded the voices of more than fifteen thousand animal species in their natural habitats. He has noticed that more than fifty per cent of the ones recorded fifty years ago are no longer to be heard now in their original form because of

the modifications that humans have effectuated on the environment and the consequent mass extinctions of animals. Even when the eye cannot perceive the gravity of the damage brought about by logging and agricultural companies, spectrograms can still clearly show how much the acoustic density has diminished, as in Lincoln Meadow's case. In this Californian area, local people were assured that selective logging would not have brought about any environmental damage. Still, the land lost its soundscape density and variety at a later time (TED). As ecologist Robert Ewers asserts, "cutting down trees doesn't kill a bird directly. It takes a lot of time for those birds to actually die. They're all crammed into the habitat that's left. Then gradually you'll have this increased mortality" (Thompson).

However, if the songs of birds have so enchanted us during the lockdown period, it means that we are far from noticing such silences and that we are in urgent need of what Smith defines "a cultural poetics of listening" (8), which "does not allow us the secure detachment that vision does. [...] Listening is accepting presence—and not being apologetic about it" (10). Unlike vision, which situates objects "out there" (Smith 10), sounds enter and reverberate inside our bodies, and break the ontological distinction between ourselves and the world, leaving us no choice but to be co-present. Using as an example a recording taken by Krause, it would make a pitiful sight to see a picture of a downhearted beaver that has come back to its den to find its mate and newborn offspring dead because some humans killed them with dynamite just for sport, but we cannot avoid feeling its grief when we listen to its mournful cry<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>To listen to the cry of the beaver recorded by Bernie Krause: FORA.tv. (2009). *Do Animals Grieve for the Dead?* [Video]. Youtube. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5uzpLXrQx0>

Ecomusicology is a multi-perspectival field that aims at developing such cultural poetics of listening to the environment and thrives on collaborations between humanities, sound studies, and environmental sciences. As Allen explains,

The suffix “-ology” means “study of,” and indeed ecomusicology is a field of study (rather than, say, of performance); the central “-music-” provides the object of our study, but we must acknowledge that this complex term relating to sound has many contested meanings due, perhaps, to its English roots (originally from Greek via Latin and French) meaning products of the nine Muses; and the prefix “eco-” [...] rather than as “ecological,” [...] is better understood as “eco-critical,” referring to ecological criticism, which is the critical study of literary and other artistic products in relation to the environment [...] (2).

In other words, ecomusicology could be defined as “the study of music, culture, and nature” (Allen 1), but only if these three keywords are meant to be explored rather than defined, with the purpose of deconstructing noxious binaries that alienate ourselves from the world of sounds we are part of. Music and culture are not only human, and nature is not something different from us or from the things we produce. For this reason, “ecomusicology can offer fresh approaches to confronting old problems in music and culture via a socially engaged scholarship that connects them with environmental concerns” (Allen 11).

This paper aims at contributing to this field of study by offering an ecomusicological analysis of two works by Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (ca. 1595) and *The Tempest* (ca. 1610). Why Shakespeare? Because in these two works, he has managed to fuse theatre, music, and the environment, creating two ecomusicological pieces par excellence. These plays have not only been selected because of the acoustic richness of their soundscapes, being *A Midsummer Night's*

*Dream* set in a wood during a summer night, and *The Tempest* on a “magical island” created “out of sheer sound” (Vaughan in Shakespeare 2011 : 19), but also because their structures reflect the concord of the harmony of the spheres, the ancient Greek theory that assumed that the movements of the planets produced celestial music. This topic will be dealt with in the first chapter of this paper, drawing from the thought of Pythagoras and the most influential musical theories of the early modern period.

Furthermore, Shakespeare makes us reflect on the connection between body and place, which can be created through sounds. The second chapter will discuss how the characters’ bodies reverberate with the sounds of the wood and of the island and, in their turn, mark the soundscapes with their voices.

Shakespearean works also explore the linkage between noise and ecophobia, or the fear of the environment. Written in a period marked by unstable weather, famines, epidemics, and floods, the sounds of these plays represent the widespread terror towards the unpredictability of the environment and climate change, which, as Borlik states, “is not a modern phenomenon” (22). The third part of this dissertation will then focus on dissonances and noises linked to predators, climatic disruptions, goblins, and the sea.

And again, why Shakespeare for ecomusicology? Because he creates an interesting link between anthropocentrism, colonialism, and the abuse of the power of music. The fourth chapter of this thesis will thus investigate music as a means of power and control over people and the environment, focusing on Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban from *The Tempest*.

However, *The Tempest* also reminds its audience that everybody will disappear into the air just like music and that human hierarchies will become meaningless. Both plays link the human and non-human worlds through sounds, which penetrate all bodies

and matter without discrimination. The result is an idea of nature that is “worth wanting” (Titon 170) because it is not something different from us but makes us participants in all the other living beings’ lives. In this light, this dissertation also aims at providing a possible positive response to the question Borlik has posed: “Given Amitav Ghosh’s complaint that the contemporary realist novel seems inadequate to tackle the moral tragedy of climate change, can Renaissance genres (such as tragedy, comedy, choreography, romance, utopia, or fable) furnish — by virtue of their different foci, shifting time-scales, or greater poetic licence — better alternatives?” (9).

# 1

## The Harmony of the Scenes

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* are works particularly apt for an ecomusicological analysis because they do not consider music a mere human cultural product but celebrate it as the daughter of the universe, the result of the movement of the planets. In the early modern period, Neoplatonism rekindled the public interest in the ancient Greek theory of *musica universalis*, according to which “all planets move around the earth at constant speeds following orbits which obey the same numerical relationships as the scale, and giving off a sound” (Proust 358).

This thought originated from Pythagoras's study of the harmonics of the open string of the lyre: he found that by hitting it at the center (hence at a ratio of 1:1), the note produced was an octave higher than the fundamental of the open string, whereas by hitting it at a ratio of 1:2, the sound emitted was a fifth higher. He believed that such ratios reflected the ones among the spheres, namely the orbits around which the planets revolved. At the very centre of these orbits was the Earth, which was believed to be stationary. Scholar Franchinus Gaffurius well illustrated this conception of the cosmos in his *Practica Musicae* (1496), whose frontispiece shows the planets in ascending order, clarifying the musical intervals among them: Moon, Mercurius, Venus, Sun,

Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, with the firmament at the top (Figure 1). As Hawkins explains,

The positions of the planets were thought to be related to the velocity at which the planets moved through the ether. The firmament moved the fastest so it was assigned to the double octave. The sun was thought to be midway between the Earth and the firmament, so it was assigned to the octave. The outer planets and the firmament were thought to move faster and emit a higher note. (9)

The ancient theory of the music of the spheres also supported that humans could not hear such celestial harmony because of their moral imperfection and limited hearing skills, which is very different from today's widespread assumption that music is a human cultural product. Shakespeare believed in this time-honoured thought, as he made Lorenzo state in *The Merchant of Venice* (ca. 1596-8):

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven  
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:  
There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
But in his motion like an angel sings,  
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;  
Such harmony is in immortal souls;  
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(5.1.65-71)

LIBER

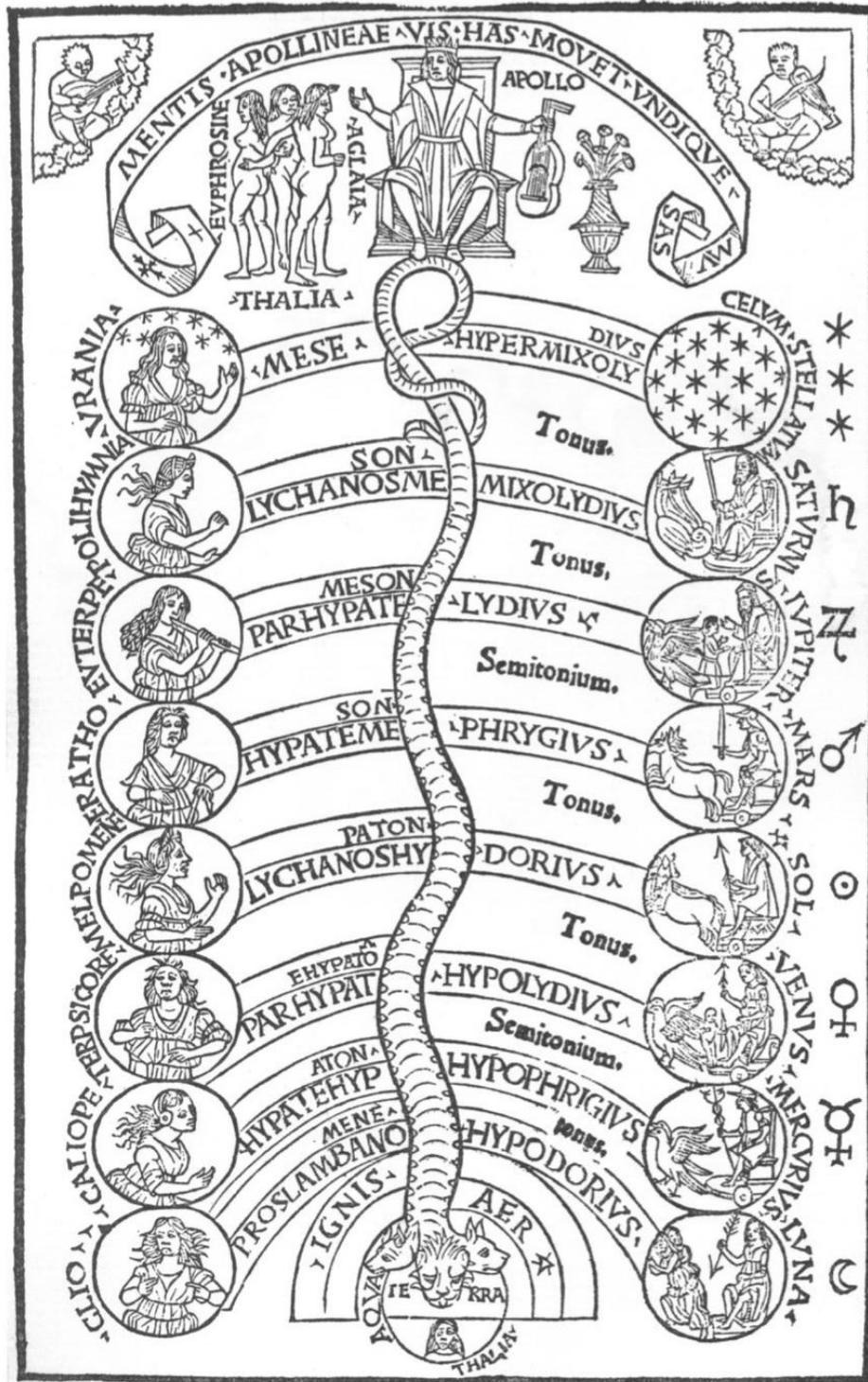


Figure 1. Gaffurius, *Practica Musicae* (1496), frontispiece (Courtesy of University of Chicago Press)

Animals, instead, were thought to be able to hear it, as William Baldwin's satire *Beware the Cat* reports (Smith 30). He imagines how such harmony could be heard by the refined ears of an animal, "ringing out so high above the normal range of human hearing that the lowest of the sounds, that of Saturn, far excelled the highest-pitched bird calls or the wind's whistling or organ pipes."

Even though humankind could not hear it, the harmony of the spheres regulated the whole world and human behaviour. This effect is reflected in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*: the moon, the sun, and planet Jupiter play a fundamental role in the development of the plays and create a "harmony of the scenes." In this way, theatre, music, and the universe fuse together in what could be defined as two ecomusicological pieces par excellence.

### **1.1 The moon and the Hypodorian mode**

The moon regulates the world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, just like she regulates the tides and the weather of the real one. As Spurgeon notices, "the word 'moon' occurs twenty-eight times" in the play, "three and a half times more often than in any other play" (260), and her presence is felt throughout, from the very beginning to the end of the piece. The pronoun "she" is apt to talk about her, as she was conceived as a feminine planet, "the governess of floods" (2.1.103), and the "Empress of the night," as Psalm 104 recites (Borlik 54).

Her centrality in the play is significant because the work dates back to the late 1590s, a period of turbulent weather and altered seasons for Elizabethan England, as Titania reports in act 2, scene 1. Shakespeare remarks on the importance of the

influence of the moon on the world by having her scan the time of the play right from its very start. The first scene begins with Theseus and Hippolyta measuring the time to their wedding, which will coincide with the moon entering her new phase.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night,  
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;  
And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
Now bent in heaven, shall behold the night  
Of our solemnities.

(1.1.1-11)

The whole structure of the play parallels the revolution of the moon, as the action begins and ends in Athens. In the end, three marriages take place, signalling the beginning of a new cycle for the characters, who start their life anew in a different “key” (1.1.18).

However, the play also exemplifies the early modern conception of the moon as a deceitful celestial body due to her “most inconstant face” (Psalm 104). She was believed to be placed at an interval of fourth below the sun (Figure 1), thus playing in the Hypodorian mode, a succession of music intervals which induced man to sleep and lose rational control, but also to “apprehend | More than cool reason ever comprehends” (5.1.5-6). Egeus proves that this was a widespread belief when he blames Lysander to have bewitched his daughter Hermia by singing to her under the moonlight:

This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.  
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes  
And interchanged love-tokens with my child;  
Thou hast, by moonlight, at her window sung,

With faining voice, verses of feigning love,  
And stolen the impression of her fantasy;

(1.1.28-32)

One of the most musical passages of the play is Oberon's remembrance of the melody sung by a mermaid in an atmosphere "quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon" (2.1.162).

My gentle puck, come hither. Thou rememberest  
Since once I sat upon a promontory,  
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath  
That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
To hear the sea-maid's music.

(2.1.148-54)

In this passage, the reference to *musica universalis* is evident: the song of the mermaid, which is heard only by Oberon — he uses the pronoun "I" instead of "we" — has the powerful effect to calm the agitated sea and even to cause stars to fall from their sphere. The moon, which governs tides and floods, is associated with the white noise of the ocean even by Titania, when she remembers how she enjoyed gossiping with her votaress "in the spiced Indian air by night," sitting "on Neptune's yellow sands | Marking th'embarked traders on the flood" (2.1.124-7).

The scope of the whole play seems thus to immerse both the characters and the audience in a lunar soundscape, marked by melodious fairy songs and the soothing sound of insects and snakes:

OBERON

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine.  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight;  
And there the snake throws her enamelled skin,  
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in.

(2.1.249-56)

Moreover, when the fairies sing, they use a musical and ordered short rhymed line, which acts as the verbal equivalent of the harmony of the sphere of the moon. Its use, then, “reminds us that they belong to another world and are magically intervening in the action” (Chaudhuri in Shakespeare 2017 : 111).

FAIRY

Over hill, over dale  
Thorough bush, thorough brier,  
Over park, over pale,  
Thorough flood, thorough fire,  
I do wander everywhere  
Swifter than the moon's sphere,  
And I serve the Fairy Queen  
To dew her orbs upon the green.  
The cowslips tall her pensioners be.  
In their gold coats, spots you see:  
Those be rubies, fairy favours;  
In those freckles live their savours.  
I must go seek some dew drops here,  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

(2.1.2-15)

Hence, the audience is invited to think of the play and the world outside it as a dream, just like it is stressed by the very title of the work and by Puck's final speech:

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended:  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear.  
And this weak and idle theme,  
No more yielding but a dream,  
Gentles, do not reprehend:  
If you pardon, we will mend.

(5.1.413-20)

This is because to dream means to evade reason and logic, which for Shakespeare is the only way to envision “the forms of things unknown” (5.1.15), and perhaps possible explanations and solutions to absurd climatic disruptions and sufferings. Puck finally takes his leave by wishing everybody good night and promising a better performance — hence perchance a better future — to come.

## **1.2 The sun and the Dorian mode**

The previously mentioned Psalm 104 also recites:

Thou mak'st the sun, the chariot-man of light,  
Well know the start and stop of daily race.  
When he doth set, and night his beams deface,  
To roam abroad wood-burgess delight

(Borlik 54)

As a matter of fact, the sun bursts into the play in the seventh scene, defacing the night and bringing relish to the human characters, victims of the fairy drolleries.

In the early modern period, the sun was conceived as a masculine planet (Lilly), and his harmony was supposed to be in the Dorian mode (Figure 1), an interval of fourth, or a *diatessaron*, above the moon. His music is thus “conductive to sober reason, good government, stability of soul, and chastity” (Song 148). As reported in Haar, “the moon is Hypodorian, the sun Dorian. From this it is clear that the moon increases phlegmatic and humid [elements] in man; the sun indeed dries up these elements. Whence these planets, because they are leaders and light-givers, govern the first mode and the second. [...] Therefore the harmony between sun and moon is clear. The latter shines by night, the former flees the night; Hypodorian induces sleep, Dorian expels it. Therefore they harmonize both in situation and in conformity with the consonance of diatessaron” (17).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the sun rises when the four Athenian lovers invoke him four times in 3.2, creating an ascending leap of fourth from the sphere of the moon to the one of the sun with their voices. Lysander and Demetrius beseech him so that they will be able to see each other and start their duel:

LYSANDER

Come, thou gentle day,  
For if but once thou show me thy gray light,  
I'll find Demetrius, and revenge this spite.

(3.2.418-420)

DEMETRIUS

Thou shalt buy this dear  
If ever I thy face by daylight see;

Now go thy way. Faintless constraineth me  
To measure out my length on this could bed.  
By day's approach look to be visited.

(3.2.426-430)

Soon afterwards, Helena, who feels miserable and wants to go back to Athens, solemnly addresses the sun as a god, thus referring to Apollo, the Greek god of sun and music:

HELENA

O weary night, O long and tedious night,  
Abate thy hours. Shine, comforts, from the east,  
That I may back to Athens by daylight  
From these that my poor company detest;

(3.2.431-434)

Yet to reach the *diatessaron*, the fourth note is needed, as Puck remarks as well: "Yet but three? Come one more. | Two of both kinds makes up four." (3.2.437-8).  
Hermia then arrives and provides for this last "note:"

HERMIA:

I can no further crawl, no further go;  
My legs can keep no pace with my desires.  
Here will I rest me till the break of day.

(3.2.444-445)

The rising of the sun is announced by the lark, "the herald of the morn," as Shakespeare calls it in *Romeo and Juliet* (3.5.6), "whose notes do beat the vaulty heaven so high above our heads" (3.5.21-2). The wood also resounds with the sharp and

powerful sound of the wind horns of Theseus's train and with the "musical confusion | Of hounds and echo in conjunction" (4.1.109-10). As Smith explains, in the early modern period, the sound of hunting dogs was generally perceived as an enjoyable one, and hunters could choose to pursue their preys following either the eye or the ear. In the dialogue between *The English Courtier, and the Cu[n]trey-gentleman* (Anonymous, 1586), the countryman Vincent explains that "if you would rather haue some Musicke to content your eare, out goes our dogges, our houndes (I should haue saide;) with them wee make a heauenly noise or cry, that would make a dead man reuiue, and run on foote to heare it" (Smith 77).

According to Lilly, the sun "signifieth Kings, Princes, Emperors, and Dukes" (71), and Theseus, the Duke of Athens, in fact awakens the four lovers. However, the harmony produced by the sun is very brief, as it lasts no more than two scenes, just to bring the characters back to their wits and accentuate the limitedness of human reason. As Bottom says:

I have had a most rare vision. I have  
had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it  
was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this  
dream. Methought I was - there is no man can tell  
what. Methought I was — and methought I had — but  
man is but a patched fool if he will offer to say what  
methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the  
ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to  
taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report  
what my dream was.

(4.1.203-212)

### 1.3 Jupiter and the Ionian scale

*The Tempest* is centred around the character of Prospero, the usurped Duke of Milan who has been kidnapped, together with his daughter Miranda, and sent out at sea to die. They have managed to survive thanks to a lucky star, which now, after twelve years, has completed its revolution and is exerting its special influence again. In fact, Prospero raises a turbulent storm at the beginning of the play because

By accident most strange, bountiful fortune  
(Now, my dear lady) hath mine enemies  
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience  
I find my zenith doth depend upon  
A most auspicious star, whose influence  
If now I court not, but omit, my fortunes  
Will ever after droop.

(1.2.178-84)

The celestial body that takes twelve years to complete its revolution is planet Jupiter, which, in early modern astrology, was considered to be

a Diurnall, Masculine Planet, Temperately Hot and Moyst, Aiery, Sanguine, the greater Fortune, author of Temperance, Modesty, Sobriety, Justice. [...] Then is he Magnanimous, Faithfull, Bashfull, Aspiring in an honourable way at high matters, [...] Liberal, hating all Sordid actions, Just, Wise, Prudent, Thankfull, Vertuous. (Lilly 62)

Throughout the play, there are many veiled allusions to this planet. In addition to “bountiful fortune” (1.2.178) present in the quotation above, Jupiter is referred to as

“providence divine” (1.2.159), “kind event” (3.1.69), “bashful cunning” (3.1.81), and “plain and holy innocence” (3.1.82), but also as “Mountain,” “Silver,” “Fury,” and “Tyrant” (4.1.255-7), reminding of Prometheus’s description of the Greek god Jupiter as “the tyrant who sits on the mountain top” (Baldwin), as well as of the Silver age, which started with his reign, and of his fierce thunderbolts, which dominate the opening scene. Moreover, “unicorns” (3.3.22), which are among his sacred animals (Lily 64), are believed to be seen by Sebastian, and the very name of the central character, Prospero, means fortunate. Prospero also seems to have a Jupiterian dual personality: he is both bounteous and autocrat, capable of controlling, benefiting, yet also hurting all the other characters in the play.

According to Greek modal theory, planet Jupiter plays in the Lydian mode, having the “grace of the octave, and also the quinte, viz. the Diapason with the Diapente” (Agrippa 259), yet the two surviving scores written for *The Tempest* by Robert Johnson, *Full Fathom Five* and *Where the Bee Sucks*, are in the Ionian mode. This is because at the Blackfriars, Shakespeare started working together with professional musicians and composers, like Robert Johnson, who was acquainted with the most influential musical theories of the period, like the one of Glareanus: in his *Dodecachordon* (1547), this scholar acknowledged that the Lydian mode was rarely performed in its pure form, as singers turned “all its songs into the Ionian by substituting *fa* for *mi* on the B key” (Glareanus 166). For this reason, he considered it as an “urgent necessity” (Glareanus 166) to change the Lydian mode into the Ionian, in which the fourth degree of the scale is lowered of a semitone. In this way, instead of performing the Lydian mode in an imperfect way, a “more natural” (Glareanus 167) and practical one was established. It is worth noting that the transition from the Lydian to

the Ionian mode signalled an important ideological change in the early modern period: practice started to become the way to make theory, and “what had seemed merely a casual performance practice [was] elevated to the status of a real differentiation in mode and sound quality” (Fuller 213).

Prospero, acting like a music director, guides all the events of the play in attunement with the Ionian scale in order to pursue his project: he wants his brother Antonio to give him back the Dukedom of Milan, and his daughter Miranda to meet Ferdinand, the Prince of Naples, so that they can fall in love, get married, and start a lineage that will rule over both Naples and Milan.

The Ionian scale consists of seven notes following the pattern tone, tone, semitone, tone, tone, tone, semitone. The first note is called tonic, and it sets the name of the scale because it is the point of reference for the succession of all the other notes. For example, if the first note is C, the scale is called C Ionian or C major. In the play, the first scene stages a tempest, and indeed the title of the whole work is *The Tempest*. Shakespeare and Johnson made sure to render it momentous, by staging a “shocking, tragic, and awe-inspiring moment” in the “enclosed space of the Blackfriars,” which “began to reverberate the roaring of the sea and the thunderbolts, opening the play with an intensity unattainable in an outdoor theatre” (Pascucci 150). The agent of this thunderstorm is Ariel, an airy spirit who serves Prospero and who describes his work with a specific reference to Jove, the Roman name of god Jupiter:

I boarded the King’s ship: now on the beak,  
Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin  
I flamed amazement. 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; the mighty Neptune  
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,  
Yea, his dread trident shake.

(1.2.196-206)

This description, together with the already mentioned Prospero's explanation of why he raised the storm, is delivered in the second scene of the play, which corresponds to the supertonic, the second note of the musical scale. It is called in this way just because it is a tone above the tonic, and in fact, the correspondent scene sees Prospero and his daughter Miranda looking at the storm from a distance. Furthermore, it also stages Ferdinand arriving ashore, led by Ariel's music, which he finds as harmonious as he has never heard before. The fact that he perceives it as creeping by him "upon the waters" (1.2.392) makes it possible to identify a further connection between the Ionian mode and the Ionian sea, a bay of the Mediterranean sea, in which the island of the play could be located. As reported in Stanivukovic, "though the critical interest in *The Tempest* has enabled criticism of Atlantic travel, most Renaissance travel plays are set in the Mediterranean and 'move east, towards the Middle East' " (172). Ferdinand and Miranda immediately fall in love with each other, but Prospero feels the need to delay their union and not let it be a "swift business" (1.2.451). As a matter of fact, no sooner than the fifth scene will they be able to exchange their vows.

The third degree of the scale is named the mediant, as it is midway between the two most important notes, namely the tonic and the dominant (fifth degree). It sets the cheerful or sad mood of the scale since it can form a major or minor third with the tonic note, which respectively result in an Ionian or Aeolian scale. As a matter of fact, the

third scene of the play sees Antonio (Prospero's brother) and Sebastian (Alonso's brother) discussing the latter's opportunity to become king of Naples if they murder Alonso while he is sleeping. They believe that prince Ferdinand has drowned and that Sebastian is Alonso's closest male kin that can succeed him. As they get ready to kill him, the invisible Ariel enters, waking up the honest Gonzalo (Alonso's councillor) with his music so as to stop them:

ARIEL

My master through his art foresees the danger  
That you, his friend, are in, and sends me forth  
(For else his project dies) to keep them living.

While you here do snoring lie,

*Sings in Gonzalo's ear*

Open-eyed conspiracy

His time doth take.

If of life you keep a care,

Shake off slumber and beware.

Awake, awake!

(2.1.298-306)

In fact, if Alonso gets murdered, it would become an Aeolian scale or, in theatrical terms, a tragedy. The fact that Ariel's intervention has been fundamental for the development of the plot is reiterated at the end of the scene:

ARIEL

Prospero, my lord, shall know what I have done;

So, King, go safely on to seek thy son.

(2.1.327-8)

The fourth degree is the one that determined the change from the Lydian to the Ionian mode explained before. In the musical scale, it is called subdominant, as it is a dominant (five degrees) below the tonic, but also because it is one step below the dominant (the fifth degree above the tonic). In the fourth scene of the play, neither Ariel nor his fellow spirits appear, yet some other mock singers are on stage, namely Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are drunk and sing scurvy songs. This scene seems to mock the transition from the divine Lydian to the human Ionian mode, whose representatives are these three “varlets” (4.1.170). They will appear on stage again in the sixth and eighth scenes, forming a triad that in music is called a subdominant chord, namely the chord formed by the fourth, sixth, and eighth notes of the scale. The scenes are then placed into a meaningful succession that creates harmonic syntax inside the play. The appearance of these three actors and their comedic conspiracy against Prospero will be resolved in the eighth scene when they will be humorously hunted away by four dog spirits.

Afterwards, one of the most harmonious moments of the work comes, which is Miranda and Ferdinand’s betrothal. Indeed it happens in the fifth scene, which corresponds to the dominant note of the musical scale, bearing this name because it is its second most important note after the tonic. In fact, their union is crucial since it will restore every character’s rightful place and bring happiness and love to the boy and girl’s life. The fifth grade is also part of two fundamental chords: firstly, it is the third note of the tonic chord, consisting of the first, third, and fifth degrees. It is possible to link Miranda and Ferdinand’s advantageous betrothal to the storm that Prospero raised in the first scene to make the Neapolitans arrive on the island, and to the issue of Alonso’s succession discussed by Antonio and Sebastian in the third one: in fact,

Ferdinand is not only alive but has also found a bride, something that he could not do while he was in Naples:

FERDINAND

Full many a lady  
I have eyed with best regard, and many a time  
Th' harmony of their tongues hath into bondage  
Brought my too diligent ear. For several virtues  
Have I liked several women; never any  
With so full soul but some defect in her  
Did quarrel with the noblest grace she owed  
And put it to the foil. But you, O you,  
So perfect and so peerless, are created  
Of every creature's best<sup>2</sup>.

(3.1.39-48)

Furthermore, the fifth degree of the scale is the first note of the Dominant chord, which links this scene with the seventh and the ninth ones. For this reason, Prospero concludes this scene by saying:

So glad of this as they I cannot be,  
Who are surprised withal, but my rejoicing  
At nothing can be more. I'll to my book,  
For yet ere supertime must I perform  
Much business appertaining.

(3.1.92-6)

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<sup>2</sup> This might be a further reference to god Jupiter, as a fable from Sydney's *Arcadia* tells about him creating man by mixing together the best qualities of all the other animal creatures.

The sixth note of the musical scale is the submediant, as it is the third degree below the tonic. It finds a parallel in the sixth scene of this play (3.2), which sees the three drunkards, Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, deciding to organise a mock conspiracy against Prospero, as Antonio and Sebastian did against King Alonso in the third scene (2.1). Ariel appears to render their plot even more ridiculous: he imitates Trinculo's voice to make Caliban angry and the audience amused. Afterwards, the spirit leads them astray by playing a tabor and a pipe to delay their assault until the eighth scene.

The seventh degree is the leading-tone, which is a dissonant interval as it is just a semitone below the tonic and needs to be resolved on it. In the seventh scene of the play (3.3), the Neapolitans are first amazed by the appearance of various strange spirits, which bring in a banquet, and then frightened by the noisy entrance of Ariel in the shape of a harpy, who berates them for having supplanted Prospero in the past and states that "The powers delaying, not forgetting, have | Incensed the seas and shores—yea, all the creatures—| Against [their] peace" (3.3.73-5). Then Ariel and all the spirits disappear, carrying away the banquet. The Italians are left alone and desperate for their guilt, which is the necessary step towards repentance and forgiveness, as it will happen in the following scene.

Finally, the eighth note of the scale is the octave, the tonic note at its double frequency, the Diapason. Its interval with the tonic consists of twelve semitones, which parallel the twelve years of Jupiter's cycle to return to its original position in the cosmos. It is a pleasant-sounding and stable note, constituting the destination point of the whole scale. In *The Tempest*, the eighth scene (4.1) stages Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage and the wondrous celestial Masque performed by Ceres, Iris, and Juno, who

represent the cosmic harmony of the elements. Prospero expresses the necessity for this spectacle to happen by telling Ariel:

I must use you  
In such another trick. Go bring the rabble  
(O'er whom I give thee power) here to this place.  
Incite them to quick motion, for I must  
Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple  
Some vanity of mine art. It is my promise,  
And they expect it from me.

(4.1.36-42)

The musical stability of the octave is here required by the harmonic syntax pursued by the play, and it is deeply enjoyed by Ferdinand, who exclaims:

Let me live here ever!  
So rare a wondered father and a wise  
Makes this place paradise

(4.1.122-4)

The goddesses' show is made perfect by the delightful dance of spirits in the shape of reapers and nymphs, representing fertility and harmony. Moreover, as Berghaus asserts, "the harmonious and orderly motions in dance are related to the concord of the heavenly spheres and obey in their rhythmic structure the same numerical principles" (45).

However, the eighth scene is also part of the subdominant chord, which needs to be resolved. Suddenly, Prospero remembers Caliban's conspiracy and interrupts the dance, leaving Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess together. The intrigue is concluded

humorously, namely with the pleasant barks of the dog spirits that chase Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, amusing Prospero, Ariel, and the whole audience:

ARIEL

Hark, they roar!

PROSPERO

Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour

Lies at my mercy all mine enemies.

(4.1.261-3)

Yet the play is not meant to end on the octave: it also has a ninth scene (5.1) which, together with the fifth and seventh ones, forms a dominant chord. Ferdinand, although very joyful for having found Miranda as his wife, is still grieved for the alleged loss of his father (3.1) and, what is more, Prospero's plan cannot be fulfilled if the boy does not come back to Italy and is recognised as a future king. For what concerns his father Alonso, at the end of the seventh scene (3.3), he is left brokenhearted as well because he thinks that his "son i'th' ooze is bedded" (3.3.100).

Therefore, in the ninth scene, Prospero traces a magic circle on the ground, inside which Ariel drives all the characters of the play, one group by one, as if they were different instrumental sections of an orchestra. The first group consists of King Alonso, together with Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio, Adrian and Francisco; after having forgiven them, Prospero uncovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess, and thus father and son can meet each other again and get happily reunited. At this point, Prospero's project is made clear to the audience through Gonzalo's words:

Was Milan thrust from Milan that his issue  
Should become kings of Naples? O, rejoice  
Beyond a common joy, and set it down  
With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage  
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis;  
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife  
Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom  
In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves,  
When no man was his own.

(5.1.205-13)

The second group is the master and the boatswain: they say that the ship is “tight and yare and bravely rigged as when | We first put out to sea” (5.1.224-5), so that they can safely navigate back to Naples on the following day; the third group sees Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are forgiven as well.

This circle brings together, including Ariel, twelve characters who are under Prospero’s control and parallel the twelve halftones of the Ionian scale. When it is complete, Prospero says:

I’ll deliver all,  
And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales  
And sail so expeditious that shall catch  
Your royal fleet far off. [*aside to Ariel*] My Ariel, chick,  
That is thy charge. Then to the elements  
Be free, and fare thou well!

(5.1.314-19)

Music is then released to the environment, and in particular, its secret power is given back to the sea, as Prospero promised before tracing the circle:

But this rough magic  
I here abjure; and when I have required  
Some heavenly music (which even now I do)  
To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book.

(5.1.50-7)

However, a musical composition cannot end on a dominant chord, as it would remain suspended. It needs to be resolved on the tonic chord, which was a storm in the case of this play. As a matter of fact, at the very end of the show Prospero, who does not have musical powers anymore, directly addresses the audience begging for applause, which proves to be fundamental for the completion of his project:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true  
I must be here confined by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell;  
But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands.

Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please.

(Epilogue.1-13)

As the loud applause of the public will bear an acoustic resemblance to the initial storm, the harmony will be resolved on the tonic, or, in other terms, it will function as a gentle wind that pushes the characters back home.

This chapter has discussed the ancient theory of *musica universalis* and its possible reflection in the structures of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. *Musica universalis* is the music produced by the movement of the planets, which exerts a special influence on living beings on Earth, although human ears cannot hear it. Accordingly, the perfect harmony of *musica universalis* seems to underlie the organisation of the scenes of the two plays as well: in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the presence of the moon and the sun is marked by allusions to the Hypodorian and Dorian modes, while the structure of *The Tempest* reverberates the intervals of the Ionian scale, as related to planet Jupiter. These correspondences are so precise that they seem not to be merely coincidental and instead demonstrate the author's keen attention and admiration towards the musicality of the environment and the cosmos.

# 2

## Sound, Body, and Place

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* make the particular environments of the wood and the island come to life in all their energy and vitality more than any other Shakespearean play, as Cless points out. They are the richest in natural images and other-than-human actants, who actively participate in the events of the plays and mediate human vicissitudes. Far from being constrained into the conventions of the pastoral genre, the natural worlds of the two plays are empowered with their own agency and interact with the human characters with their own voice.

One of the reasons for the enduring popularity of these two plays is the centripetal force with which the human characters and the audience are drawn inside the non-human world. This happens mainly through sounds, which help characters find their bearings in places where sight is hindered and let them interact and create an emotional bond with the environment. In fact, sounds act as mediators between bodies and places in a way that vision does not. As Smith asserts,

Sound immerses me in the world: it is there and here, in front of me and behind me, above me and below me. Sound moves into presence and moves out of presence: it gives me reference points for situating myself in space and time. Sound subsumes me: it is continuously present, pulsing within my body,

penetrating my body from without, filling my perceptual world to the very horizons of hearing. (9-10)

The present chapter will focus on the interaction between body and place mediated by sounds as presented in the two plays, which could inspire today's audience to rekindle their attention towards the soundscapes which surround us. Schafer has coined the term *soundscape* to indicate the acoustic equivalent of a landscape, namely a set of sounds that make up the identity of a specific place. Every wood, island, shore, and mountain has its own particular sounds, which also signal the state of health of the environment. As long as attention to sounds precedes care and protection, plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* are of great environmental value since they encourage the audience to reflect on aspects of the world that might go unnoticed.

In Shakespeare's time, the soundscapes of the wood and the island of the two plays were amplified by the unique acoustics of theatres like the Globe and the Blackfriars, whose architecture made them sound like great sounding boards. The first paragraph of this chapter will highlight this aspect to contextualise the following sounds and better understand their effect on the audience.

Afterwards, four kinds of sounds will be analysed, which constitute an acoustic continuum between the human and the non-human worlds: place-words are human words that are used to chant the beauty and the peculiarity of the environment and stimulate the attention towards its most hidden and distinctive aspects, which need to receive protection and care; pre-linguistic sounds draw humans closer to other living beings, as well as instrumental music, with which we can convey less specific meanings, yet having at our disposal a more expansive repertoire of possibilities;

finally, ambient sounds are the sounds of the environment, which eloquently speaks to the human world with its various voices, rhythms, and intensities.

## **2.1 The acoustics inside the Globe and the Blackfriars**

In the early modern period, theatres were privileged among all the other performance venues, because they were conceived as huge instruments that could amplify, shape, and propagate sound in a unique way. They could create a dense acoustic environment that could detach the audience from the city and immerse them in a different world. As Smith asserts,

Evidence that theatres were thought about as sound-devices is not hard to come by. For special occasions it was common for large households—schools, colleges, the inns of court, the court of the realm—to erect temporary theaters inside an existing hall. [...] Not only a stage, but galleries for spectators were part of the structure, made out of marked timbers that were dismantled and stored away at the end of each season. [...] Its multiple planes and all-wood construction would have provided richer resonance than the masonry room itself. [...] Theoretical justification for such structures, if any were needed, could be found in Vitruvius, who designed the ideal theaters in *De Architectura* first and foremost around sound. [...] A Vitruvian theater could be played by the actors as if it were a musical instrument. (206-7)

The Globe and the Blackfriars theatres were the two main venues in which *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* were performed. Thus, they were the instruments on which Shakespeare's company could play, each having their own peculiar acoustics.

As Smith explains, the Globe was a twenty-sided polygon that might have offered a listening space of 231,028 cubic feet, a value that exceeds modern standards. Its twenty reflecting surfaces created a reverberant acoustic environment, even more so because they were made of wood, producing short, but harmonically rich vibrations. The interplay of sound waves made them converge at the centre of the auditorium, as shown in Figure 2, which offers a side view of the theatre, and Figure 3, which is a top view of it.

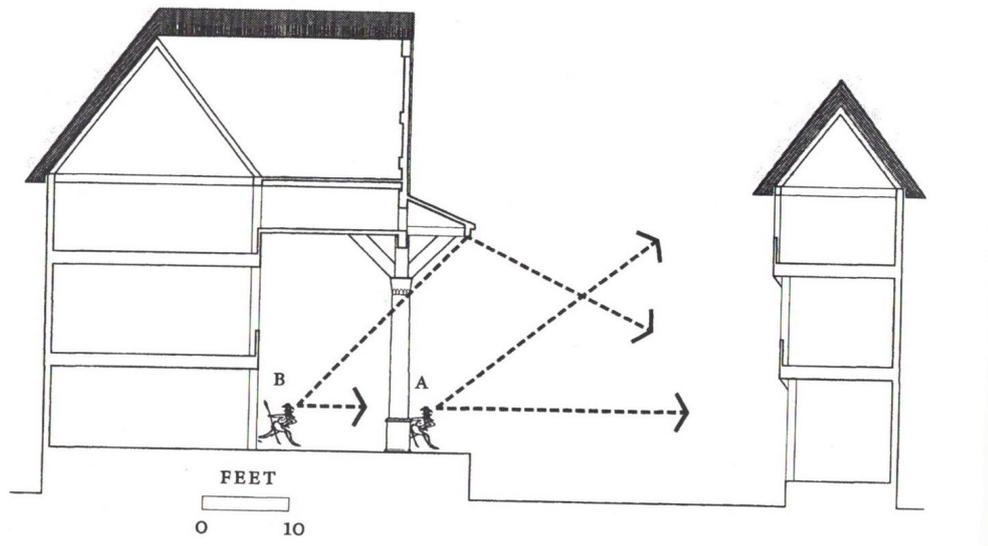


Figure 2. Side view of the Globe, 1599 (Courtesy of The University of Chicago Press)

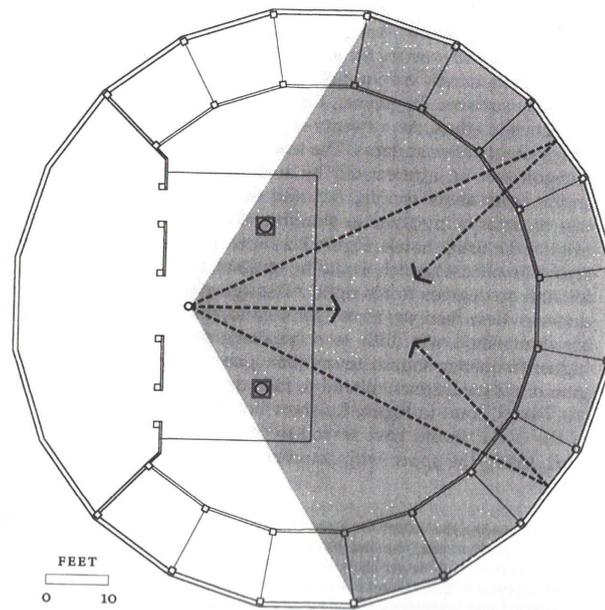


Figure 3. Top view of the Globe, 1599 (Courtesy of The University of Chicago Press)

As the Globe lacked a rooftop, sound waves circulated horizontally, producing the effect of a broad sound. From the listener’s position, this meant that the origin of each sound could be located on the right or the left. As Smith reports, “Performers in the reconstructed Globe in London have commented on the way audience response can start in one part of the theatre and then spread laterally to the rest” (Smith 214).

The Blackfriars was a different acoustic space. It was much smaller than the Globe—possibly a difference of 135,000 cubic feet of listening space—but, as it could contain much fewer people—512 instead of 3000—each spectator had a more expansive listening space. It was an indoor theatre, which meant that sound waves could bounce off both of the ceiling and the walls, producing a round rather than a broad sound; moreover, it was rectilinear, hence vibrations did not focus at its centre, but they “would have struck the back wall, bounced to the sides, and only then returned to the center.

This dispersal effect would have been enhanced by the multiple planes of the galleries,” which “provided a series of differently angled, resonant wood surfaces that contributed to the dispersal of sound in its full range of frequencies” (Smith 217). Pascucci, for instance, describes the role of the Blackfriars in enhancing the storm of the initial scene of *The Tempest* with the following words:

What a shocking, tragic and awe-inspiring moment must have been when the enclosed space of the Blackfriars began to reverberate the roaring of the sea and the thunderbolts opening the play with an intensity unattainable in an outdoor theatre. And how soothing and calming must have sounded the abrupt shifting from plain and loud noise to the presumably sophisticated music accompanying the lyrics of *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* and of *Full Fathom Five*. (150)

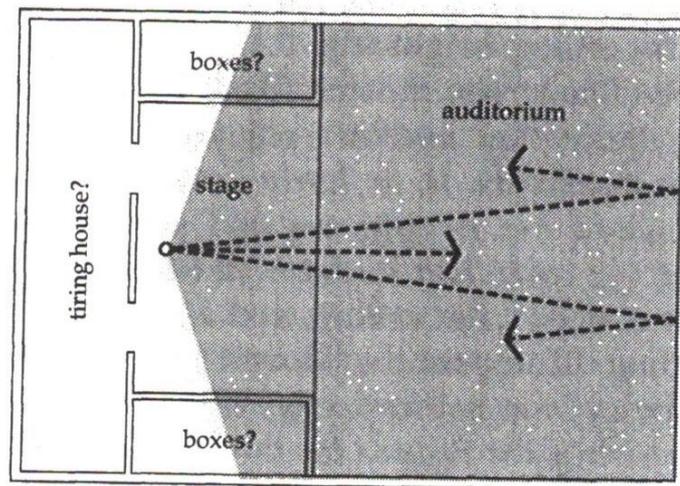


Figure 4. Top view of the Blackfriars, 1596 (Courtesy of The University of Chicago Press)

The theatrical environment can thus be conceived as an active non-human contributor to the performance of the play, enhancing the work of the playwright and the actors and modifying sounds with its own unique agency.

## 2.2 Place-words

In 2007, Oxford University Press published a new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary, which lacked around fifty words related to nature and the countryside because modern children did not frequently use them. Among these deletions, there were words like “acorn, adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture, and willow” (MacFarlane 2016 : 2). A group of twenty-eight writers reacted with a letter, stating:

This is not just a romantic desire to reflect the rosy memories of our own childhoods onto today’s youngsters. There is a shocking, proven connection between the decline in natural play and the decline in children’s wellbeing. Compared with a generation ago, when 40% of children regularly played in natural areas, now only 10% do so, while another 40% never play anywhere outdoors. *Ever*. Obesity, anti-social behaviour, friendlessness and fear are the known consequences. [...] In all, the names for thirty species of common or important British plants and animals have been removed—such as acorn and bluebell—along with many words connected with farming and food. Many are highly symbolic of our cultural ties with the land, its wildlife and produce. [...] Will the removal of these words from the OJD ruin lives? Probably not. But as a symptom of a widely acknowledged problem that *is* ruining lives, this omission becomes a major issue.

(Atwood et al.)

Today, we are gradually losing place-words, namely those specific and even dialectical words that connect us to a particular territory, and together with them, also the attention towards biodiversity. MacFarlane provides an interesting example thereof: “*Smeuse* is a Sussex dialect noun for ‘the gap in the base of a hedge made by the regular passage of a small animal’” (2016 : 4). As he asserts, once one knows this word, he will be more likely to look at and pay attention to them—yet if this term gets lost, they will become invisible, too small for the human eye to be perceived as signs of life.

Shakespeare was indeed a “word-hoarder,” borrowing MacFarlane’s term: in his texts, many place-words are safeguarded (including the ones deleted from OJD), praising the particularity of the microcosm. The dense biome of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is rendered in all its details: we can find the sizable “duke’s oak” (1.2.103) and “acorn cups” (2.1.31), but also delicate “cowslips” (2.1.10) and “oxlips” (2.1.250), “sweet musk-roses” (2.1.252) and a “crimson rose” (2.1.108), the “nodding violet” (2.1.250), the “luscious woodbine” (2.1.251), the eglantine (2.1.252), the wild thyme (2.1.249), and great importance is conferred to the “love-in-idleness,” which becomes a magic flower whose juice can make everyone fall in love with the next living being they see:

OBERON

Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell:

It fell upon a little western flower,

Before milk-white, now purple with love’s wound,

And maidens call it love-in-idleness.

(2.1.165-78)

Precious terms like “dewberries” (3.1.160), “honey-bags” (3.1.162), “night-tapers” (3.1.163) and “rearmice” (2.2.4) are also kept, which let the modern reader enjoy the particular perspectives early modern people had on these elements. Dewberries were berries that looked like large drops of dew to Warwickshire inhabitants, bees seemed to carry honey in small bags, fireflies were compared to night-tapers, and bats were seen as rearing, lifting-up mice. Once one gets to know these perspectives, he will look at them differently and with renewed attention.

Indeed, if Shakespeare described the wood only in general terms, it would not be as lively and communicative. What is more, it would not be as musical because it would lack *tact*. In music, tact is “a stroke in beating time which ‘directs the equalitie of the measure’” (MacFarlane 2016 : 14)—tactful language, MacFarlane explains, is a “language which sings (is lyric), which touches (is born of contact with the lived and felt world), which touches us (affects) and which keeps time—recommending thereby an equality of measure and a keen faculty of perception” (14).

What we know of the island of *The Tempest* is that it has “fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile” (1.2.339), and “clust’ring filberts” (2.2.168), namely hazelnuts. Of course, it does not have the rich biome of the wood, and apart from the “cloven pine” (1.2.277) inside which Sycorax imprisoned Ariel, there is scarce mention of vegetation. However, it is full of spirits that can take many shapes, including the ones of “apes,” “hedgehogs,” “adders” (2.2.9-13), and “unicorns” (3.3.22).

However, the celestial masque staged for Miranda and Ferdinand owes its beauty also to the particular language the deities of the earth and the sky use. Ceres, the goddess of the earth, is summoned by Iris from her “rich leas | Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats and peas,” her “turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep, | And flat

meads thatched with stover them to keep;” from her “banks with pioned and twilled brims, | Which spongy April at [her] hest betrimms | To make cold nymphs chaste crowns” (4.1.60-66). In her turn, Ceres greets Iris, the rainbow, addressing her as the “many-coloured messenger” (4.1.76) from the sky, calling her “Rich scarf to my proud earth” (4.1.82).

Furthermore, other words that show the connection between men and the sea or the weather are stored in the play, as for instance units of water measure, like the “acre” (1.1.66), the “furlongs” (1.1.65), the “fathoms” (5.1.55), the “leagues” (1.1.66), and the “plummet” (5.1.56), which was a device to measure the depth of the ocean. Among the fish, “Poor-John” (2.2.27) is mentioned, which is a long-dead and fish of the cheapest kind given as food to the mariners of the British Navy, and the “stockfish,” inside the expression “make a stockfish of thee” (3.2.68-9), which means to beat one as a fish is beaten before being cooked. The clouds, then, are described as “curled” (1.2.192) and as “welkin’s cheek” (1.2.4), namely the cheeks of the sky.

### **2.3 Pre-linguistic sounds**

Smith asserts that the point of contact between speech and ambient sounds is represented by “nonverbal human-produced sounds” (44), which include pre-linguistic words or interjections:

In crying, screaming, moaning, wailing, ululating the human voice emits sounds that are *nonverbal* if not *preverbal*—sounds, that, according to Aristotle, ally the human voice with the voices of all breathing creatures in the soundscapes of the world. Early modern physiology recognized this continuum between animal sounds and human sounds. “Euen in the tongue of a man,” Crooke observes,

‘sometimes it expressth onelie those things that fall vnder the Sense, as when wee crie for paine, or for Foode and soccour; sometimes those things that fall vnder our vnderstanding as in Discourse.’ (45)

These sounds associate human beings with all the other living beings on the Earth, as they project their emotions and intentions into the environment, and they are understood even by non-human life forms. A phenomenological approach to Shakespeare’s plays makes it possible to give them importance and to take the substantial impact they have on the surrounding environment into consideration.

A peculiar interjection that is present throughout the plays is “O”. It usually precedes other words, making the emotional message that they will later specify immediately apparent, enhancing its reverberation as well. As Smith explains, the phoneme [o:] is “the most intense phoneme in English: typically it strikes a listener’s ear at a pressure about 1,000 times greater than the least pressure the human ear can detect” (8). For this reason, [o:] is “a burst of energy from within,” an intentional “projection of one’s body into the world.” It represents an “environmental gesture” (14) because characters extend their individuality into their surroundings, seeking communication, resonance, and co-participation.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the phoneme [o:] stands out in the intertwining of Hermia’s and Lysander’s laments in the opening scene:

LYSANDER

Ay me! for aught that I could ever read,  
Could ever hear by tale or history,  
The course of true love never did run smooth;  
But either it was different in blood —

HERMIA

O cross, too high to be enthralled to low!

LYSANDER

Or else misgrafted in respect of years —

HERMIA

O spite, too old to be engaged to young!

LYSANDER

Or else it stood upon the choice of friends —

HERMIA

O hell, to choose love by another's eyes!

LYSANDER

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,  
War, death, or sickness did lay siege to it,  
Making it momentary as a sound,  
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold',  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:  
So quick bright things come to confusion.

(1.1.132-49)

One can imagine the *crescendo* that the repetition of “O” creates, making the audience and the whole reverberating theatre take part in their frustration for not having the possibility of living happily together in Athens.

The phoneme [o:] is either free or echoed inside words, as it happens in Alonso's crying in *The Tempest*:

ALONSO

O, it is monstrous, monstrous!  
Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;  
The winds did sing it to me, and the thunder —  
That deep and dreadful organpipe — pronounced  
The name of Prosper. It did bass my trespass.  
Therefore my son i'th' ooze is bedded, and  
I'll seek him deeper than e'er plummet sounded,  
And with him there lie mudded.

(3.3.95-102)

The first 'O' is reiterated inside the words "monstrous," "methought," "billows," "spoke," "told," "of," and "organpipe," finding its climax in the name of "Prosper," which Alonso describes as having pierced his body with its deep sound. His and the other Neapolitans' cry and grief touch Ariel, the spirit of air, who later tells Prospero:

ARIEL

Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That, if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

PROSPERO

Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL

Mine would, sir, were I human.

(5.1.17-20)

In *The Tempest*, [o:] amplifies a burst of joy as well: when Miranda asks Ferdinand if he loves her, he exclaims:

FERDINAND

O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound,  
And crown what I profess with kind event  
If I speak true; if hollowly, invert  
What best is boded me to mischief! I,  
Beyond all limit of what else i'th' world,  
Do love, prize, honour you.

(3.1.68-73)

The [o:] sound starts from Ferdinand's chest and directly addresses the environment, filling the soundscape with his promise of love to Miranda. Heaven and earth are considered as attentive listeners that safeguard his words, being witnesses to them.

This might seem daydream to the twenty-first-century reader, yet this passage epitomises the early modern awareness that the environment can listen and remember. This belief was supported by the residual animism coming from Renaissance writers' fascination "with the more earth-centred spirituality of ancient Greece and Rome" (Borlik 5), yet it does not necessarily clash with modern-day scientific thought: as a matter of fact, the environment, with its various life forms that we might be able or not to perceive, is indeed capable of listening to and memorising our sounds.

## **2.4 Instrumental music**

The environment does not only listen to its human creatures, it also talks to them through its music. It is worth noting that the presence of music in the early modern theatre was different from today's performances: the music the audience heard was also

expected to be heard by the actors on stage. It was not just “an independent adjunct for the audience’s ears only, acting as a commentary or metatext” (Lindley 112), as it is used today in movies and television programmes. Music was “part of the world of the play itself, heard and responded to by the characters on-stage,” as Lindley explains (111), so it was imagined to come from the environment.

Particular musical instruments were played to bring the wood and the island to life. One group of instruments was the broken or mixed consort, namely an ensemble made up not of complete families of instruments (for instance, a family of viols) but of their representatives. A typical English mixed consort was mainly composed of stringed instruments (a cittern, a violin, a bandora, and a lute), with the addition of the dainty sound of a flute or a recorder.

These—or at least some of these—would have been the instruments that accompanied the fairy speech in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and which could have performed the “Music still” (4.1.82) called by Oberon and Titania at the end of the night. This stage direction is, in fact, reminiscent of Dekker’s “*Musicke still*” in *Old Fortunatus* (1599), to charm Andelocia by a lullaby. The character Shadow comments on such soothing music, saying: “O delicate warble [recorder or flute] ... O delicious strings [viols]: these heauenly wyre-drawers [cittern and bandore]” (Smith 219).

Such instruments had a positive symbolic significance for Elizabethans, being perceived as “benign forces over the human spirit; like musical homeopathy, they eased melancholy by transforming it into exquisite art” (Springfels). Stringed instruments, in particular, “admitted the possibility of the singing human voice. It was the varying lengths of the strings, proportionate to the mathematical principles of the universe, that allowed arche-poets like Apollo and Orpheus to charm the material world” (Smith 93).

The pipe, instead, was “indelibly associated with dancing and with the theatrical clown” (Lindley 238). It could be played just with one hand, leaving the other one free to beat a tabor, a small drum, to keep the dancing rhythm. In *The Tempest*, the airy spirit Ariel appears in the sixth scene playing a pipe and a tabor to comically guide Stephano, Caliban, and Trinculo towards the stinking pond. He later tells Prospero that they have followed him like they had “smelt music” (4.1.178), so catchy a tune he managed to perform. Instead, when singing the songs composed by Johnson, like *Come Unto These Yellow Sands* and *Where the Bee Sucks*, he must have accompanied his singing with a lute. As a matter of fact, the composer Johnson was a lutenist himself.

The other wind instruments and the percussion instruments had different connotations: their sound was ear-piercing and thus used to signal the entry of high-status personae and the start of solemn events. Moreover, “blown instruments were proverbial in Platonic lore for their gutsiness, their mindlessness, their distance from *logos*” (Smith 93) and were also used to represent the sounds of wars, hunts, or storms.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, such instruments are played to signal the events of the human world, like Theseus’ entry in the wood in scene 4.1 and the start of a play-within-a-play performed by the mechanicals. In *The Tempest*, instead, wind instruments and drums might have been used to imitate thunders during the initial storm, and also to create “*Solemn and strange music*” (3.3.17 SD), “*a strange hollow and confused noise*” (4.1.138 SD), and “*Solemn music*” (5.1.57 SD). At the Blackfriars, an organ could also have been added to render the musical atmosphere even eerier.

## 2.5 Ambient sounds

In *The Tempest*, the acoustic portrayal of the environment also includes various sound effects to stage the noises of the wind, the sea, and the thunder. These are sounds that need to be as realistic as possible for the outcome of the performance, for making all the auditors frighten and immerse themselves in the world of the play.

The sound of the thunder is fundamental, as it can be heard not only during the opening storm scene but also for most of scene 1.2 (until Ariel's song *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*), throughout scene 2.2, and in the seventh scene, when Ariel enters like a harpy and then vanishes. In this way, the possibility of the outburst of another tempest looms until the end of the play:

TRINCULO

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

(2.2.18-24)

Sound effects were not something new in the early modern period. Hero of Alexandria (c. 10 AD - c. 70 AD), a Greco-Egyptian engineer, had already invented “a thunder machine (Figure 5) using brass balls that would drop onto dried hides arranged like a kettledrum, and a wind machine (Figure 6) with fabric draped over a rotating wheel” (TSDCA).

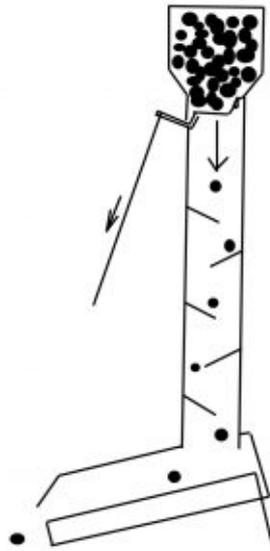


Figure 5. Thunder Machine by Victoria Deiorio (Courtesy of TSDCA)

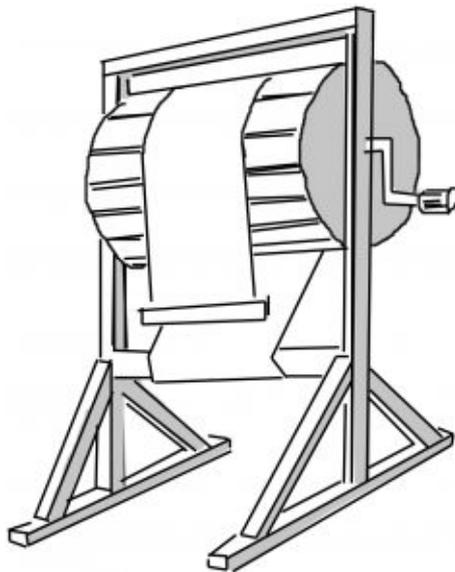


Figure 6. Wind machine by Victoria Deiorio (Courtesy of TSDCA)

The effect of thunders at a distance, which Trinculo hears in the fourth scene, might have been created by the rumbles of a “tempestuous drum,” as Ben Jonson describes in his prologue to *Every Man in His Humour* (1616). The devilish appearance of Ariel as a harpy in the seventh scene, instead, could have been accompanied with squibs (fireworks), which “were a standard aural event whenever devils arrived on the scene from hell” (Smith 221). The Arden editors also mention a sea machine, consisting of pebbles in a drum, to recreate the ocean’s sounds.

These sounds would have made the audience frighten and shiver to make their body feel connected with the environment. Even if they lack the specificity of human words, these environmental sounds include a wide range of acoustic possibilities—different intensities, rhythms, pitches—which let them be perceived with diverse meanings by the audience. As the next chapter will show, they are particularly associated with feelings of fear towards nature and with the sense of guilt for human sins.

This chapter has shown how sound acts as a mediator between body and place in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*. In the context of the reverberating theatrical environments of the Globe and the Blackfriars, place-words, pre-linguistic sounds, instrumental music, and ambient sounds have been analysed to demonstrate the presence of an acoustic continuum between the human and the other-than-human worlds. In the plays, characters musically represent the liveliness of the environment through detailed words and talk to the non-human world through interjections and pre-linguistic sounds, like other animals do. In its turn, the environment provides its answers which are represented by particular musical instruments and sound machines, arousing a

wide range of emotions in the audience. The analysis of sounds in the two plays proves to be of particular interest to make the interaction between the human and the non-human world emerge and bring it to today's audience and readers's attention to rekindle their interest in the diverse soundscapes of our surroundings.

# 3

## Ecophobia and Noise

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* are plays that do not only consist of music but also noises: the loud sound of percussion and brass instruments, the boisterous sound effects reproducing thunders, wind, and roaring waves, the clamour coming from the audience—above all in the outdoor amphitheatre of the Globe—as well as the imaginary noises evoked by the actors' words. It can be noticed that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, some of these noises are specifically designed to instil fear in the audience and that they manage to do so because they are related to the environment, representing it as a looming threat upon the human characters of the plays. The wood of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* teems with supernatural creatures and allegorical predators that could harm the characters at any time, while the frightening sounds of the storm keep menacing those in *The Tempest*, rumbling at a distance, at least until scene 2.2.

As a matter of fact, *ecophobia* (Estok), or the fear of the environment, was a widespread feeling during the early modern period. On the one hand, it was a rational concern caused by the unstable climate of the late 1590s in particular, which led to the ruin of harvests, famine, diseases, and higher mortalities. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written towards the end of this dire period, and Titania's description of the confusion of seasons in 2.1 has been used to assign a date to the play. Instead, *The*

*Tempest* was written when travel narratives about shipwrecks and storms heightened feelings of impotence and helplessness towards the unruliness of the non-human world. Moreover, in 1607, the Bristol channel's disastrous flood aroused great anxiety all around England, and people interpreted it as a divine punishment for their immorality. On the other hand, the fear of the environment was also based on superstition. Non-buildable and non-arable areas like woods or heaths, which did not bend to human control, were perceived as evil wastelands haunted by evil spirits and witches. As long as people believed God to have put nature at man's disposal for his nourishment and wellness, those unpredictable and wild areas were deemed as places of temptation and spiritual perdition, where Jesus himself had endured his spiritual trial: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4 : 1). Similarly, the sea and the ocean were perceived as unknown and dangerous areas, which defied human laws and territorial boundaries.

This chapter will explore the fear-provoking sounds of the wood in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the marine environment of *The Tempest*, discussing them as noises. Noise is a fleeting concept in sound studies, as it is not possible to define its precise characteristics. In the late nineteenth century, Hermann Helmholtz distinguished music from noise by recognising that the first was characterised by periodic waveforms, while the latter by nonperiodic ones. Yet this distinction was not clear, as long as several musical instruments (e.g. the flute and the violin) produce both kinds of vibrations (Novak). Loudness is another possible quality that might help us distinguish music from noise. Still, its perception is culture-bound: regular acoustic events in urban soundscapes could result as unbearably loud to inhabitants of rural ones.

For this reason, Novak asserts that noise “is not really a kind of sound but a metadiscourse of sound and its social interpretation” (126), meaning that the listener’s culture influences the understanding of noise. Early moderns understood noise in a much more defined way than we do today: if we are used to listening to musical songs that include nonperiodic vibrations produced by “the widespread use of effects, synthesizers, samplers, and studio recording techniques” (Novak 127), in early modern England, they set the difference between music and noise upon the concepts of concord and discord, order and disorder, good and evil. Noise was perceived as the opposite and the disruption of *musica universalis* and the acoustic representation of cosmic disorder. Therefore, it was intentionally produced during punishing and humiliating processions against adulterers or scoundrels, known as skimmington rides, to condemn the chaos these individuals caused in the society (Smith 156).

The following analysis is divided into four parts: first of all, it focuses on the dual nature of the forest/wood of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which renders it musical during the day but noisy at night; secondly, it presents the ensemble of the wind blowers, who watch their human puppets from the sky, and frighten and punish them for their sins; afterwards, the roaring sea is described as a dangerous and chaotic realm, which puts human life at risk; finally, the threatening silence of the barren island of *The Tempest* is linked to the possible return to an ecology without humans, representing the widespread fear of an impending apocalypse.

### 3.1 The “haunted grove” of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

The five central scenes of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* are set in a magical and ambiguous woodland, which is Theseus’s hunting reserve during the day and a “haunted grove” (3.2.5) during the night, teeming with dangerous animals and mischievous supernatural beings. It is referred to both as a forest and as a wood during the play, even though these two terms had different meanings during the early modern period: the term *forest* was used for those areas that had been legally recognised as royal reserves for hunting, whereas the word *wood* indicated a useless wasteland, which could neither be cultivated nor used for royal sport, and which was thus the dwelling of evil creatures.

What the play seems to suggest is that no matter the legal recognition, during the night, the environment falls out of human control and gets ruled by supernatural entities, who enjoy bringing disorder and playing mischief on those who dare to venture into their realm. On an acoustic level, if during the day the forest resounds with the musical barks of Theseus’s hounds, at night superstition and imagination sharpen the human ear to catch all kinds of noises:

HERMIA

Dark night, that from the eye his function takes,  
The ear more quick of apprehension makes;  
Wherein it doth impair the seeing sense,  
It pays the hearing double recompense.

(3.2.177-81)

The actors’ words lead the audience towards the construction of a frightening imaginary soundscape, which is rich in allegorical meaning. Several predators, in fact,

and consequently also their sounds, are mentioned by Oberon: according to him, Titania could fall in love with a lion, a bear, a wolf, a bull, a monkey, an ape (2.1.180-1), or also with a lynx, a “cat<sup>3</sup>,” a leopard, or a boar (2.2.34-5). His lists of predators are reminiscent of Nicholas Breton’s *The Pilgrimage to Paradise* (1592), in which, following the model of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, the wood is portrayed as a savage and irrational place, where the characters’ virtues are tested (Borlik 269).

Yet in the path wherein he sweetly passed,  
No evil thing had power to take a place.  
No venomd serpent might his poison cast,  
No filthy monster nor ill-favoured face,  
No lion, Bear, dog, Monkey, fox, nor Crow,  
Could stop the way where virtue was to go.

(Borlik 269-70)

Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius go through a challenging spiritual trial in the play, which is further complicated by the goblin Puck’s mischiefs. The goblin was a legendary creature who was believed to cause all inexplicable misfortunes of peasants. As a matter of fact, he is introduced to the audience by one of Titania’s fairies with the following words:

Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Call’d Robin Goodfellow: are not you he  
That frights the maidens of the villagery;

---

<sup>3</sup> Although the Arden editors write that the “cat” mentioned here might refer to the wild cat, this latter is more common in the Scottish Highlands. Interestingly instead, during the Elizabethan time, the polecat was perceived as a bloodthirsty animal and was “so persecuted it was on the brink of extinction in the UK” (The Wildlife Trust).

Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern  
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;  
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;  
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?

(2.1.32-9)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck manages to frighten and mislead the night-wanders by causing discord and noises, and even by enjoying disarraying the numerical proportions that produce the music of the spheres: by pouring the juice of the magic flower on the wrong lover's eyes he causes the unity between Hermia and Lysander to break, as well as the long-lasting friendship between Hermia and Helena: this latter feels cheated because both Lysander and Demetrius begin to woo her, unexpectedly, and thinks that Hermia takes part in their game. Puck indeed takes pleasure in the conflict and the confusion he has caused:

PUCK  
Then will two at once woo one;  
That must needs be sport alone;  
And those things do best please me  
That befall preposterously.

(3.2.118-21)

Puck torments the four Athenian lovers as well as the mechanicals, who have decided to do their rehearsals in the woods by moonlight, not to be seen by anyone. The goblin transforms Bottom into a hybrid creature with the head of an ass and enjoys frightening the other mechanicals through noises:

PUCK

I'll follow you; I'll lead you about a round,  
Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.  
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound,  
A hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire,  
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn,  
Like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.

(3.1.102-7)

Thus, the play gives voice to the popular superstition that the forest becomes an evil wood at night, in which man is deprived of his sense of sight and confused through sounds. Human laws are substituted with those of the supernatural world, and the ones who try to venture into the “haunted wood” become helpless marionettes of the other-than-human beings.

### **3.2 The frightening ensemble of the Wind Blowers**

The disastrous weather events happening during Shakespeare's lifetime (1564-1616) were typically framed inside transcendental narratives, in which fairies, witches, and divinities were at work. As Borlik asserts, in fact, “Instead of greenhouse gases, early moderns viewed God, malign planets, fairies (see Titania's “forgeries of jealousy” speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), or witches as the material cause of climatic anomalies” (510). However, Brayton unveils other actants disrupting the weather in Shakespeare's plays: the wind blowers (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Claudius Ptolemy's *Geographia* (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Figure 7 shows a nautical chart of the sixteenth century. The winds were traditionally represented on maps and charts, as they “acted as road signs for mariners, cues to plotting direction and establishing location.” They were known by their name and “were understood as cosmic forces with their own personalities and as vectors of possibility” (Brayton 199). They also seem to be the stage directors of the great globe of the world, creating wonderful music or loud noise at their will.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania's speech portrays the winds as touchy pipers, who get furious and cause all the climatic troubles of the late 1590s just because they do not see the fairies dancing to their songs (2.1.88-90). In later plays, like *King Lear* (1605) and *The Tempest*, the winds are characterised by their cheeks, according to their traditional visual representation on maps and charts. In *King Lear*, the king

screams: “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!” (3.2.1); in *The Tempest*, Miranda refers to the black clouds as the “welkin’s cheek” (1.2.4), and the Boatswain cries to the sky: “Blow till *thou* burst *thy* wind, if room enough” (1.1.7-8, emphasis added), probably addressing the wind blowers. Prospero also describes them as emotional entities when he tells Miranda: “There they hoist us | ... to sigh | To th’winds, whose pity, sighing back again, | Did us but loving wrong” (1.2.148-51).

*The Tempest* represents the winds as an actual consort placed in the Blackfriars’ upper gallery, capable of both beautiful music and shrieking noises, depending on the different characters’ personalities. Sebastian and Antonio, the two conjurers who want to kill king Alonso, describe their sound as “a hollow burst of bellowing, | Like bulls, or rather lions” which struck their “ear most terribly” (2.1.312-14) and as “a din to fright a monster’s ear — | To make an earthquake! Sure it was the roar | Of a whole herd of lions” (2.1.315-7). They are described as “a thousand twangling instruments” by Caliban, and, in the seventh scene, Alonso hears them singing the name of Prospero (3.3.97). Finally, the Boatswain says that he heard “strange and several noises | Of roaring, shrieking, howling, jingling chains | And more diversity of sounds, all horrible” (5.1.232-4). On the contrary, Gonzalo perceives them as “a humming, | And that a strange one too, which did awake me” (2.1.319), and Ferdinand can discern wonderful songs like *Full Fathom Five* and *Come Unto These Yellow Sands*.

When Ariel appears as a harpy in the seventh scene, he explains why Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian have been so tormented by noises:

You are three men of sin, whom destiny,  
That hath to instrument this lower world  
And what is in’t, the never-surfeited sea

Hath caused to belch up you, and on this island  
When man doth not inhabit — you ‘mongst men  
Being most unfit to live — *I have made you mad*;  
And even with such-like valour, men hang and drown  
Their proper selves.

(3.3.53-60 emphasis added)

The winds intentionally wanted to frighten them, as they usurped Prospero’s dukedom and sent him out to the sea with his daughter to die. This passage echoes the popular early modern idea that climatic events were punishments for human immoralities. For this reason, it must have had a substantial impact on Shakespeare’s audience. Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio, at this point, draw their swords out of fear, and Ariel continues:

You fools! I and my fellows  
Are ministers of fate. The elements  
Of whom your swords are tempered may as well  
Wound the loud winds, or with bemocked-at stabs  
Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish  
One dowl that’s in my plume. My fellow ministers  
Are like invulnerable. If you could hurt,  
Your swords are now too massy for your strengths  
And will not be uplifted.

(3.3.60-8)

The winds can see man’s sins and punish him without leaving him any possibility to react, raising blasts, storms and driving him mad with frightening noises.

Together with the waters, they minister the fate of humans, metaphorically directing their lives in the direction they choose.

The Mediterranean sea reveals itself to be the proper stage for representing the human condition: in fact, it is a particular area where the thirty-two winds of the Wind Rose are associated with direction because they are as predictable and constant as the sunrise (Brayton 199). The characters of *The Tempest* are placed amidst the sounds of a frightening consort of winds that brings together cartographic conventions (Prospero mentions the “sharp wind of the north” in 1.2.254, while Caliban refers to the “south-west blow” in 1.2.323) with the “illusory and baffling meteorology of an island that cannot be precisely located” (Brayton 199).

### **3.3 A sea roaring out of time**

In *Shakespeare's Ocean*, Dan Brayton highlights the pervading presence of the sea in Shakespeare's plays, asserting that “The physical geography and social history of England inevitably put a maritime stamp on the works of its most celebrated poet.” As a matter of fact, “The British Isles have an immensely long coastline in proportion to their area,” and “it is physically impossible to be much more than fifty miles from the sea anywhere in England” (16). The sea permeates Shakespearean plays, according to Raban, “with a quality of brilliant irrealism:” it appears as a “silver sea; a triumphant sea; a hungry sea; a sea of glory; a boundless sea; the multitudinous seas incarnadined by Macbeth's bloody hands” (6). This section will call attention to a different reading—or rather hearing—of the Shakespearean sea: a sea of noise.

In his representations of the sea, Shakespeare gives voice to a particular widespread perception of it as “a realm that stands outside of time” (Brayton 82). Early modern people conceived it as an unknown space that had existed forever and could endure endlessly. According to them, it was ahistorical, internally unseeable, and for this reason wild, “dangerous, foreign, untamable, and inimical to the more domestic notion of place” (Brayton 82). As Corbin puts it,

The ocean was [for premodern Europeans] the remnant of that undifferentiated primordial substance on which form had to be imposed so that it might become part of Creation. This realm of the unfinished, a vibrating, vague extension of chaos, symbolized the disorder that preceded civilization. A firm belief began to appear which held that already in antediluvian times, it was only with difficulty that the raging ocean could be contained within its bounds. Consequently, the ocean inspired a deep sense of repulsion. (2)

Towards this great cosmic force, early modern mariners and sea-venturers felt helpless, as it emerges from Strachey’s ‘A True Reportory’ (1609), one of the alleged sources Shakespeare used for writing *The Tempest*:

For surely ... as death comes not so sodaine nor apparant, so he comes not so elvish and painfull (to men especially even then in health and perfect habitudes of body) as at Sea; who comes at no time so welcome, but our frailty (so weake is the hold of hope in miserable demonstrations of danger) it makes guilty of many contrary changes, and conflicts: For indeede death is accompanied at no time, nor place with circumstances every way so uncapable of particularities of goodnesse and inward comforts, as at Sea ...

(Strachey in Shakespeare 2011 : 311)

In the theatre, the wild and timeless sea produces noises, with the pebbles striking the drum of the sea machine and making a sound similar to a roar, reminiscent of wars and rebellions. Right in the first scene, the Boatswain refers to the violent waves as “roarers” (1.1.17) because they “form a disordered and potentially rebellious crowd” (Brayton 189). In the second scene, Miranda begs his father: “If ... you have | Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them” (1.2.2), and Prospero remembers how the sea roared to him and Miranda out of pity, as they were crying during their journey from Milan to the island on the rotten raft. Moreover, when Ariel arrives, he describes the sound of the waters as a “sulphurous roaring” and envisions the sea god Neptune’s action as a siege:

ARIEL

the fire and cracks

Of *sulphurous roaring*, the most mighty Neptune  
Seem to *besiege* and make his bold waves tremble,  
Yea, his dread trident shake.

(1.2.203-6 emphasis added)

The war metaphor is also present in Prospero’s speech in 5.1 when he says: “I have bedimmed | The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds, | And ‘twixt the green sea and the azured vault | Set roaring war” (5.1.41-4). As Brayton points out, the roars of the waters emerge as a percussion section throughout the play, creating, together with the howling winds, an acoustic pattern “associated with revolt, while Prospero’s controlled rhetoric and Ariel’s artful songs enact the providential ability to allay such violence” (191).

Not only navigators but also English citizens felt fear towards the vast indefinite sea because of floods. The flooding of rivers like the Thames or the Bristol Channel were frequent during Shakespeare's lifetime, being caused by several factors, among which the high tide of the sea or great storms (Rowley). The Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire floods in 1570, and the Bristol Channel flood in 1607, in particular, happened to be particularly disastrous for the English population, as Borlik reports:

The Bristol Channel flood of 1607 ranks as one of the worst natural disasters in British history, as an estimated 2,000 people lost their lives. One eye-witness report, entitled *Wonderful Overflowings of Waters*, compares its twelve-foot surge to the biblical deluge, and echoes the widespread belief — also expressed in a 1570 ballad about floods in Bedfordshire and Lincolnshire, and in Thomas Churchyard's 1580 poem on the Dover Straits earthquake — that natural disasters should be regarded as divine punishments for humans sins. (515)

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Titania calls attention to the floods that devastated the English harvests in the late 1590s. Shakespeare attributes the heavy rainfall that caused the flood to the interaction between the winds and the sea:

TITANIA

Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,  
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea  
Contagious fogs, which, falling in the land,  
Hath every pelting river made so proud  
That they have overborne their continents.

(2.1.88-92)

After the great clamour evoked by these lines, characterised by alliterations of ‘s’, ‘f’, ‘p’, and the roaring assonance of ‘o’, sounds of death come from the devastated land:

The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,  
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.  
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,  
And crows are fatted with the murrain flood.

(2.1.93-97)

This leads to the creation of a “terraqueous” (Brayton) landscape, where everything is indistinguishable because covered with water. No music can be heard because it is a timeless realm of chaos and noise:

The nine men’s morris is filled up with mud,  
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green,  
For lack of tread, are undistinguishable.  
The human mortals want their winter here;  
No night is now with hymn or carol blest.  
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger, washes all the air  
That rheumatic diseases do abound.

(2.1.98-102)

The moon becomes furious because she has not commanded the flood, but it has been an unruly and unexpected weather event. The “rude sea” (2.1.152) proves in this way to be able to escape her control and to destroy life and music on Earth.

### 3.4 A noisy and desolate island

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Great Britain had become so populated and modified by human interventions that historians started to research how it looked like in the prehistoric period. They found that it was portrayed as a desolate and wild island “at the edge of the earth,” possibly inhabited by giants, and that “only the strenuous efforts over the centuries of enterprising ancestors had made the land habitable” (Borlik 44). In *The Surveyor’s Dialogue* (1607), John Norden states that it was “A very desert and wilderness, until people finding it a place desolate and forlorn began to set footing here, and by degrees grew into multitudes.” It was inhabited by “Bears, Boars” and “infinite many Wolves,” which decreased as people began to settle in towns and villages (Norden in Borlik 45).

The barren island in *The Tempest* is reminiscent of such prehistoric Great Britain, as Prospero’s settlement imitates what the first Britons did. For this reason, if on the one hand literary critics agree with the Arden editors that it is “a magical island” created “out of sheer sound” (Shakespeare 2011 : 19), on the other hand it should not be disregarded that it is first of all a place of chaos, bareness, and noise, in which human beings do not wish to live (1.2.283-4).

With *The Tempest*, then, Shakespeare presents an ecology without humans, which sounds hopeless and frightening. As the Arden editors point out, Prospero’s description of his first meeting with Ariel is reminiscent of Dante’s one with the lost soul kept inside a thornbush in his *Inferno* (13.31-151), in this way creating a possible connection between the island and hell:

PROSPERO

Thou best knowst  
What torment I did find thee in: thy groans  
Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts  
Of ever-angry bears. It was a torment  
To lay upon the damned, which Sycorax  
Could not again undo. It was mine art,  
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine and let thee out.

(1.2.286-93)

One of the most prevailing fears in the early modern period was Great Britain's return to such a prehistoric situation, caused by the increasing scarcity of natural resources and the devastating climatic disequilibrium which further ruined the harvests. The concern for an impending apocalypse to punish people for their sins was widespread and, in the play, it is represented by Prospero's Epilogue, which displays a particular religious attitude: he begs the audience to relieve him "by prayer," which "frees all faults," as long as he has managed to overcome his hate and to "pardon the deceiver." As a matter of fact, his "ending" would be "despair" if he were to remain on "this bare island," which appears to be similar to the already mentioned desert wilderness in which Jesus had to suffer the devil's temptations.

In this light, the environment without humans is but a hellish and noisy place, not blessed by music and marked only by the unruly noises of the elements. Man's intervention in the ecosystem is thus viewed as necessary and beneficial, in this way legitimising the "slow violence" (Nixon) that humans have been carrying out against the planet for their profit.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* give voice to a widespread fear of the unruliness of the environment, which makes man helpless and weak. The characters in the plays are under the control of supernatural beings and the elements, which can subvert human laws and hierarchies. These fears are grounded both on actual events, like climatic disruptions and devastating floods, which tried England several times during Shakespeare's lifetime, but also on superstition, which made people perceive the unpredictability and agency of the environment as chaos and evil. Environmental noises are thoroughly used in the plays as the opposite of *musica universalis* and signal the disruption of the cosmic harmony.

# 4

## **The Abuse of the Power of Music in *The Tempest***

*The Tempest* is of particular interest to the ecomusicological discourse as it tackles the theme of political dominion upon peoples and natural resources, reached through the abuse of the power of music. As discussed in the first chapter, Prospero directs the musical performances on the island to fulfil his dreams of political power over Naples and Milan, exploiting Ariel to seduce and control the other characters with his songs.

The power music is endowed with in *The Tempest* is toxic, in that listeners are given no other choice than to yield to its effects and behave according to Prospero's desires. The play then demonstrates how, already in the early seventeenth century, music began to be conceived as a means to obtain power and to gain profit, above all in the colonial context. Today, this dynamic is still observable in the global music industry, which delivers songs that need to follow precise rhythmic, thematic, and melodic features in order to appeal to the greatest number of people to produce money. In this way, music has come to be reduced to "humanly organized sound" (Edwards 155), something alienated from the environment, to which it actually belongs.

It is worth considering that Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* at a time when England still had a marginal role in the early colonial world, yet consistently looked for new lands not just to fulfil dreams of expansion and glory but also to fetch natural resources in order to solve problems like famine and lack of timber. To obtain the most

from the new territories they conquered, the English needed to allure and seduce native peoples, as long as these were the ones knowing the riches and secrets of their land, much as Caliban does in the play:

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow,  
And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts,  
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee  
To clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee  
Young scamels from the rock

(2.2.164-9)

Music, and above all religious hymns, played a paramount role in colonial missions: with their perfect cadences and predictable tonal development, songs had a soothing, calming and even narcotic effect on natives, similarly to Ariel's ones.

CALIBAN

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,  
That if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,  
The clouds, methought, would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
I cried to dream again.

(3.2.135-143)

This chapter will delve into the role of music in the Age of Discovery and offer an interpretation of the music of *The Tempest* that goes beyond its aesthetic magnificence. The complexity of the use of music in the play can be grasped by taking advantage of the multiple and often clashing interpretations that it triggers. Thus, Prospero will be interpreted both as a coloniser and as an Elizabethan magus modelled upon John Dee. Accordingly, Caliban and Ariel will be read both as native inhabitants of the island and as representatives of the natural elements controlled and exploited by Prospero's magical powers.

#### **4.1 Music and colonial expeditions**

During the Age of Discovery, musicians were essential members of European crews, and their role was more than providing entertainment for their captains and the other sailors. As Woodfield explains, the Portuguese experimented and set the model for all the other European nations to approach distant native populations with “musical diplomacy,” namely with music and dances that wondered them, and could avoid skirmishes on the coast, which would have brought the already tried crew to exhaustion. Music, instead, could allure and calm down even the most hostile natives and guarantee the Europeans a safe arrival. European instruments like bells, flutes, harps, and drums, particularly pleased natives and performances were often accompanied by a giving out of musical gifts and other trinkets to establish a friendly relationship.

Francis Drake's circumnavigation (1577-80) was the first reported English expedition during which music was functionally used to approach the American Indians. In the summer of 1579, they arrived at a bay on the Californian coast and noticed that

the natives were particularly attracted by the singing of religious psalms, “whereby they were allured immediatly to forget their folly” (Drake 128). With their “reassuring cadences and refusal of tonal adventure,” psalms and hymns exerted a soothing and almost sedative effect on overseas populations, which kept them “trapped in a prisonhouse of diatonic tonality” (Agawu).

After the initial period of contact, solemn music marked by the sound of trumpets and drums was used to formally claim and name the land, as well as to signal their arrival and military occupation to the villages in the hinterland, scaring them by making their troop sound like a large one. In America, the first English colony was established in 1607 in Jamestown, Virginia, and Strachey’s report in *For the Colony in Virginea Britannia. Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall* (1612) states how music was instrumental in regulating the activities of the colony: drums, in particular, authoritatively signalled the start and the end of the workday, the beginning of prayers and psalms, and the time of gathering and entertainment, during which ballads and dance music were performed.

Early colonial England, however, was not only focused on the Americas. Music was also a critical diplomacy tool for the East India Company, which organised musical banquets aboard English ships (or even on the guests’ ones, if they were hesitant). These feasts had the objective of making potential traders taste the English food and delicacies to establish fruitful commercial international relations. Pleasant music and the distribution of gifts (including small packages of food for those respecting Ramadan) had the role of winning the traders’ trust and confidence, which was paramount for the Englishmen’s safety in foreign lands.

Another colonial objective that Queen Elizabeth I pursued was the complete control over Ireland to avert its possible coalition with Spain and a subsequent attack against England, as well as to exploit its rich natural resources. Englishmen were sent to Ireland, where they could cheaply settle and control local chiefs and clans. As Callaghan explains, Ireland “was quite literally full of noises, a culture of sounds” (108), which hoarded Irish memory and history, and told about their desire for liberty from the English influence over them, which had started already in the twelfth century. English settlers were ordered to repress and correct these *lies* with their own version of history, and specific statutes were issued to execute rhymers, musicians, and bards because they allegedly “infected the people” (Callaghan 104).

The English dismissed, appropriated, and corrected Irish oral culture, detaching it from its history and praising its music only for its exoticism. During the reign of James I, the king required two Irish bards to compose music for him, overcoming the statutes previously issued during Queen Elizabeth I’s rule only to praise his figure as “the legitimate spouse of Ireland who had been predicted by prophecy” (Callaghan 111). The character of the Irish bard also became part of *The Irish Masque* by Jonson, again to celebrate the king while enjoying the pleasure of the acoustic exotic.

#### **4.2 Music and colonisation in *The Tempest***

Postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* have discussed several possible settings for the play, including the Americas, Africa, India, and Ireland, and have focused on Prospero’s use of books, magic, and language to underline his attitude as coloniser, exploiting his technology to take control of the land. His use of music echoes that of the coloniser

because music becomes a diplomatic tool to allure the other characters of the play, a solemn way to claim his control of the land, and a means of cultural repression on the natives Ariel and Caliban.

When Prince Ferdinand arrives on the island, the wonderful music he hears has the purpose of soothing his restless spirit and guiding him towards Miranda: music, in this way, is used to win his confidence, much as colonisers did when meeting foreign populations. An analysis of Ariel's song *Full Fathom Five* (Figure 8) also reveals that the song sung to Ferdinand presents some of the characteristics of religious hymns identified by Agawu, which triggered wonder and reverence during colonial expeditions. The tune has the purpose of bringing comfort to the boy, who is suffering from the alleged loss of his father; its poetic form is simple, and its imagery vibrant. Moreover, it is "harmonized using the primary chords of the tonal system" (the two major chords around which it revolves are G major and D major), it displays frequent perfect cadences (V-I), "and thus displays only modest trajectories of tonal thought" (Agawu).

Ferdinand's reaction further proves the similarity between *Full Fathom Five* and the religious hymn. According to the prince, this song commemorates his drowned father (1.2.406). He perceives it with a sense of sacredness that makes him look at Miranda, the first living being he sees, as the goddess of the island, the addressee of such wondrous songs: "Most sure the goddess | On whom these airs attend!" (1.2.422-3).

*Cantus Primus.* *R. Johnson.*

**F** Ull fathome five thy Father lyes, of his bones are Corral made

those are pearles that were his eyes, nothing of him that doth fade but doth

suffer a Sea change into something rich and strange.

Sea Nymphs hourly ring his knell, Hark now I heare them

Ding Dong Bell Ding Dong Ding Dong Bell

Figure 8. *Full Fathom Five* from *Cheerfull Ayres or Ballads*, 1660 (Courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library and The Arden Shakespeare)

Another typical expression of musical diplomacy can be found at the beginning of 3.3 when the Neapolitans are offered a rich banquet by dancing spirits in several shapes. As the banquets organised by the East India Company, this feast is meant to make the guests realise that they are dealing with someone powerful—Prospero—with whom it is convenient to establish an amicable and respectful relationship. However, the harpy scene at the end of the feast also instils fear in them—in this way, having them in his power, Prospero will readily obtain his requests, namely the restitution of his Dukedom of Milan by Sebastian and the marriage between Miranda and Alonso’s son.

Furthermore, when Prospero stages the masque for Miranda and Ferdinand, it is more than just a wedding gift. In Chapter 1, it was noticed how this moment is necessary to the harmonic syntax of the play, but even more than that, it is a tribute to the English cultural supremacy and power in a foreign land. In England, the masque “was the most exalted form of cultural representation” (Callaghan 114), epitomising the alleged harmony and order present at court. By placing the masque in the eighth scene of the play, which parallels the musical octave, English culture is celebrated as the highest form of artistic expression.

This is paralleled by the cultural repression Ariel and Caliban have to live with until the end of the play. In her study of the Irish echoes in *The Tempest*, Callaghan points out how Prospero’s dismissal of Ariel’s and Caliban’s versions of the past as lies is reminiscent of the English repression of the Irish cultural memory. During their first appearance on stage, both characters let the audience know their own side of the story (Ariel: 1.2.246-50; Caliban: 1.2.332-45), only to be mortified by Prospero as “most lying slave[s]” (1.2.345). A particular linkage to the Irish people is provided by Miranda’s use of the verb “gabble” (1.2.357) to describe Caliban’s way of

communicating before she and Prospero taught him their language. According to the Arden editors, this word has Irish origins and “first appears in a sixteenth-century Anglo-Irish description of Irish speech” (52).

The Irish expressed their memory of the past and their longing for freedom chiefly in music, which troubled the English so much that they banned and condemned to execution all rhymers, bards, and musicians, as previously mentioned. It is significant that both Ariel and Caliban, when they come to envision the end of their slavery under Prospero, express their happiness for the upcoming liberty with music.

ARIEL

Where the bee sucks, there suck I,  
In a cowslip’s bell I lie;  
There I couch when owls do cry.  
On the bat’s back I do fly  
After summer merrily.  
Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,  
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.

(5.1.88-94)

By comparing the scores of *Full Fathom Five* (Figure 8) and *Where the Bee Sucks* (Figure 9), it is possible to notice that in this second one, Ariel enjoys creating a more ornamented and complex song, which does not only move through conjunct degrees but also presents various intervals and madrigalisms (Pascucci 160). Furthermore, there is a change of time from 4/4 to 6/4, which divides the song into two different parts. Ariel is beginning to taste his freedom and his return “to the elements” (5.1.318), and this is reflected both in the music and in the lyrics of the song.

*Gantus Primus.* *R. Johnson.*

Here the Bee sucks there suck I, in a Cowlips Bell I lye there I couch

When Owles doe cry, on the Batts Back I doe fly, after Summer merrily.

Merrily Merrily shall I live now under the Bloffome that hangs on the Bough

Merrily Merrily shall I live now, under the Bloffome that Hangs on the Bough,

Figure 9. *Where the Bee Sucks* from *Cheerfull Ayres or Ballads*, 1660 (Courtesy of the Folger Shakespeare Library and The Arden Shakespeare)

Caliban sings his own song of liberty from Prospero's authority as well, even though he just wants to substitute it with Stephano's one, rather than being free. According to Mannoni, this behaviour reflects the psychological dependence that colonisers taught to natives by approaching them friendly, giving them gifts and tokens,

and by teaching them new skills just to win their confidence and to be introduced to the secrets of their land. Then, they betrayed them and dismissed them as inferior beings.

CALIBAN

When thou cam'st first  
Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light and how the less  
That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee  
And showed thee all the qualities o'th' isle:  
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.  
Cursed be I that did so!

(1.2.333-40)

Indeed, Prospero's justification is that Caliban attempted to rape his daughter. Yet Prospero, instead of trying to correct his misbehaviour and of distancing him from Miranda, just spurns him as an unruly and immoral savage who deserves nothing more than confinement and slavery. The bitterness Caliban feels for this betrayal makes him long for Prospero's murder and for a new and generous master, whom he finds in Stephano, who gifts him with his "celestial liquor" (2.2.115).

However, Caliban still sings a song of freedom from Prospero's slavery, as he remarks in the final part of the lyrics. It is also possible to notice that the chant consists of "multiple rhythmic patterns, the syncopation of beats felt in silence," and "accents falling in unexpected places" (Smith 338), which contrast with the simple rhythmic patterns of European religious hymns.

No more dams I'll make for fish  
Nor fetch in firing, at requiring,

Nor scrape trenchering, nor wash dish.

Ban' ban' Ca-caliban,

Has a new master, get a new man.

Freedom, high-day; high-day freedom; freedom high-day freedom.

(2.2.176-82)

The reading of Prospero as a coloniser can be completed and enriched by his interpretation as a magus, as John Dee was. The following paragraph will explore the connection between the two figures and explain how it is relevant to consider Prospero's domination not only of people but also of the natural resources of the island.

#### **4.3 Prospero as magus and his control of the environment**

Prospero's interpretation as John Dee, the Elizabethan magus and royal counsellor, has been made well-known by Frances Yates and came into conflict with the postcolonial reading of the character as a coloniser in the 1980s. However, these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive but rather enrich each other, as John Dee was also the promoter of the rising of the British Empire, claiming that England was God-chosen to be the leader of all nations.

The connection between Dee and Prospero is knitted in particular through three symbols of power: the books, the magic garments, and the monad, the sign of the perfect unity of the cosmos first outlined by Pythagoras. Firstly, Prospero's love for his books, which even exceeds the one for his dukedom in Milan (1.2.166-8) finds a parallel in Dee, who, in his adulthood, built and owned one of the most excellent libraries of England, with more than four thousand volumes and manuscripts (Royal College of Physicians). In their libraries, both Dee and Prospero are highly devoted to

studying: Dee reports that during his bachelor's years, he "was so vehemently bent to studie, that for those years [he] did inviolably keep this order: onely to sleep four houres every night; to allow to meat and drink (and some refreshing after) 2 houres every day; and of the other 18 houres all (except the time of going to and being at the divine service) was spent in [his] studies and learning" (Wright 45); likewise, Prospero explains to Miranda how he neglected his political duties because he was "transported | And rapt in secret studies" (1.2.76-7).

Secondly, Prospero's magic garments render him an adept of Solomonic magic, like John Dee. As Arnold explains, "Solomonic magic ... was a current of loosely related magical manuscripts and associated rituals which took shape between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Many of the most influential Latin manuscripts in this genre claim to pass on techniques and mysteries which had originally been revealed to King Solomon through a ministering angel sent to him by God" (22). As a matter of fact, Prospero's magic attire consists of a cloak, a hat, and a staff, which reminds of Dee's famous Ashmolean Museum portrait (Figure 10). As Arnold states, these black garments were "demanded by Solomon himself for the 'scryer' and 'master'" (23), who would possess many powers which Prospero shows off throughout the play: "to know the spirits of the air," "to cause thunder and lightening," "to go invisible," "to have power over every man," "to cause unity and concord," "to cast into sickness whom you will," "to cause [hold back] danger, both by sea and land," "to delay a ship that is stopped in the sea by the adamant stone," "to make jugglers or maidens singing to appear," and "to make hunters and their dogs to appear hunting" (Honorius of Thebes).



Figure 10. Portrait of John Dee (Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford)

A last symbol of power is the circle Prospero draws in 5.1, which reminds of the Pythagorean monad, the symbol of the unity and perfection of the cosmos, but also of Dee's *Monas hieroglyphica* (Figure 11), which is “composed of the symbols that represent the seven planets of the Ptolemaic cosmos ... and the seven metals” (Forshaw 125), and which “shows itself to us in the light and life of nature. For it reveals, by its own will, the secret mysteries of this physical analysis” (Forshaw 99). Dee's monad is constructed following exact proportions, which are the ones of the diatonic musical scale (Legard). Drawing the monad, then, Prospero symbolically conjoins all the forces of nature and exerts his power upon the whole earth, bringing forth unity and harmony, yet under his own dominion.

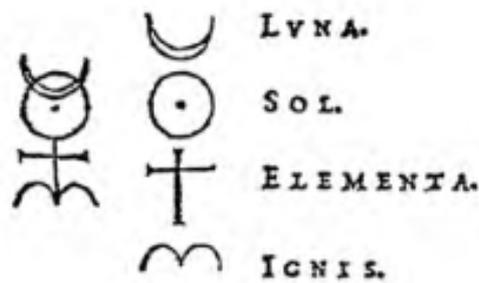


Figure 11. Dee's hieroglyphic monad from Theorem 10 (Courtesy of  
esotericarchives.com)

According to Yates, both Dee and Prospero are Agrippan magi since their magic is based on Agrippa's occult philosophy. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) was an occult philosopher whose major three-volume work, *De Occulta Philosophia*, is now deemed to be the leading guide to Renaissance magic theory. The second volume describes musical harmony as a magical science, which

is not destitute of the gifts of the Stars; for it is a most powerful imaginer of all things, which whilst it follows opportunely the Celestial bodies, doth wonderfully allure the Celestial influence, and doth change the affections, intentions, gestures, motions, actions and dispositions of all the hearers, and doth quietly allure them to its own properties, as to gladness, lamentation, to boldness, or rest, and the like; also it allures Beasts, Serpents, Birds, Dolphins to the hearing of its pleasant tunes [...] and the very Elements delight in Musick.

(Chapter XXIV)

Through music, then, Prospero becomes capable of alluring and controlling not only the other characters but also the elements both in the microcosm and in the macrocosm. He describes his power over the elements in a particular passage of the play, when he is abjuring his magic:

I have bedimmed  
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,  
And 'twixt the green sea and the azured vault  
Set roaring war; to the dread-rattling thunder  
Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak  
With his own bolt: the strong-based promontory  
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up  
The pine and cedar;

(5.1.41-8)

In this light, Ariel and Caliban are apt to be interpreted as representatives of the elements, as Coleridge did notice: "The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived: he is a sort of creature of the earth, as Ariel is a sort of creature of the air" (Raysor 137). By exploiting Ariel and Caliban, Prospero capitalises on the natural resources of the island, merging the figure of the magus and that of the coloniser: as a matter of fact, the conquest of overseas lands was necessary to England to fetch food and most of all wood, a raw material that was precious not only to warm houses and to cook but also to build war and commercial ships.

The exploitation of the environment in the play happens through the "wooden slavery" (3.1.62), which Caliban (and Ferdinand, for a brief period) endures, consisting in cutting wood and carrying logs for Prospero. This forced labour receives a lot of relevance throughout the play: Prospero explains to Miranda how, even if Caliban has

tried to rape her, they cannot get rid of him because “he does make our fire, | Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices | That profit us” (1.2.312-4); Caliban’s exasperation with this work is remarked by the fact that, when Prospero orders him to speak, he just utters: “There’s wood enough within” (1.2.315), and despite this, Prospero still commands him: “Heg-seed, hence: | Fetch us in fuel, and be quick” (1.2.366-7). Scene 2.2 opens with Caliban entering “with a burden of wood” (2.2.0 SD) and fearing that a spirit is coming to torment him because he is carrying the logs too slowly (2.2.16). He begs this alleged spirit, who is actually Stephano, to spare him, promising that he will “bring [his] wood | home faster” (2.2.70-1). Finally, in envisioning Stephano as his new master, Caliban gladly sings: “No more ... fetch in firing at requiring” (2.2.176-7). Until this moment, in fact, the regular and quick rhythm that Caliban has had to keep while cutting trees and bearing logs has hindered him from creating any rhythmical variation, any form of music. If Caliban represents the earth, this fast and steady rhythm could stand for the speed and predictability of the devastation of the environment.

Through Ariel and Caliban, the environment is given a voice and actively expresses its pleas, protests, and curses to Prospero. Ariel prays Prospero to set him free right from his first appearance on stage (1.2.246-50), while Caliban debuts by cursing him and his daughter (1.2.322-5), continuing to do so throughout the play (1.2.365-6; 2.2.4), and even plotting to kill him. However, Prospero also manages to establish a loving relationship with Ariel, which lets the audience catch sight of a crack on his seemingly harsh dominating figure.

ARIEL

Do you love me, master? No?

PROSPERO

Dearly, my delicate Ariel.

(4.1.48-9)

#### 4.4 From subjugation to equality

Prospero knows that his dictatorship is time-bound and depends on the influence of the benevolent planet Jupiter. Right after the masque, he explains to Ferdinand and Miranda that all people, elements, and matter are equal and share the same destiny: that of vanishing into the air.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into *air*, into thin *air*;  
And — like the baseless fabric of this vision —  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,  
And like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

(4.1.148-58 emphasis added)

Prospero is therefore conscious that his mastery over the island has always been an illusion, a mere theatrical performance. He claims that everyone and everything are equally made of the same substance of dreams, and he ultimately breaks the barrier of

alterity between himself and Caliban, asserting: “this thing of darkness I | Acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-6). Prospero, in fact, without his books, is “but a sot” (3.2.93), a fool, as Caliban says he himself is, and as Puck and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* assert that all humans are (3.2.115; 4.1.208).

Furthermore, as long as in Shakespeare’s time the word *air* was connected to the word *music*, because it “evoked the idea of arias and other melodies” (Sulka 11), the passage quoted above might allude to the dissolution of all ontological differences between human and other-than-human beings into music. In this light, then, everything will ultimately “melt into” music, and all culture-bound differences will mean nothing.

This chapter has discussed how music was used during colonial expeditions in the early modern period and how *The Tempest* reflects its fundamental role as a diplomatic tool: music was played to allure and control natives, who could give Europeans access to the resources of their land. As a result, Ariel’s melodious songs are not just meant to enchant the public but also show how colonisers consistently misused the power of music to achieve their own objectives, including the exploitation of natural resources. The final message that is conveyed, however, is that all forms of dominion are but illusions, fictional shows in the great theatre of the Earth, and that all differences between human and other-than-human beings will ultimately dissolve into air and music.

## Conclusion

Listening to the sounds of the environment is becoming ever more critical to gain information about the health of the ecosystem and mitigate the effects of the environmental crisis. The field of ecomusicology gives great importance to the analysis of the soundscapes, as related to the ways humans perceive them, and thus studies the intertwining of the concepts of music, nature, and culture in their diverse manifestations.

This dissertation contributes to the ecomusicological field by analysing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, following this research question: How do music, nature, and humans interact together in these early modern plays?

The theoretical basis lies in the ancient theory of the music of the spheres, according to which music is the daughter of God and Nature, and is produced by the movements of the planets, so perfectly that human ears cannot even hear it because of their moral imperfection. In the cosmos, the exact distances among planets correspond to the intervals among the notes of the musical scale; therefore, each celestial body is assigned a note and a musical mode, which influences life on Earth in a peculiar way. It was argued that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, clear allusions to the effect of the music of the Moon and the Sun on the mood of characters and the events of the play are present, while in *The Tempest*, the Ionian scale deriving from the influence of planet Jupiter underlies the whole sequence of the scenes. In this light, music is not a product of human culture but comes from nature and is endowed with a sacred value.

In the plays, sounds mediate between the human and the non-human, immersing them in a shared soundscape where every voice is equally important. Through sounds, even things that the eye cannot perceive can receive our attention and become present in all their vitality. Furthermore, as we detach from the specificity of language, we can also communicate with our surroundings as all the other living beings do.

The sounds of the environment are not only perceived positively but also arouse feelings of fear. These can be rational when related to actual devastating events like unstable weather, famine, and floods, or irrational when based on superstition. The agency and unpredictability of the environment made early moderns feel threatened and punished by supernatural forces and damned to a forthcoming apocalypse.

Given this circumstance, music started to be used by early modern colonisers as a diplomatic tool to conquer distant lands and gain control over their natural resources to help the homeland. In *The Tempest*, a similar abuse of music occurs: characters are seduced and manipulated through songs to satisfy Prospero's need for timber and political power.

This dissertation adds some insights into the usage of music in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, which is far from being merely ornamental. This study also points out the complex intertwining between music, culture, and nature, which could make today's readers find new approaches to these two early modern plays and to the soundscapes around us. If the realist novel, as Ghosh asserts, is inadequate to tackle the issue of climate change because climatic events are so abnormal to seem unrealistic, Shakespeare's works immerse reality and imagination into the same theatrical soundscape, letting these two worlds inform each other and encouraging the public to overcome the limits of vision and predictability.

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