Shelley-Mills Prize 2025

THEME: 'Shakespeare and the natural world'

MOTTO: The Mushroom that grows on the Tree

No-place, no roots, no mother: Subversive maps and family trees in *The Tempest* and Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother*

The act of establishing colony is always contingent upon the *perception* of blankness. Recounting exile from Milan, Prospero describes being 'extirpated'—literally meaning to be pulled out at the roots and rendered incapable of regeneration— before being set adrift at sea.[1] In turn, he extirpates another (and an Other) —seizing Caliban's matrilineally inherited land to establish his own settler colony. Sixteenth century explorers of the New World envisioned the land and peoples they encountered as a 'bare table unpainted […] upon which you may […] write what you list, as you cannot upon tables already painted, unless you raze or blot out the first forms.'[2] The presence of other humans in the New World was surmountable because they were not considered culturally significant enough to leave 'forms' upon the spaces they inhabited. There was nothing to 'blot out'. It is this abstract quality of cultural significance that, according to Marc Augé's theories on tourism, must be perceived as present to convert mere space into rooted place.[3] Likewise, *The Tempest*'s Italians first experience the play's fictional island as an 'uninhabitable', barren non-place without relational, historical, or identity-based attachments (II.i.40).[4] Yet it is permanent home to Caliban, the 'monster of the isle', who knows where the land is fertile and where it is not (II.ii.64). Saidiya Hartman considers such erasures and appropriations of place in her 2007 memoir/historical novel *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, wherein she narrates stories of transatlantic slavery in tandem with her journey across Ghana.[5] Frustrated by the commodification of African-American tourism to West Africa, Hartman dismantles the romantic myth of return to the so-called motherland, deciding that slave routes cannot be so simply retraced. In Ghana, local passers-by mark her as rootless, calling out the Twi proverb *dua hon mire*: 'a mushroom that grows on the tree has no deep soil' (4). As a 'spatial dialectic', the aphorism intends to firmly orient Hartman

[1] Shakespeare, William, 'The Tempest' in *The Arden Shakespeare Third Series: Complete Works* ed. by Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, David Scott Kastan and H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), I.ii.125
[2] Peter Martyr, *The Decades of the Newe Worlde or West India, Conteyning the Navigations and Conquestes of the Spanyardes...*, trans. by Richard Eden (London: John Russell Smith, 1555), p. 5.
[3] Marc Augé, 'From Places to Non-Places', in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 75–115 (p. 77).
[4] Marc Augé, 'From Places to Non-Places', in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 1995), pp. 75–115 (pp. 77–78)
[5] Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Trade* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2021).

at geographical, social and political margins.[6] Yet mushrooms, colloquially treated with a level of disgust, have recently been understood to operate in enormous, unseen rhizomic networks that sustain trees and plants through non-linear pathways that grow in all orientations.[7] Likewise, Hartman develops her sense of unrooted belonging, unburdened by trite myths, in small Ghanaian sea-side towns. Working from and through this metaphor of the mushroom, I argue that rootlessness and dispossession in *The Tempest* and Hartman's text can foster lateral and transformative reimaginings of self and space; in short, that deep roots need not grow downwards.

Imagined geography and implied cartography in *The Tempest* are fundamental to its allegories of identity. As foregrounded by John Gillies, Shakespearean geographies are 'much more than a literal quality and much more than a backdrop', constituting 'a complex and dynamic quantity, with a characterological and symbolic agenda.'[8] *The Tempest* generates complex and dynamic cartographic potentials, rendering its island an unstable and contested presence. Firstly, there is the real-world space it takes up on the stage. Its boundaries, as noted by Michael Witmore, are positioned at 'exactly the same geographical lay-line as the metaphysical edge of the theatrical illusion.'[9] This is to say that the edge of the island falls exactly where its theatrical and metatheatrical fabrications cease, doubling the sense of the unreal. Secondly, there is the imagined physical space of the island generated through speaking parts, which tell of its 'odd angles' and 'deep nooks', 'fresh springs' and 'brine pits' (I.ii.223-7;339). These scanty descriptions, as well as a much-interrogated reference to the 'still-vexed Bermudas' (I.ii.229), have helped to establish a third sense of space in *The Tempest* – that hypothetical cartographic/geographic space which the island might take upon a globe or map. Several critics and authors have attempted to authenticate or reimagine the play's space as a place within the Caribbean, Mediterranean, and Near East alike.[10] I find that attempts to establish the specific 'place' of the island

[6] John Gillies, 'Mapping the Other: Vico, Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference', in *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1–39 (p. 7).
[7] Paul Stamets, 'Mushrooms As Nature's Internet', in *Mycelium Running: How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2005), pp. 2–11.
[8] Gillies, p. 3.
[9] Michael Witmore, 'Spinoza and the Tempest: An Island of One', in *Shakespearean Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 90–126 (p. 91).
[10] James E. Robinson, 'Caribbean Caliban: Shifting the "I" of the Storm', *Comparative Drama*, 33.4 (1999), 431–53; Richard Wilson, 'Voyage to Tunis: New History and the Old World of The Tempest', *ELH*, 64.2

presuppose that Shakespeare did not know exactly what he was doing when he chose to blend the Bermudas, Algiers, and Patagonia into Caliban's contexts. In doing so he skilfully, and, I think, deliberately, renders the island *not* a place. Gillies has demonstrated that such a 'blurring of racial outline is typical of the representation of exotics in Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists.'[11] In resisting the urge to focus the blurred image of the Elizabethan racial other and his environ, its compositeness can elucidate how identity is mapped onto space and place in this period. For the Italians, who I figure as accidental Augéan tourists more than deliberate colonists, the island falls into the category of 'non-place' occupied by 'transit points and temporary abodes without any lasting anthropological attachments.[12] Caliban, who supposedly did not know his 'own meaning' prior to being educated by Prospero and Miranda, is figured as too culturally deficient to cast any sense of place upon a space (I.ii.377). Shakespeare surrounds him with a variety of clashing cultural referents that almost seem to cancel each other out, rendering him 'culturally non-existent', as Günter Walch has argued.[13] Hence, the island can repeatedly be claimed a 'barren' or 'bare' no-man's-land because Caliban, it's first native-born resident, is not really a 'man'.

Prospero constructs a moralising binary regarding attachment to the earth. He addresses Caliban as 'Thou earth', aligning him with his 'earthy' mother, in immediate juxtaposition with the less corporeal and more compliant Ariel (I.ii.315; 273). To be 'earthy' and especially attuned to the natural world is framed as a source of suspicion and disgust. Caliban's deep ecological knowledge about the island —and Prospero's repeated exploitation of it— is reiterated throughout the play. However, I do not read Caliban's attachment to the land through indigenous metaphors. While Shakespeare does characterise his intimate knowledge of the island's geography, it does not follow that he is an indigene in the strictest sense; rather, he is a sort of second-generation immigrant. Caliban's devotion to his mother's god, Setebos (a South American deity), would suggest that he knows some of his family's

(1997), 333–57; Jennifer Linhart Wood, 'Sounding Spaces: The Tempest's Uncanny Near-East Echoes', *Shakespeare Studies*, 44 (2016), 173–79.

[11] Gillies, p. 32.

[12] Augé, p. 78.

[13] Günter Walch, '"What's Past Is Prologue": Metatheatrical Memory and Transculturation in *The Tempest*', in *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot and Michèle Willems, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 223–38 (p. 232) <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511553141.014> [accessed 31 December 2024].

history and tradition, and probably Sycorax's Algerian roots. He knows of another home, but having lost his mother means he has lost what connects him to any community. Little criticism has seemed to truly consider Caliban as being away from home in any significant sense. But Hartman engages with this predicament of the slave during her time in Ghana. She attests that the 'most universal definition of the slave is a stranger. Torn from kin and community, exiled from one's country…' (5) This certainly describes Sycorax and her mysterious exile from Algiers. Caliban's estrangement is further entrenched and doubled by his inexperience of any other country than that where he is born a slave.

Hartman's novel is centred around the phenomenon of mother-loss as the disorientating result (and tool) of transatlantic slavery. She writes that 'slaves did not possess lineages. The "rope of captivity" tethered you to an owner rather than a father and made you offspring rather than an heir' (77). The system of slavery severed paternal relationships without regard for family units. However, enslaved women were often kept with their children for a significant period before they would be separated. Hartman describes the long-term impact of this as a haunting; 'The stamp of the commodity haunts the maternal line and is transferred from one generation to the next […] The mother's mark, not the father's name, determined your fate' (80-1). Accordingly, though we hear little of Caliban's mother, as the 'Sycorax school' of critics have noted, we are told nothing of his father, apart from Prospero's suggestion that Sycorax slept with the devil to produce Caliban —which may or may not be literally intended. Portrayed as a monstrous and deformed offspring, Caliban is labelled with unusual compound epithets that reveal the European racial thought systems threaded through the play. The first major nickname, 'hag-seed', disparages his mother, whose 'abhorred' nature Prospero implies he has inherited (I.ii.273). Prospero also evidences a European disgust for the fecundity of the racial Other; Caliban's birth is described as Sycorax having 'littered' onto the island (I.ii.282). Mary Douglas has established that the human body is the most fundamental phenomenological margin and thus breaches of bodily boundaries generate the most extreme reactions of disgust.[14] In this way the delimited production of Sycorax's body generates revulsion and fear for Prospero, who is always endeavouring to score

[14] Mary Douglas, 'External Boundaries', in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas Collected Works (London: Routledge, 2003), II, 115–29.

boundaries and lines across land and bodies alike. After all, his justification for Caliban's slave status is his alleged attempt to force himself upon Miranda after having been welcomed into Prospero's cell.

Caliban's violation of spatial and bodily boundaries is crucial to the construction of his barbarous status. Gillies explains that 'the barbarian is a transgressor of bounds and a violator of prohibitions: notably the prohibitions of incest upon which rests the institutions of the family and ultimately that of the state.'[15] It is not a far stretch to consider that Caliban encroaches on the incest taboo as well; Prospero's didactic treatment of both Caliban and Miranda before the expulsion suggests a dynamic in which Prospero is father, the former his impressionable children. Caliban's threat that he and Miranda would have 'peopled' the island with 'Calibans' is thus doubly transgressive in its implications of incest and miscegenation (I.ii.351-2). Returning to the idea of Sycorax's 'littering,' Hartman similarly discusses the geographical 'scattering' of children caused by chattel slavery but contends that it is disingenuous to do as Prospero does, casting the slave-mother's abandonment of her child as indicative of a warped maternality rather than of sheer desperation (16). The disgust towards the production of the slave is also deeply ironic due to the master's dependence on this production. Prospero 'cannot miss' Sycorax's bodily production, though he describes it as a spewing out of waste (I.ii.312). In this way Sycorax haunts the island with her inexpungeable legacy.

The drunken butler Stephano liberally addresses Caliban with a second epithet, 'moon-calf', which refers to a deformed animal or monster. The term is derived from an earlier meaning of an abortive foetus, in a gynaecological condition thought to be induced by the moon.[16] It is fascinating, then, that Prospero scorns Sycorax and her capacity to 'control the moon' in the final act (IV.i.270). Within the Ptolemaic astronomical model under which the play operates, the moon and all other planets were thought to be fixed in a spheres that orbited around the Earth.[17] Sycorax's ability to disrupt this model,

[15] Gillies, p. 14.
[16] *mooncalf*, n., sense 1a: ' A deformed animal; a monster. *Obsolete. rare*.', *OED Online* (revised December 2002, accessed 21 January 2025); *mooncalf*, n., sense 1a: 'A mole (mole n.4), a false conception. *Obsolete* (*rare* after the 17th cent.). Formerly regarded as being produced by the influence of the moon', *OED Online* (revised December 2002, accessed 21 January 2025)
[17] Catherine Currie and Ian Neal, 'Shakespeare and the Spheres: The Representation of Astrology, Astronomy and Folklore Surrounding the Moon in King Lear, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest', *Education Today*, 2011, 1–10 (p. 7).

to move the moon (and therefore the same tides that Prospero manipulates at the start of the play) and invoke monstrous births, makes her a highly threatening female magus figure. She continues to warp and breach spatial boundaries desired to be rigid and impermeable. As per Hartman's quotation, Prospero comes to take ownership of Caliban but struggles to totally efface the legacy of his heritage. Though Caliban's father is successfully erased, Caliban's mother continues to make 'marks' on Caliban and the island that ultimately disturb Prospero to the point of discarding his project.

Both *The Tempest* and *Lose Your Mother* lend themselves to geographically poetic explorations of how travellers can map geographies that are by nature ephemeral and fractured. The traveller as a literary character is historically one of hubris and authority aided by the fact that no one can refute his claims about a land that only he has been to. Unlike the imposing status assumed by Prospero, who works hard to inculcate his historical truths into Miranda, Ariel, and (unsuccessfully) Caliban, Hartman radically foregrounds her novel with the fact of her own blindness.[18] She cannot see markers of slavery's presence in Ghana. Graves and memorials for the dead are conspicuously absent. How, then, can she plot the paths of slaves without physical traces? I suggest that Hartman envisions a new kind of genealogical map emerging from the interlinked diasporic voices that converse in her novel —those of slaves and their descendants, twenty-first century indigenous Ghanaians, African-American expats, and admitted tourists like herself. An artistic digital representation of such a cross-temporal map has been created by Carolina Hinojosa, who has overlaid the Ghanaian locations visited by Hartman with those mentioned Mary Prince in her report of her life as enslaved woman.[19] Such a dynamic, lateral network forms a different kind of genealogical map that more precisely represents the multilayered aftermath of enslavement.

Likewise, *The Tempest* yields non-traditional genealogical and cartographic poetics. The island, heralded by the chaotic aural mayhem of the opening storm, is an overwhelmingly sonic space; its ambient 'noises' 'sounds' and 'sweet airs' disorient the European parties as they try to navigate

[18] Tisha M. Brooks, 'Searching for "Free Territory" in Saidiya Hartman's Lose Your Mother', *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 50 (2017), 57–83 (p. 63).
[19] Carolina Hinojosa, 'Subversive Cartography: Mary Prince and Saidiya Hartman', *StormyMapJS*, 2023 <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/5e622401bda8c3d18eb77aa3c72cf0f9/cartography-of-imperial-vs-domestic-space-in-mansfield-park-and-the-history-of-mary-prince/index.html>.

(III.ii.123-5). *The Tempest's* sonic disorientation, then, is the basis for its major geographic disorientation.[20] The island's spaces are mapped through a tripartite structure of major auditory events —the storm, songs, and masque— but also ambient noise, conducive to an 'acoustic map' that recentres phenomenological power upon Caliban.[21] As Bruce R. Smith notes, Caliban 'stands dead center' in the 'broad acoustic horizons' of *The Tempest* between ambient noise and music.[22] They do not disturb or disorient him. Such an alternative acoustic mapping privileges Caliban's sensory and lived experience over European efforts to establish static borders, by orientating him centrally.

The Tempest and *Lose Your Mother* hijack the poetic potential of geography to transform narratives about loss into frameworks for re-mapping spatial belonging. Both texts challenge rigid cartographies in favour of a more porous, fluid understanding of place and identity. Hartman's metaphor of the isolated mushroom that thrives on a tree inadvertently captures an adaptive model of lateral connection and communication between different trees, or diasporic sectors. Similarly, an acoustic mapping of *The Tempest* that emphasises Caliban's subversive centrality within the play's sensory dimensions mirrors Hartman's dismissal of colonial and romantic neo-colonial delineations. Together, the texts not only challenge colonial boundary-making but open non-mythic possibilities for reconceptualising histories of displacement.

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