

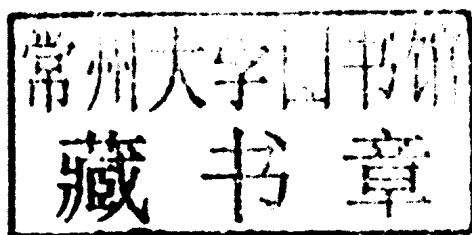
THE TEMPEST **and NEW WORLD- UTOPIAN POLITICS**

FRANK W. BREVIK

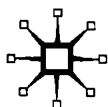


***The Tempest* and New World-Utopian Politics**

Frank W. Brevik



palgrave
macmillan



THE TEMPEST AND NEW WORLD-UTOPIAN POLITICS

Copyright © Frank W. Brevik, 2012.

All rights reserved.

Chapter 1 of this book appeared in the online journal *This Rough Magic* in Spring/Summer 2011.

Chapter 3 of this book appeared in print in *Authority of Expression* in 2009. It is used here with kind permission from Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

First published in 2012 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the World, this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited, registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978–1–137–02179–3

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brevik, Frank W.

The Tempest and new world-Utopian politics / Frank W. Brevik.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978–1–137–02179–3 (hardback)

1. Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616. Tempest.

2. Utopias in literature. I. Title.

PR2833.B66 2012

822.3'3—dc23

2012005800

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Integra Software Services

First edition: August 2012

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound in Great Britain by

CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

***The Tempest* and New World-Utopian Politics**

To my son, Oliver Anker Brevik

Acknowledgments

The publication of this book marks the high point of a project that has been with me since I was a junior in college thirteen years ago, and my deeply felt thanks are due to a number of people whose help has been significant.

I wish first and foremost to thank Jessica White, who has co-written the first chapter and who deserves special thanks for her willingness to contribute to the book and for the quality and intelligence of her input.

Jennifer Vaught, who supervised the doctoral dissertation that forms the backbone of the research, was as tireless as she was insightful in her feedback.

I also wish to thank LaGrange College reference librarian Arthur Robinson, who has pulled several rabbits out of his hat toward this project. Jay Simmons and David Garrison deserve thanks for awarding me the LaGrange College Dean/Provost Summer Research Grant in 2009 and 2011.

At Palgrave Macmillan, I am grateful to Brigitte Shull, Jo Roberts, and Maia Woolner for believing in my book manuscript and for taking it on board.

Special thanks also go to the anonymous reviewer for invaluable comments and remarks on the manuscript.

Finally, my love and sincerest gratitude go to my family in Norway—my mother, Anne Lise Brevik, and my sisters Kristin Waage and Lena Brevik.

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Part I The New World <i>Tempest</i> Orthodoxy as Multicultural Pedagogy	
Introduction: The Rampant Politicization of <i>Tempest</i> Criticism—and Its Recent Discontents	3
1 Teaching <i>The Tempest</i> in an American-Adamic Context: The New World Orthodoxy as Multicultural Pedagogy	13
Part II “Text” versus “Context” in Post-Second World War Criticism	
2 Such Maps as Dreams Are Made On: Discourse, Utopian Geography, and <i>The Tempest</i> ’s Island	35
3 Calibans Anonymous: The Journey from Text to Self in Modern Criticism	55
Part III Subversive American Adams and Anarchic Utopists	
4 <i>The Tempest</i> Beyond Post-Colonial Politics: Vargas Llosa’s <i>The Storyteller</i> as Topical Retrotext	71
5 “Any Strange Beast There Makes a Man”: New World Manliness as Old World Kingliness in <i>The Tempest</i>	91
6 “Thought Is Free”: <i>The Tempest</i> , Freedom of Expression, and the New World	113
Part IV Post-Communist Topicalities	
7 Toward a Post-1989 Reading of <i>The Tempest</i>	131

Conclusion: Readers vs. Text in the Age of Democracy: <i>The</i> Formalist <i>Tempest</i> or Presentist “ <i>Tempests</i> ”?	159
Notes	169
Works Cited	179
Index	189

Part I

**The New World *Tempest*
Orthodoxy as Multicultural
Pedagogy**

Introduction: The Rampant Politicization of *Tempest* Criticism—and Its Recent Discontents

It has been 400 years since *The Tempest* was written. For about 340 years the play was enjoying a largely panegyric criticism laden with honorifics like “transcendent,” “artistic,” and “Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage.” By now, the play is without a doubt one of Shakespeare’s most politicized plays. This book will trace and challenge the major recent political interpretations of *The Tempest*, especially where these readings draw on the very earliest suggestions by Edmond Malone and Sidney Lee that the play portrays or foreshadows the way in which the English/Americans would later dispossess the natives of America of their land and culture. Many *Tempest* critics have since sought to expand the applicability of the play to include historically more recent ideological issues particular to the “third world” as well as the more New World-specific slant found in Malone and Lee. The study on New World and Americanist utopian politics in *The Tempest* that follows focuses on how paradigm shifts in literary criticism over the past six decades have all but reinscribed the text of Shakespeare’s last unassisted play into a fiercely political palimpsest grounded in historical events like colonialism or even prophetically envisioning post-colonial issues. In the following chapters, I problematize the by now hegemonic views that the play has a dominant New World dimension, reject the idea that Caliban can be seen as a Native American or African slave, and disprove textually the premise that the play unproblematically addresses a uniquely Western colonial history and post-colonial plight. My conclusions are not only drawn on the important basis of a method of holistic close readings that demonstrates how a textually derived, ultimately utopian setting at the same time enables and effaces discursively over-invested New World settings but also informed by intertextuality, sources, historical context, and presentist

co-texts. To the extent that this hybrid methodology—hardly original in itself—yields original findings, it does so in this book's ensuing discussion of utopian politics, which posits the argument that *The Tempest* is a politically subversive play rather than a compliant and decorous one, drawing, as it does, on explosively radical passages that form a proto-Americanist discourse that displays and interrogates a power vacuum where nearly all authority has been suspended. The New World dimensions that this book sees at work in the play are in other words not the colonial or political relationship between Caliban and his master Prospero that fits into the narratives that post-colonial writers and scholars have so often rehearsed. Instead, the Americanist impulses of the play form a part of a larger utopian discourse that has so far been all but neglected in *Tempest* criticism. Such proto-Americanist discourse can be found not so much in the red herring of Caliban as an Indian or cannibal but rather in Ferdinand's New World masculinity, in the freedom of speech and movement that the setting's New World-topical space affords, in Gonzalo's utopian urges to start mankind all over again, all resonating with the (sometimes unrealistic) optimism that forms an important part of the discourse about the New World—as opposed to the bleak pessimism associated with Europe. This latter tension has been given almost no critical attention in *Tempest* scholarship, and, over several chapters, my book interprets the play's pastoral, utopian, and "American" tensions in light of its aporic setting as well as through a "presentist" post-1989 prism—unfathomably, almost totally neglected as a historical and political paradigm shift in Shakespeare criticism.

More specifically, this book seeks to answer the following questions relevant to understanding *The Tempest* and its myriad interpretations in the last sixty years: What led to the New World orthodoxy in terms of the play's themes? How can this interpretation be best discussed and understood in a pedagogical situation involving students unfamiliar with the play's considerable contextual resonances? Where is the play's island set, cartographically as well as metaphorically speaking? To what extent is literal text privileged over more fluid understandings of "texts" and "contexts" (or, lately, perhaps, vice versa) in *Tempest* criticism? How convincing—in terms of text, intertext, and context—is Caliban as a symbol of everything and everybody, especially as a suffering colonial subject oppressed by the European conqueror? Beside the much-touted (post-)colonialist parallels, what Americanist dimensions pervade the play otherwise? In what ways are these New World or "American" points of interest interpretable in terms of sex and gender? Can we speak of a New World masculinity that is different from European manliness? Can the play be said to be politically subversive

in its advocacy of a sense of freedom of expression, of freedom of movement, of conscience, of thought, of belief, of religion, of spirit? And to what extent is this multifaceted freedom, then, a result of the play's setting, in how great measure reliant on vastness of space, on the New World in its literal topicality? Is American speech, therefore, freer than European utterance in early modern discourse? And what sort of political and social parallels does the play hold post-1989? And *why*, finally, have such possible post-communist and post-colonial parallels remained nearly *entirely* unarticulated in criticism of the play these last twenty-two years?

As the above questions intimate, this work addresses a black hole in *Tempest* criticism. I suffer no delusions that my work can somehow fill this critical gap, but, for its small part, the holistic, text-centered approach that follows in the next chapters yields a dramatically different interpretation than most of the last sixty years of scholarship. Previous criticism—for example by Mannoni (1950); Césaire (1955); Lamming (1960); Fernando Retamar (1972); Leslie Fiedler (1973); Peter Hulme and Francis Barker (1984); Paul Brown (1985); Thomas Cartelli (1987); and Ania Loomba (1988)—has been exceptionally successful in stressing the play's historical and (post-)colonial points of interest. Carolyn Ann Porter (1987) and Meredith Anne Skura (1989) were among the first to take issue with New Historicists and Cultural Materialists and have since been supported by a new camp of “discontents” whose concerns have been particularly well voiced by Ben Ross Schneider (1995), Jonathan Gil Harris (1999), Ivo Kamps (2004), and Tom McAlindon (2004). My own contribution to this debate aligns itself only in certain chapters, and admittedly not wholly without internal self-contradiction, with this most recent criticism that questions the ubiquitous politicization of *Tempest* readings—and then goes on to suggest a political interpretation of its own.

And toward the 1990s, *The Tempest* witnessed a more moderate (that is to say, *less*) political interpretation that found the methods, premises, and conclusions of previous anti-colonialist scholarship wanting. In the words of Meredith Anne Skura,

it is assumed that the similarities [the play poses to colonialism] matter but the differences do not: thus Prospero's magic occupies “the space *really inhabited in colonial history* by gunpowder” [Skura's emphasis]; or, when Prospero has Caliban pinched by the spirits, he shows a “similar sadism” to that of the Haitian masters who “roasted slaves or buried them alive”; or, when Prospero and Ariel hunt Caliban with spirit dogs, they are equated to the Spaniards who hunted Native Americans with dogs. So long as there is a core of resemblance, the differences are irrelevant. The differences, in

fact, are themselves taken to be evidence of the colonialist ideology at work, rationalizing and euphemizing power—or else inadvertent slips. (49)

To the extent that Skura's scathing critique can be called political, it is so only insofar as it goes against what it perceives as an overpoliticized criticism that neglects the text in central places and that wishes to read only one side of the story, as it were. Skura's broadside stresses that cultural critics who otherwise tend to operate chiefly in the contextual and discursive realms of literary criticism readily point to textual detail whenever it may confirm some suspicion of a larger New World historical or cultural issue at work in *The Tempest* but tend not to acknowledge the text whenever it might challenge such politically motivated readings.

This revised criticism enjoys, perhaps surprisingly, much support in the Marxist critic Howard Felperin (1995), who finds great weaknesses in New World-specific discussions of *The Tempest*. Felperin points out that most of the readings dealing with colonialism in *The Tempest* tend to be partial and incomplete, ultimately shaped by political interest.¹ He suggests instead a much larger vision: whereas previous critics on the Left have been skeptical or downright dismissive of a humanist utopia, Felperin suggests that we see Prospero's epilogue as central in sketching, or at least alluding to, a utopian view that is fused with elements of a teleological Marxism as well as a theological Christianity, claiming that

The Tempest is not an explicitly Christian play, nor is its "magic" the expression of a primitive pre-theological system; yet it is deeply compatible with both... So much so, that we might be justified in viewing the play's representation of history as a kind of "missing link" between the historical schemes of Christianity and Marxism. (62)

My own interpretation is indebted to Felperin in both its pronouncements on current criticism and especially in its broadened understanding of utopias seen above that this book in turn links to numerous *benevolent* travel narratives from the New World.

In slight contrast, by calling attention to and emphasizing the Old World and Mediterranean dimensions of the play, some recent scholars have since tried to temper the predominantly dystopian New World angles—and thus, axiomatically, downplay the political castigations leveled at the play—that have been the staple of much recent criticism. Jerry Brotton (1998, 2000), David Scott Wilson-Okamura (2003), Ivo Kamps (2004), and Andrew Hess (2000) are recent examples of this "revisionist" tendency. Because of the admirable range of their work, Alden

T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan could perhaps be placed in the same camp, but the Vaughans steer clear of polemics and controversy about the play or about Caliban yet nevertheless provide an enormously useful survey of reception, criticism, and cultural metaphors in their seminal book *Caliban: A Cultural History* (1991), to which this book is necessarily greatly indebted. Interesting works have also been written by Jonathan Hart (1996), Jeffrey Knapp (2000), Peter Hulme (2000), and Tom McAlindon (2004), who decries the New World angle as spurious by instead pursuing a similar discussion of the discourse of religion and prayer in the play in order to demonstrate and temper a critical generation's perhaps obsessive focus on the play's colonial aspects and New World-discursive references.

To return to the questions I listed at the outset, my own approach and answers suggest that lecturing to students about the play in this tremendously thorny critical-political climate is very, very easy—but it remains an extremely difficult undertaking to *teach* the play and its myriad contexts and themes in a way that allows student readers who are critically and contextually innocent (what I refer to as “Adamic” students in Chapter 1) to interpret the text with some degree of autonomy. Chapter 1 argues that in order to do so, one ought to start at the critical ground zero, the text of *The Tempest*, and accept the fact that since each student brings a unique background and prism to the reading experience, interpretations will differ greatly. Further, a reading, for example, that is colored by the professor's pronouncement that the play is heavily involved in colonialism (or that it is not, for that matter) can hardly be a fruitful pedagogical experience if student autonomy or freedom of interpretation are the articulated aims—which they nowadays so very often are, of course. Yet some common interpretative experiences will necessarily be shared by most (if not all) readers by virtue of the text's (in)ability to communicate its generic and thematic intent and content; hence the return to the text itself, to its genre and form, the return to lexical (as well as metaphorical) meaning is a useful first step toward appreciating not only the play itself but also, in due time, its legion contexts, intertexts, and co-texts.

Such a pragmatic pedagogy may well entail a time-tested method of thorough close reading, a familiar method that, in the case of Chapter 2, will result in unfamiliarly different conclusions than those drawn by a generation of *Tempest* critics influenced by “old historicism” and the New Criticism that preceded the current New Historicist orthodoxy. For a holistic close reading reveals that the play's setting is not so much a Caribbean colony but a “floating” island, a “hovering” Laputa of sorts that has no consistent geographical coordinates, thus rendering the island perpetually unstable and literally utopian—that is, *nowhere*. This interpretation,

while original in its conclusions, is one that nevertheless draws on a distinctly uncartographical and purposely bewildering sense of geography previously described by David Baker as “hypertopical” (68) and by Geraldo de Sousa as an “alien habitat” (447). This geography, so seldom an issue taken seriously in *Tempest* criticism, is greatly at odds with the bulk of recent criticism’s tendency to locate the play’s island semi-metaphorically and semi-geographically—but wholeheartedly in terms of pathos—in the New World, as if its literal and/or geographical setting were an unimportant afterthought. This book criticizes the blithe convenience with which perhaps especially Marxist-influenced critics have done so—often with an eye to Caliban’s presumed New World *topicality*—as highly paradoxical and indeed befuddling, since the axiom accepted by most Marxists posits that material forces (the basis; in this case either the play’s setting or the immediate circumstances under which Shakespeare conceived this striking character) are the conditions that enable the superstructure such as culture, art, and language. Thus the play’s setting, the very grounds and physical forces of which Caliban is presumably a result, would seem to wield a major influence on the characters and the themes—rather than the other way round. In myriad universally accepted ways, of course, Renaissance London around 1610–11 also shaped the play—but importantly also Caliban, which we witness on the one occasion when, for comedic purposes, he is likened to an Englishman (II.ii.27–30),² a point hardly mentioned by any *Tempest* scholar in the last thirty years. Hence there is an enormous inconsistency at work here for Marxist-inspired Cultural Materialist critics seeking to stress the importance of the shaping forces of the basis, the setting, the means of production, the nature, the geography, the climate, the weather, the trees, the rocks, the logs, and so on, while at the same time overtly, artificially, far-fetchedly privileging the setting in particular as New World on the strength of this one, this very European, perhaps even English and local, character’s dubious Americanness alone.

I thus contend that many political readings of *The Tempest* rely on the textually highly shaky premise that the setting for the play is *de facto* New World. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, a setting in the Virginia Colony, in Bermuda, or in America more generally is in many ways a clearly selective and anti-textual locus that enables critics to discuss the play’s purported relevance to political problems particular to the New World. In other words, recent discussions over issues like racism and colonialism often rely on circular argumentation in the sense that some critics ostensibly seek to address a *textually* extant dimension from a political angle—the same political impetus that reads the text *against the grain* in order to produce such an otherwise textually unfounded angle in the first place.

Part of Chapter 3, devoted to Caliban, seeks to answer the question why so many New Historicist and Cultural Materialist *Tempest* critics seem to eschew materialism for an unstable culturalism that finds minimal support in the text but rather flimsy evidence in a “discourse” that can be traced back just as much to our own sensibilities as to the historical bases that produced it. Subsequently, Caliban, only recently symbol of nearly every body and every thing in criticism, ought to be interpreted outside of the false guiding premise that the play’s setting is to be understood as New World. Caliban’s disentanglement from this geographically predicated misreading, stripped of his phantom Indianness and textually ill-defined Africanness, reveals a decidedly mythological, Old World version of the wild man or savage. In contrast to the most dystopian readings that equate Caliban’s savageness with the benign portrayals of the “noble” savagery of Native Americans so often found in Renaissance New World travel narratives, an Old World Caliban seems historically and empirically far more convincing. The strength of such a reading finds its root cause in a critical methodology that privileges close textual analysis over historical and contextual discourse. For while New Historicism, Cultural Materialism, and post-colonialist studies have in many ways provided valuable critical perspectives to perhaps especially *Tempest* scholarship, Caliban has been claimed by so many political factions that “his” views—whatever they are—rarely fit with those that appear in the text but rather with a projected set of views that shift attention away from Shakespearean text onto a politicized “context” that a brief survey of *Tempest* criticism after the Second World War strongly affirms is exclusively our own presentist co-text.

There are, precisely for this reason, some rather obvious ironies and problems attendant with reading the play along the lines of post-colonial works. My choosing to do so in the case of Mario Vargas Llosa’s topically convergent novel *The Storyteller* in Chapter 4 runs no little risk of practicing the sort of extratextual criticism that my book criticizes post-colonial scholars for having got carried away with to the point of almost no primary-textual recognition or acknowledgment in their efforts to discuss works by, for example, Fanon, Césaire, or Brathwaite. Commentary on these post-colonial works are often passed on as Shakespearean criticism yet in many cases eclipse the Shakespearean play that gave their spin-offs life and fail to explicate and comment on the original. My own defense of the similar exercise that Chapter 4 calls for is first of all that its reaching outward toward Vargas Llosa’s novel does not neglect or jar with the Shakespearean text but actually harmonizes with it—that the novel employs similar thematic and structural strategies to what *The Tempest*