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Shakespeare and the Mediterranean • 2
The Tempest

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Contents

Contributors 9

Fabio Ciambella
Introduction 15

Part 1 – *The Tempest*: Its Genesis and Its Mediterranean World(s)

1. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells
How Did Shakespeare Write *The Tempest*? 29

2. Silvia Bigliazzi
Navigating Time: Memories of Mediterranean Worlds in *The Tempest* 49

Part 2 – *The Tempest* and the Mediterranean Myth: from Resources to Afterlives

3. Cristiano Ragni
Prospero, or the Demiurge. Platonic Resonances in Shakespeare's Mediterranean 75

4. Erin Reynolds
Auden and the 'Myth' of *The Tempest* 95

Part 3 – From the Mediterranean to the Mediterranean: *The Tempest*, Italian Music and Cinema

5. Shira F. Melcer
Ariel's Music in Italian and English Madrigal Forms 115

6. Emanuel Stelzer
The Tempest in Italian Dialects 133

Part 4 – Ecocritical and Postcolonial Readings of *The Tempest*

7. Magdalena Gabrysiak
Shakespeare's Nature in Time. Contextualising Ecocritical Readings of *The Tempest* 157

8. ANMOL DEEP SINGH
Mediterranean Echoes in the *The Tempest*: the Rape of Miranda between Race and Politics 175

Index 197

2

Navigating Time: Memories of Mediterranean Worlds in *The Tempest*

Silvia Bigliazzi

Abstract

As Frank Kermode has aptly summarised, *The Tempest* starts where other romances end (2000, 286), and this demands long expositions and recapitulations. Narratives articulate memories and give them new shapes. *The Tempest* accommodates within its romance frame memories of the ancient past as well as of contemporary Mediterranean models and archetypes. It develops through a continuous display of theatrical spectacle and narrative rhetoric, which, while inhibiting dramatic action, parallels, and competes with, visual gesture and pageantry. This essay concentrates on the role of memory within the play and in the dynamic relation with other memories of the Mediterranean past. Special attention is devoted to Prospero's painful memorising in relation to Aeneas's own woeful story-telling in book 2 of the *Aeneid*, and questions are raised on the role of sources and their positions in relation to reception stances. By exploring narrative intricacies at an intertextual level as well as within the play itself, the essay offers a reflection on human capacity to make sense of time and memory in un unstable world of deluding appearances.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *The Tempest*; Virgil; *The Aeneid*; memory

1. Time Castaways

In Book 5 of Lucretius' *De Rerum natura*, man's birth is famously likened to a shipwreck on the shores of light ("Tum porro puer, ut saevis projectus ab undis / navita, nudus humi iacens . . . in luminis oras / nixibus ex alvo matris natura profudit luminis oras"; "Then further the child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves lies naked upon the ground . . . as soon as nature has spilt him forth with throes from his mother's womb into the regions of light"; 1924, 222-3, 224-5). Lucretius was not fully translated into English until 1682 by Thomas Creech, but his poem was reprinted many times in the course of the sixteenth century, and attempts have been made to show similarities between his materialism and Shakespeare's own materialism of nature.[1] Shakespeare does not use exactly the same image as that of a shipwreck, but in sonnet 60 he similarly depicts nativity as an entrance into the "main of light" (5), evoking the sense of a voyage through time which will gradually lead man to his own death:

Nativity, once in the main of light,
  Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned
Crookèd eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
  And time that gave doth now his gift confound. (5-8)[2]

For both Lucretius and Shakespeare, to be born is to enter the sea of light, but while for Lucretius light is the shore upon which we are castaways on a voyage through darkness – a sailing away from not-being-yet towards being-no-more – for Shakespeare light is the sea of being: through it we navigate under the malign influences of heaven, and we gradually decay under the power of Time, in a perilous voyage as a nostos to nothingness.

As Hans Blumenberg reminds us, the traditional metaphorical poignancy of sailing and shipwreck is built on two premises: that the sea is a "naturally given boundary of the realm of human activities" and is also demonised "as the sphere of the unreckonable and lawless, in which it is difficult to find one's bearings" (1997, 8). In *The Tempest*, the sea is where Prospero is set with his daughter at the mercy of unpredictable waves and an uncertain fortune. His voyage is one of potential death and rebirth – like the child Lucretius sees being tossed ashore by the cruel waves. It is a political space as it also is for the King of Naples on his return from Tunis where his daughter has been married to the King. The Mediterranean is in both cases a politicised space where Antonio expels Prospero, and across which Naples and Tunis are connected; it separates but also liaises, and at the beginning of the play it is the "lawless" sea where tempests, natural and artful, may reserve unexpected surprises capable of producing a cut in time.

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[1] As Shoaf calls it (2014); on the relevance of Lucretius in humanist thinking see Greenblatt 2011.

[2] All Shakespearean quotations are from Shakespeare 2005.

This beginning is both fantastical and potentially tragic. From the start it connotes the play's temporality as sharing in the finiteness, irreversibility and linear directionality typical of tragic time, fraught with tensions and anxieties.[3] But we will soon learn that it is only instrumental in turning this temporality into one of pacification and resolution. It is the time of romance, tragicomedy and reconciliation in a drama where the performance and the action roughly coincide, although the story covers a much longer period evoked through the characters' memories. The present is replete with, and conditioned by, a thick sense of the past that translates into an obsessively repetitive dramatic pattern which plays around with Prospero's painful remembrance of his own past, ambivalently combining a sense of guilt for his own political negligence in Milan, and a wish to revenge on his enemies. His story of dispossession is repeated twice in the play by Sebastian and Antonio, and the Caliban team, respectively, and twice fails. The present is when Fortune furnishes Prospero with the occasion finally to punish those who have made him suffer; it is a cut in time similar to the ancient *kairos*, or right moment, that Prospero refers to an auspicious star, thus appropriating that ancient model through the language of Renaissance providential thinking. It is his own zenith, he says, and yet it is not entirely dependent on a higher design but on whether or not he will miss the opportunity:

> 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. Here cease more questions.
> Thou art inclined to sleep; 'tis a good dullness,
> And give it way: I know thou canst not choose.
> (1.2.179-87)

This ancient idea belongs to a qualitative, rather than a quantitative conception of time, as instead *chronos* does. It is a non-measurable temporality independent of a transcendental will, entailing individual agency and responsibility. In this sense, it is an ethically-imbued conception. It is up to Prospero to grasp this opportunity and to make up for the past. He must remember himself now and be ready for the action. His language recalls this ancient model, but Prospero speaks of stars, fortune and Christian values. The need not to forget and to act accordingly is part of a punishment-and-repentance frame which is deeply Christian and concerns Prospero and his enemies alike. As William Fulwood, among others, wrote in his translation of Guglielmo Gratarolo's *De memoria reparanda, augenda servandaque*, which was published in 1562 with the title of *The Castel of Memorie*, "Take memory away, what is a man? what can he doe, or else what can he say?" (Av*v*). As I have argued elsewhere (2013), Prospero's revenge through memory proves to be a step in the reconstruction of his own identity. But what remains to be discussed is how memorisation becomes further problematised once it is set against other examples of ancient representations of Mediterranean acts of memory. Hulme (1982) and Hamilton (1990) are among those who have long pointed out the intricacies of classical stratifications in this play, which, as in the case of the Virgilian echoes, "rather than appearing as shadowy outlines beneath the words of the text, satisfactory reminders of generic and ideological continuity . . . [break] through the surface of the play to become a subject for discussion by the characters" (109). Hulme's reference here is to the "widow Dido" episode in 1.2, which explicitly connects the play with the Roman poet. But when we think about Prospero's traumatic memorisation of his own past in 1.2, and Aeneas' similarly traumatic remembrance in book 2 of the *Aeneid*, we are faced with a different form of dialogue, which is neither a neutral reminder of classical continuities, nor does it establish an explicit analogical ground. In the following pages I will interrogate what this ground may be, and will consider how a dialogue across different genres and stories as well as different receptions of Virgil may affect our perception of Prospero's memorial position within the play as well as the impact of memory on narrative and playacting.

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[3] See my discussion in Bigliazzi 2019; see also Frye 1996; Kastan 1982; Bushnell 2016 and 2018; Wagner 2014 and 2018.

2. Memory

Sixteenth-century theories of memory were at the heart of an intense debate on its cognitive role, its somatic position in the brain, and its religious and political functions. It is no surprise that, as Andrew Hiscock has noted, "Prospero seeks to restrain those around him with a *grand narrative* of the past" so that "the play urges us repeatedly to consider the desperate struggle that is being enacted to establish what should be remembered and to consider the very partial nature of any human act of memory" (2011, 3). The reason why intellectuals were obsessed with theories of memory and ways to retain it, from the arts based on repetition by rote or on loci and visual models, to later Ramist logical and dialectical ordering, was an awareness that the sense of the past is ephemeral and that it may be subjected to revision. Montaigne is probably the best and most acute writer about the fallibility of memory in this period. In "On presumption", for instance, he avows his own incurable propensity to forgetting:

> Memorie is an instrument of great service, and without which, judgement will hardly discharge his duty, whereof I have great want . . . if I must remember a discourse of any consequence, be it of any length, I am driven on this vile and miserable necessitie, to learne every word I must speake, by rote: otherwise I should never doe it well or assuredly . . . Memorie is the receptacle and case of knowledge. Mine being so weake, I have no great cause to complaine if I know but little. I know the names of Artes in generall and what they treate of, but nothing further. I turne and tosse over books, but do not studie them . . . The Authors, the place, the words, and other circumstances, I sodainely forget: and am so excellent in forgetting, that as much as any thing else I forget mine owne writing and compositions. (1613, 367, 368)

Aristotle's epistemology, differently from Plato's notion of a prenatal knowledge conversing with the Ideas, was rooted mostly in the ordinary and material experience. His theory was highly influential on Renaissance thinking, which also distinguished between memorial response to sense-perception and the conscious act of recollection, a process conceived of as a form of inference from data assimilable to "a sort of investigation" (Hiscock 2011, 12). But traces of a Platonic ontology of memory also lingered on in Christian thinking, particularly in Augustine's legacy, whose conception of spiritual identity involved some form of epiphanic "remembering and reappraisal" (21). As Hiscock again points out,

> In this radical rescripting of human experience in the *Confessions*, Augustine's speaker appeals not only for a renewed sense of spiritual direction from the Godhead, but interrogates some of the fundamental axes through which we organize temporal existence: "Thus my boyhood, which is no longer, lies in the past which is no longer . . . neither future nor past exists . . . The present considering the past is the memory, the present considering the present is immediate awareness, the present considering the future is expectation. (Ibid.)

The connection between memory and spiritual renewal would affect the debate in subsequent centuries, including the reception of Cicero's moralisation of *memoria* as for instance presented in *De Inventione* (book 2):

> [160] Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius: memoria, intellegentia, providentia. Memoria est, per quam animus repetit illa, quae fuerunt; intellegentia, per quam ea perspicit, quae sunt; providentia, per quam futurum aliquid videtur ante quam factum est. Iustitia est habitus animi communi utilitate conservata suam cuique tribuens dignitatem. Eius initium est ab natura profectum; deinde quaedam in consuetudinem ex utilitatis ratione venerunt: postea res et ab natura profectas et ab consuetudine probatas legum metus et religio sanxit. (1949, 326-7)
>
> [Wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.]

In turn, Aquinas was to argue that "it is in the nature of prudence that prudent people are directed through those courses of action which are at hand by a consideration not only of the present circumstances but also of past events" (qtd in Hiscock 2011, 22). The political implications of cultivating the art of memory were not immune to such thinking and through intellectuals such as Vives and Erasmus they reached Henry VIII's court and then circulated widely afterward. Erasmus was among the most eminent thinkers in this respect, suggesting a cognitive frame that combined the need for artificial memory and for achieving intellectual apprehension. In his *De ratione studii* (1528), he remarked that

> Although I do not deny that memory is aided by 'places' and 'images', nevertheless the best memory is based on three things above all: understanding, system, and care. For memory largely consists in having thoroughly understood something. Then system sees to it that we can recall by an act of recovery even what we have forgotten. Furthermore, care is of the highest importance, not only here but in all things. That being so you must repeatedly re-read very carefully what you want to remember. (Qtd in Hiscock 2011, 24)

It is not coincidental, therefore, that the sixteenth century witnessed a new emphasis on national history with a special attention to its crises, and a whole host of narratives were published in the second half of the century, culminating in Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* first published in 1577. Shakespeare was to rely heavily on them.

Prospero's concern about memory is related to this complex scenario. Memory is unstable and unable to fully restore the truth of the past, but man must strive to this end as this conception of memory bridges the cognitive and the ethical, the religious and the political, in ways that make it central to both private and public life.

3. *The Tempest*: Navigating Memory

This ambivalent attitude towards memory, aware of both its necessity and its limits, is possibly nowhere as clear as in the first opening duologue between Prospero and Miranda, where, I will argue, not only does Prospero navigate through time to reach back to his own past and probe his own and Miranda's capacity to conjure up their own individual memories, but Shakespeare also navigates through literary models implicitly to evoke and deconstruct them.

In 1990 Donna B. Hamilton was among the first critics to emphasise the relevance of Virgilian symbols and style in the play's texture. Shakespeare, she argued, reworked "the chiefly contested issues of national politics by rewriting some major sections of the *Aeneid*" (x), and in this way he interrogated the ideology of royal power, also with regard to colonisation practices. His naturalisation and problematisation of "the Virgilian idiom" eventually brought "the Virgilian text into dialogue with the problems of power as they were being experienced in its own time" (66). One of her foci of interest was the last scene where we can find "all of the central elements of [the] reunion of the Trojans with their king" (130). In words similar to those used by Aeneas with Dido, "Prospero steps forward and speaks to the group 'Behold, sir King, / The wronged Duke of Milan, Prospero' (5.1.106-7)", and "as Aeneas grasps the hands of his men, so Prospero embraces Gonzalo, thereby assuring him that what he is seeing has a corporeal reality". And eventually, "like Dido welcoming the Trojans, Prospero welcomes his visitors (5.1.110-11)" (130-1). On the initiative of Prospero with the cooperation of the Alonso group, the final reunion, as in the *Aeneid*, re-establishes the lost order. But more interestingly, in this last scene Shakespeare writes into the dialogue "several reminders that a new story has been told – or, as the dialogue has it, that Prospero now has a new story to tell. The pattern for all these lines is that ancient moment when, at Dido's banquet, Aeneas at last responds to her urgings and finally recounts the tale of the destruction of Troy" (131). As Dido encouraged Aeneas to recount the story from the beginning and in full details, so Alonso insists that Prospero tells the story, which is an act of memory:

> "Immo age, et a prima dic, hospes, origine nobis
> Insidias", inquit, "Danaum casusque tuorum
> erroresque tuos".
> (1900, 1.753-5)
>
> ["Come, illustrious guest, / begin the tale", she said, "begin and tell / the perfidy of Greece, thy people's fall, / and all thy wanderings". (1910)]

> this must crave . . .
> . . . a most strange story
> (*The Tempest* 5.1.116-17)
>
> Give us particulars of thy preservation;
> How thou hast met us here.
> (*The Tempest* 5.1.135-6)
>
> . . . I long
> To hear the story of your life, which must
> Take the ear strangely.
> (*The Tempest* 5.1.311-13)

But beyond superficial similarities, their narratives have different formats and functions: while Aeneas's tale may be told in its entirety at the end of the banquet, Prospero says that his is "a chronicle of day by day, / Not a relation for a breakfast, nor / Befitting this first meeting" (165-7), and he then invites everybody to enter his cell where he will eventually tell "the story of my life" (308) – a story which will not be "a replication of the tragic narrative Aeneas told to Dido", but rather "of the renovation of a mind and the union of self and society that is made possible thereby" (Hamilton 1990, 131-2).

This final remark invites further rethinking of Hamilton's suggestive comments. The pattern of repetition of an assumedly literary model of recollection at the invitation of an eager listener concerns radically different memorial acts in qualitative terms. Aeneas's long narrative is of a deeply painful past with which he has not reconciled himself yet, as his proverbial opening lines clarify. Aeneas's remembering is a re-suffering that brings up a trauma, it is the awakening of a grievous past he is resistant to return to and rather prefers to keep dormant, if not strategically to forget.

But let us look at it more closely. In book 2 of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas pours out his passion in a long tale covering the whole book (3-804), premised on a prologue where he voices his anguish and announces a story that would make even his Greek enemies weep, and the tale ends up being so moving that Dido will fall in love with him. This was a very famous tale at the time. As Colin Burrow has pointed out, "The first 4 books of the *Aeneid*, particularly books 2 . . . and 4, seem to have been more frequently read in Tudor grammar schools than any other passage from Virgil’s epic” (2013, 56). Its first 7 books were translated by Thomas Phaer in quantitative verse in 1558 (the whole 12 books were first published in 1573), and in the same heroic Latinate meter Richard Stunyhurst translated the first 4 books in 1582:

A dolefull worke me to renew (O Quéene) thou doost constraine,
To tell how *Greekes* the *Troiā* welth, & lamētable raigne
Did ouerthrow, which I my self haue seen and béen apart
No small thereof, but to declare the stories all: what hart
Can of the *Greekes* or soldiour one of all *Vlisses* rout Refrayne to
wéepe? and now the night with hie heauen goth about,
And on the Skies the fallyng Starrs doo men prouoke to rest:
But if such great desier to know, such longyng haue your brest
Of *Troy* the latter toyle to here, to speake or yet to thinke
For all that it my mynde abhors, and sorows make me shrinke:
I will begin . . .
(Phaer 1558, 2.3-13)

You me byd, O Princesse, too scarrify a festered old soare
How that thee Troians wear prest by Graecian armye.
Whose fatal misery my sight hath wytnesed heauye:
In which sharp byckring my self, as partye, remayned.
What ruter of Dolopans weare so cruel harted in harckning,
What curst Myrmidones, what karne of canckred Vlisses
That voyd of al weeping could eare so mortal an hazard?
And now with moysture thee night from welken is hastning:
And stars too slumber dooe stur mens natural humours.
How be yt (Princelye Regent) yf that thy affection earnest
Thy mynd enflameth, too learne our fatal auentures,
Thee toyls of Troians, and last in fortunat affray:
Thogh my queazy stomack that bluddy recital abhorreth,
And tears with trilling shal bayne my phisnomye deepely:
Yeet thyn hoat affected desyre shal gayn the rehersal.
(Stunyhurst 1582, 2.3-17)

Books 2 and 4 were translated in blank verse by Henry Howard Early of Surrey already in 1557:

Infandum, regina, iubes renovare dolorem,
Troianas ut opes et lamentabile regnum
ereuint Danai; quaeque ipse miserrima vidi,
et quorum pars magna fui. Quis talia fando
Myrmidonum Dolopumve aut duri miles Ulixi
temperet a lacrimis? Et iam nox umida caelo
praecipitat, suadentque cadentia sidera somnos.
Sed si tantus amor casus cognoscere nostros
et breviter Troiae supremum audire laborem,
quamquam animus meminisse horret, luctuque refugit, incipiam.
(Vergil 1900, 2.3-13)

Thus gan to speak. I Quene, it is thy wil,
I shold review a woe cannot be told:
Now that the Grekes did spoile, and ouerthrow
The Phrygian wealth, and wailful realm of Troy,
Those ruthful things that I my self beheld,
And wherof no small part fel to my share.
Which to expresse, who could refraine from teres?
What Myrmidon? Or yet what Dolopes?
What stern Ulysses waged soldiar?
And low moist night now from the welkin falls,
And sterres declining counsel vs to rest.
But sins so great is thy delight that here
Of our mishaps, and Troyes last decay:
Though to record the same my minde abhorres,
And plaint eschues: yet thus will I begyn.
(Surrey 1557, 2.3-17)

In 1594 Christopher Marlowe possibly in collaboration with Thomas Nashe presented the same narrative in *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, offering an almost literal translation of the initial lines, except that in this play Aeneas proves radically different from Virgil's: he is a hesitant and an apparently shattered hero. And yet his tale is likewise announced as a tearful narrative that will make the listeners weep:

Aeneas A woeful tale bids Dido to unfold,
Whose memory, like pale death's stony mace,
Beats forth my senses from this troubled soul,
And makes Aeneas sink at Dido's feet.
Dido What, faints Aeneas to remember Troy,
In whose defence he fought so valiantly?
Look up, and speak.
Aeneas Then speak, Aeneas, with Achilles's tongue,
And, Dido, and you Carthaginian peers
Hear me, but yet with Myrmidons' harsh ears,
Daily inured to broils and massacres,
Lest you be moved too much with my sad tale.
(1999, 2.1.114-25)

If we compare Virgil with Marlowe, we sense that, as Colin Burrow has argued, Virgil's "idiom is that of the set-piece declamation, the performance of rhetorical artistry rather than of exchanges between people" (2013, 55). We also perceive why "Virgil is not concerned with conversation but with the affective force of speech" (56). The first four books and this particular tale in the *Aeneid* could not possibly be models "of theatrical conversations but of what might be called situated effect", for instance showing "the powerful influence of Aeneas's act of narrating on Dido" (ibid.) – an example that would be taken up by Shakespeare in *Othello* when Desdemona is likewise charmed by Othello's narratives of his life events.[4] Aeneas's tale in Virgil is a typically epic narrative which, for all its passion, remains hardly adaptable to the stage, so that Marlowe has Dido interrupt it several times in order to suggest a conversation replete with emotional engagement, eventually leading up to her request of ending the tale ("O end, Aeneas! I can hear no more", 2.1.243). Shakespeare would again recall this passage in Polonius's similar request to the actor's playing Aeneas in *Hamlet*'s Hecuba scene ("Prithee no more!" 2.2.523). But to return to this narrative in Virgil and its dramatised version by Marlowe, what can be safely argued is that it was very famous, that it was a marker of the epic genre – although at the time epic narratives could also be defined as tragedies – and that at this point Aeneas's passion shows him coming to terms with a trauma memory.

---

[4] For a longer discussion of the function of narratives in *Othello* see e.g. Macaulay 2005.

Laurie Maguire and Emma Smith have rightly contended that Aeneas and Prospero are very similar in their response to a trauma which in both cases is of dispossession and exile, and treat Marlowe's Aeneas as a haunting presence in Derrida's terms, a ghost that "engineers a habitation without proper inhabiting", a lingering spectre which is and is not there, "neither dead nor alive" (2015, 26). In somewhat similar yet not identical terms, Colin Burrow has remarked that Virgil is neither central nor peripheral, but "shimmers across the work rather than shaping it, repeatedly providing options and possibilities for a larger understanding of the story" (2013, 82). What remains to be elucidated, though, is how to interpret and pin down such a shimmering presence (77). In other words, we are confronted with the problem of how to make sense of the interplay between models and texts from the double perspective of what they may have meant then, and what they mean for us now. This is a question to which Robert Miola could probably respond as follows: "one scholar's echo, signaling indebtedness, is another scholar's coincidence, signifying nothing" (2000, 13-14; see also Miola 2004, 23; Maguire and Smith 2015, 18).

My own sense of this shimmering, ghostly presence is that of a meaning-generative intertextual and infracontextual engine which may add layers of signification while not being indispensable for the play to signify. Following Claes Schaar, Barbara Mowat has contended – and Maguire and Smith with her – that "the intertexual moment is one of recognition first and then of understanding, when 'surface contexts, operating as a signal, trigger a memory of the infracontext'" (2000, 28). What this implies is a shift in "focus from the source-reading author (and from the source-hunting critic) to the source-recognizing reader" (27). Of course, infracontextuality as here defined raises a whole series of related questions about how to reconcile source and reception studies which the 'vertical' infracontextual approach does not tackle but skips by placing critical emphasis on individual receptions and responses. What is of interest in this context, though, is that, as Mowat points out, there is a stratified network of implications that invites reflection on the meaning-making potential of their signifying density. To bring just one example, the opening storm "triggers memories of the *Aeneid* and of Strachey's 'True Reportory' . . . [which in turn] recalls the *Aeneid* and *Clitophon and Leucippe*, and perhaps the *Metamorphoses* and the *Arcadia* as well" (32). The same intricate implications were pointed out by Peter Hulme with regard to the "widow Dido" passage recalled above:

> To recall Carthage is to bring to mind several centuries of punishing wars with Italy, not the happiest memories when presumably – though this is only implied – Claribel has been a gift to fend off a dangerous new power in the central Mediterranean. After all Dido, the Carthaginian virago, died sooner than marry an African king, the fate that has been imposed upon Claribel to the evident distress of the whole party, including the father who forced her into the marriage. Antonio has his own reasons for over-emphasizing the distance between Naples and Tunis ('Ten lineages beyond man's life' (II.i.242)), but Alonso also talks of his daughter as 'so far from Italy removed / I ne'er again shall see her' (II.i.106-7). Since Tunis is closer to Naples than Milan is, the distance must be predominantly the cultural one implied in Sebastian's bitter remark that Ferdinando's presumed demise is the punishment due to Alonso, 'That would not bless our Europe with your daughter, / But rather lose her to an African' (II.i.119-21), despite her 'loathness' for the match. It is perhaps no longer possible – if it ever was – to fully untangle the skeins of this Mediterranean labyrinth. (1986, 112)

In the "widow Dido" phrase there are several layers of implication that can hardly be entirely unfolded,[5] and this is something that the Prospero-Aeneas parallel does not evoke in the same way while activating the meaning-making intertextual engine. Prospero's story does not respond to an epic design, as Aeneas's does, and his 'sin' does not reflect the *felix culpa* model to which Aeneas's own belongs in causing Dido's death – an event which follows his tale. This difference begins to move the engine contrastively. Prospero must atone for his sin of forgetfulness. The neglect of his duties is morally and politically condemnable, as we have just recalled, and this makes him co-responsible for the loss of the Dukedom.

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[5] For a fuller discussion of this passage, see Hulme 1986, 109-12.

As Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson point out in this volume, *The Tempest* "comes closest to a religious ritual", and this level of rituality is very much attuned to the sense of atonement pervading the whole play. The length of Prospero's initial narrative is unquestionably exceptional in a play replete with magic and spectacle, and it is its very length and complicated unfolding that raise questions about its function. It has also been remarked that the play's labyrinthine structure has a fragmented plot featuring repeated narratives and suspended actions, alongside the characters' temporary loss of identities – overall a stagnant plot.[6] But if we go back to Prospero's initial narrative and set it side by side with Aeneas's tale in Marlowe's play, it suddenly appears incomparably more intriguing, and not because Miranda's interjections are more interesting than Dido's: it is because Prospero's personality and his own self-narratisation abound with more complex implications unrelated to a foundational epic but referable to a tragic experience whose gradual unfolding needs the interaction of different narrative and (meta)theatrical worlds on stage eventually to reach a comic ending.

4. In the Loop of Time

In *The Tempest* the access to plural time-space worlds is grounded on an awareness that recollections are subject to time's erosion and self-delusion, a question consonant with contemporary reflections on the mysteries of the mind's capacity to assemble and retain numberless forms. In 1601 Thomas Wright posed precisely this question:

> How can possibly be conserved, without confusion, such an infinite number of formes in the soule, as we see Learned men and Artificers retain? in what tables are they painted? in what Glasses are they to

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[6] See for instance Bigliazzi 2014 and Serpieri 2014.

> be seene? why doth not the huge mountaine darken the little moaths in the Sun? the formes of fire fight with the formes of water?
> How, when we would remember can we single a Flie from the university or beasts, soules, and fish? how a Violet from the infinite varietie of flowers, hearbes and trees?[7]

Martin Butler has rightly noticed that in *The Tempest* what "you take to be wonderful depends on where you stand to look at it" (2007, xxvi), but it is likewise arguable that the sense of the real depends very much 'on how you are told to look at it', which is a typically narrative problem. How complex this issue is here emerges in Prospero's initial tale whose lacunae raise questions on his narrative intentions. Memories are always fabrications to some extent, they may be changed over time, they may be eroded or invented anew. Prospero's tale in 1.2 is addressed to Miranda, and yet it shows the stylistic obscurity of monologuing, a private discourse pointing to an urgent need to validate his own memory. Miranda wants to know about the nature of the storm, and shows painful sympathy for those she has seen suffer in the shipwreck. But Prospero evades her question, and his avoiding it foregrounds ellipsis as a prominent figure endowed with psychological urgencies.

Soon after inviting his daughter to open her ear, obey, and be attentive (37-8), he inquires whether she can remember a time before their arrival at the cell. Miranda's comment on her dream-like remembrance of the women tending her when she was a little child (45-6) is the first hint at the dubious trustworthiness of memory, a topic which will soon become a major preoccupation of the play. Prospero's following image of "the dark backward and abysm of time" in which he urges her to see (49-50) draws a dizzying figure of temporal vertigo expressing his passionate concern about time and memory, and implicitly about narratives as well. It is only at this point that his tale takes off, a speech that bears the signs of a plea for verification and assurance: as Magnusson has rightly pointed out, his "style depicts the thinking of a man pestered, even baffled, by complications and qualifications", showing "the causes of events to be obscure, undecidable" (1986, 57).[8] But however dark the causes may be, there is no doubt that Antonio and himself are crucial to those events. Miranda does not intervene with interjections in Dido's style, but it is her father who calls on her to make sure that she pays attention to him when he talks about her "false uncle" (77), and then again after summing up his brother's subtle usurpation of his own powers and his avowal of his own guilt in awakening Antonio's evil nature:

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[7] Questions 68 and 69 from "Problems concerning the substance of our Soules" (Wright 304-5); see also Tribble 2006.

> PROSPERO *I pray thee mark me.*
> I, thus *neglecting* worldly ends, all dedicated
> To closeness and the bettering of my mind
> With that which, but by being so retired,
> O'er-prized all popular rate, *in my false brother*
> *Awaked an evil nature*; and my trust,
> Like a good parent, did *beget* of him
> A *falsehood* in its contrary as great
> As my trust was, which had indeed no limit,
> A confidence sans bound. He being thus lorded
> Not only with what my revenue yielded,
> But what my power might else exact, *like one*
> *Who having into truth, by telling of it,*
> *Made such a sinner of his memory,*
> *To credit his own lie, he did believe*
> *He was indeed the Duke.* Out o' th' substitution,
> And executing th'outward face of royalty
> With all prerogative, hence his ambition growing –
> *Dost thou hear?*
> MIRANDA Your tale, sir, would cure deafness.
> (1.2.88-106; emphasis mine)

Prospero did not simply forget his political duties, he neglected them, and this neglecting is imbued with moral contempt. Nor did he passively allow Antonio to take his place, but he actively begot his brother's falsehood through excess of trustworthiness in him. Prospero's confession implies self-reproach and a tacit wish for atonement. It also implies an awareness of the shaping power of lies to spread falsity and induce self-deceit: Antonio ended up believing to be the legitimate Duke by repeating that he was so, and thus he made a "sinner of his memory" (101). As Perkins Wilder puts it, "Antonio's problem is not that he snatched the dukedom from his brother but that he did not preserve the distinction between fiction and reality" (2010, 180). Does this suggest a move away from conscious pretension and lying to role-playing in life with a final loss of the sense of the game? Here Shakespeare seems to offer a variation on what Lanham (1976) and later Altman (2010) defined as a situated, central self as opposed to a rhetorical one, in ways that point to the scripting of one's subjectivity through role-playing and self-deception. This point is central for an understanding of the moral, in fact Christian, frame of sin and punishment pervading the whole play, connected with Prospero's original guilt of forgetfulness. As we have seen, memory has cognitive, ethical, religious and political resonances. At this point it is also presented as an agent of falsification: telling false stories, as in Antonio's case, got him into the habit of believing them, retrospectively modifying the past and affecting the present. Memory is repetition, and by repeating unreal narratives, it begets a new state of affairs. From sinful lack of memory to memory as the begetter of a false reality, from Prospero to Antonio, the line of memory-the-sinner extends from the original act of forgetfulness and usurpation of the Dukedom to the present rituals of individual and collective reminiscences enacted on the enchanted island, where just memory must be restored for expiation to follow.

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[8] According to Tribble, mnemonic rivalry sets off a "competition of two memories of the past: Prospero's powerful narrative of his exile from Milan and Miranda's shadowy, partial memory of a scene from her early childhood" (2006, 156). As I have already argued, however, "Miranda's memories are reduced almost to nil and can hardly be considered as an alternative to her father's monadic account" (2014, 131n15).

There is a last moment when Prospero calls for Miranda's attention after speaking of her crying during the abduction from Milan (133-4) – one piteous detail that causes her to burst into tears:

> Hear a little further,
> And when I will bring thee to the present business
> Which now's upon's; without the which, this story
> Were most impertinent.
> (1.2.135-8)

The keyword here is “impertinent”: Prospero is worried that his message may not be brought home to her, and yet he does not say in respect to what his story would be irrelevant if she were not attentive. What follows does not refer to his revenge, but rather explains why they were not killed, praises Gonzalo’s gentleness, and for no apparent reason depicts himself as a good schoolmaster of Miranda on the island. Finally, he mentions that his enemies have been brought ashore by good Fortune (168-86) and leaves all the rest out – what he is going to do and how. Prospero’s rehearsal of his own past is clearly very much a self-address, albeit aimed at Miranda. He neither fully responds to her initial question (his avenging plot), nor does he always provide details consistent with his presentation. His style is tortuous and this betrays emotion and confusion, as also the apparently unnecessary mention of having been a good teacher suggests: does he perhaps need to demonstrate that on the island, if not in Milan, he is – and has been – a good father and teacher? This is an issue which he will soon resume in his encounter with both Ariel and Caliban in 2.1. A confused and over-anxious narrator, he appears eager to prove to himself, before anybody else, that he is a good man and remembers the past well, despite his earlier sin of forgetfulness. Indeed, this is no secondary issue, as it contains as in a nutshell the whole tragicomic story of the drama he will soon direct. Thus, he will shortly provide the circumstances to authenticate Antonio’s malice on stage, a scene which no-one will be aware of except himself – and the audience. There is probably no better clue than this scene of Antonio’s temptation of Sebastian for understanding the self-enclosed and self-referential, solitary tragicomic experience of Prospero in this play.

5. Conclusion

According to Giraldi Cinthio in his “On the composition of comedies and tragedies” (1543), epic poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were both considered to be tragedies, one with a tragic and the other with a comic ending (1554, 225). As Jonathan Gibson (2009) has pointed out in his study of tragical histories and tales, the terms "tragic" ("tragical") and "tragedy" ("tragedy") at the time also identified a number of genres, including various types of narratives that can be grouped into three main categories: tales of martyrs of the Protestant faith (such as John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, 1563); unfortunate affairs of princes along the lines of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*; and stories of unhappy love affairs similar to those told in the fourth day of the *Decameron* "under the reign of Philostratus". There was no normative theorisation clearly differentiating a narrative epic poem from a tragic drama, except that Aristotle distinguished the two on the basis of their length and the use of the narrative form in the epic genre (*Poetics* 1449b). Criticism has shown the combinatory possibilities offered by the contemporary model of pastoral tragicomedy behind the complex architecture of *The Tempest* (see e.g. Henke 1997), and I believe that it is along those lines that we can also perceive Shakespeare's re-use of the well-known example of Aeneas's epic tale to deconstruct it. For Aeneas, remembering goes unquestioned. For Prospero, it does not. He needs to repeat his trauma experience over and over again, narratively and metatheatrically. This is what makes it potentially tragic, before the comic resolution. This is what Aeneas brings to Prospero, if we are alert to hearing his voice.

As I have tried to suggest, Prospero's own narrative has a potentially epic allure, but displaces the attention to its lacunae and contradictions, indirectly questioning the reliability itself of his own memory, which needs to be confirmed by the visitors' repetition of past actions. Antonio's temptation scene for the sake of Prospero's eyes only obsessively iterates and confirms Prospero's own anxiety about brotherly and political betrayal.

Thus, while the play does not need the memory of Aeneas's tale to signify, once that memory is activated it shows how strongly and deeply that model may be evoked and questioned. Meaning-making resides in this questioning and in dramatising the loop of time Prospero is in, his fears of mis-remembering and his need to have them verified through drama, thus opening creative routes around an interrogation of time and story-telling on stage. This is entirely new in respect to Aeneas's substantial confidence in his own memory. Prospero's drama will eventually move away from revenge tragedy to comedy, as his final discarding of vengeance in favour of pardon demonstrates ("The rarer action is / In virtue, than in vengeance", 5.1.27-8). The play is already over before the final recapitulations and his repeated refusal to tell his story.[9] Memory has been restored and passion cathartically purified – Prospero no longer needs to navigate time, he is eventually out of its maze.

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[9] Incidentally, it may be noticed that Prospero's self-disclosure renders the final recognition less effective in Aristotelian terms compared to other forms of anagnorisis relying on signs, memories or logical deduction (syllogism) (*Poetics* 1454 b 20-35, 1455a 5-20).

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