

“Rapt in Secret Studies”

“Rapt in Secret Studies”:
Emerging Shakespeares

Edited by

Darryl Chalk and Laurie Johnson

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

MICHAEL NEILL

“Haven't you finished reading Shakespeare?”

Poised unsteadily between irritable reproof, envy, and grudging admiration, the perplexed fraternal enquiry recorded at the end of Mark Houlahan's essay, nicely epitomises the way Shakespeareans are often seen—or imagine themselves seen—by a wider public. In so far as it bespeaks a familiar professional anxiety, the imagined reproof matches the guilty sense of belatedness that haunts practitioners in a crowded field where attention is focussed on a relatively small number of exceptionally well-studied texts. In the new corporatised academy, where the practice of the humanities is increasingly constrained by a demand for “outputs” largely defined by scientific notions of research, such anxiety is liable to become especially acute. At the same time, the destabilisation of the canon that resulted from the triumph of critical theory in the late twentieth century has made it difficult to offer an intellectually coherent defence of literary studies—especially, perhaps, in former settler societies like those of Australia and New Zealand, where the life of the mind has traditionally been regarded with suspicion. In this embattled condition literary scholars are perhaps more likely to appear like Jonson's *Subtle*, wrapped in the protective fustian of a bogus mystery, than rapt like Prospero into some transformative ecstasy of the imagination.

Yet for Shakespeareans the very conditions that have threatened their profession with dangerous marginalisation, have had an unexpectedly liberating effect. This has been made possible, no doubt, by the continuing fetishization of Shakespeare, which has given his work such an exceptionally privileged position in contemporary culture: apart from his extraordinary theatrical currency throughout the world, Shakespeare now stands as perhaps the only pre-twentieth-century writer with a guaranteed position in the English programmes of schools and universities. This imperfectly understood phenomenon—no longer easily dismissed as a mere relic of imperial ideology—has itself opened new areas of enquiry, exemplified in this collection by Laurie Johnson's provocative essay on “Shakespeare's Gifts.” More importantly, however, it has endowed

Shakespeareans—especially those of the younger generation—with a professional self-confidence that has released them from both ideological dogmatism and servitude to critical fashion. Perhaps the most engaging thing about this collection is the broad spectrum of approaches adopted by its contributors, and the unabashed eclecticism of many of their essays: here, the high theory of Derrida can sit comfortably alongside the traditional techniques of close textual analysis, while presentism and historicism, far from being rival methodologies, are simply instruments for opening up different aspects of the text. It is in such intellectual flexibility, I believe, that the future of our discipline lies, because it offers a prospect of infinite renewal.

“Oh, this reading Shakespeare,” as a rapt Frank McCourt might have exclaimed, “there's no end to it!”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors wish to thank a number of people who have played a significant part in the chain of events that have culminated in the present collection. While we make mention of Lloyd Davis *in memoriam* in the introductory section to the book, we wish to record special thanks, each in our own way, for his contribution to the career trajectories that have brought us both to this point. We would also like to register our thanks to Professor Chris Lee, who was integral in converting an idea into a set of achievable targets, and for introducing us to the notion that we were the right team to achieve these targets. For their stalwart efforts, ensuring that the “Rapt in Secret Studies” conference would be a success, Darryl would specially like to express his appreciation to Helen Drury, Geoff Parkes, Michael Smalley, and Bernadette Pryde, and of course we collectively wish to acknowledge the vibrant contributions of all of those who participated in the conference, giving rise to our firm belief that a new generation of scholars in Shakespeare studies existed and that a book collection was necessary to capture the moment of their arrival. Our belief was strengthened at subsequent conferences, AULLA and ANZSA in particular, and for agreeing to let us use these conferences as opportunities to invite scholars to contribute to the book, we thank Philippa Kelly and Lyn Tribble. We also thank the many scholars who agreed to act as readers for the review process, ensuring that the submitted work was of exceptional quality.

For their ongoing encouragement during various stages of the process, we wish to thank a list of other mentors including Rose Gaby, Penny Gay, Jonathan Gil Harris, Peter Holbrook, Jean Howard, Michael Neill, and Robert White, the last of whom in particular for his generous additional assistance in overseeing the contribution from Sue Penberthy. Closer to home, the support from the Public Memory Research Centre, the Faculty of Arts, and other sections of the University of Southern Queensland has been invaluable. Funds from the Public Memory Research Centre, specifically, were made available for resources needed in the production of this book, and Faculty of Arts funding assisted the “Rapt in Secret Studies” conference in the first instance.

On a more personal note, Darryl is forever grateful to Scott Alderdice and Janet McDonald for their belief in what he was doing from the very

beginning, and Laurie is in fact indebted to Darryl for bringing him back to the fold after years spent studying things other than early modern culture. Both editors thank the members of ANZSA and AULLA for their friendship and collegiality. From Darryl, deepest gratitude to Tonia for her unending love and support throughout the entire process; from Laurie, indebtedness and thanks to Angie, Charlotte, and TJ, for love, for support, and for “nugs”. To our extended families and groups of friends, as well, and as always, our thanks.

INTRODUCTION

“RAPT IN SECRET STUDIES” AND EMERGENCE IN SHAKESPEARE STUDIES

DARRYL CHALK AND LAURIE JOHNSON

In the midst of the lengthy back story recounted by Prospero to his daughter Miranda in the second scene of *The Tempest*, he confesses to having allowed events to come to pass by virtue of his predilection for the liberal arts above the management of his own affairs. Putting learning before duty, as it were, he “grew stranger” to his own state, “being transported / And rapt in secret studies” (1.2.76-77). The audience soon learns that this version of the liberal arts is a very liberal one indeed, as it includes the very magic capable of transporting the souls lost at sea in the first scene to dry land on this island refuge. We might even suggest that these studies, being “secret,” represent the opposite to the liberal arts Prospero claims to have mastered “without a parallel” while still in Milan (74). The liberal arts, by definition, are free: the areas of study proper to any man who walks freely among men—as it were, in Ancient Greece—and by which he will govern himself in the free company of other men. For Prospero, the secret studies in which he becomes so “rapt,” however, are proper only in the neglect of “worldly ends” (91). Moreover, these studies in which he has become “transported and rapt” are designed precisely for this purpose: by way of non-worldly means to achieve the transportation and rapture of worldly beings. In Prospero’s opening dialogue with his daughter, we thus catch an early hint of what Caliban will later explain more bluntly about the power of Prospero’s books: “without them / He’s but a sot as I am, nor hath not / One spirit to command” (3.2.95-97).

It may be little wonder, then, that when the compilers of the *First Folio* wrestled with the decision of which play to include first among plays in a book collection designed to cement Shakespeare’s authorial name, they eventually settled on this most bookish of plays. It is equally no coincidence that the compilers of the present collection found ourselves

drawn to *The Tempest* for inspiration. Yet we do not derive from the play quite the same degree of emphasis on the importance of books alone. Caliban falsely declares that Prospero's power inheres solely in the books he possesses. Prospero tells us right from the start—if we are prepared to hear him—that the power to transport is not inherent to the book; rather it derives from the interrelation *between* scholar and book. Prospero's studiousness is thus the source of his power. What Prospero knows and yet Caliban can scarce comprehend is that the phrase “rapt in secret studies” describes a labour not to be underestimated. Yet Caliban would most likely have been part of the minority among those present at any of the original performances of *The Tempest*. To the early modern ear, “secret studies” was all but a tautology: scan the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) entry for “study” and one may be struck by the abundance of meanings on offer through the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, not a few of which are obsolete, and which capture notions of introspection, meditation, learning, and reading. Reading for the early moderns was already a silent practice, having emerged during the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries on the back of the rise of print culture and, in particular, the use of word spacing in print (Saenger 1982; 1997). Paul Saenger has argued that silent reading “emboldened the reader, because it placed the source of his curiosity completely under his personal control” with the result that individual contemplation could become consonant with reading as the locus for “the development of scepticism and intellectual heresy” (1982, 399).

To the early modern ear, then, whether it was understood as introspection, meditation, learning, or reading—or, we suspect, as any or all of these processes at once—study was a silent and individual, that is, secret practice. In another now obsolete meaning of the term, “study” was also “a state of reverie or abstraction” (*OED* “study” 6a) up until at least the sixteenth century. Study was thus not only secret; it was a state akin to rapture. Whereas Caliban believed that Prospero's power could be located in his books, the early modern audience would more likely have heard the subtle imbrication of terms in Prospero's early statement about his studious habits and thus understood that his power was bound up in the silent, rapturous pursuit of studying rather than in the books themselves. Some four hundred years on, the modern ear may be less attuned to such resonances in these terms. Those who have read Foucault may be at least familiar with the notion of “power-knowledge” (1981, see esp. 92-102), through which is explained the interrelations between the ability to exercise power and the control over what passes for truth. Yet, let us be honest, the proportion of those who have even heard of Foucault let alone

read his work is really quite low. The modern ear, understood perhaps more typically, regards “study” in a somewhat functional fashion, as the practice through which a person acquires the qualifications necessary for employment. It is a view that aligns more comfortably with Caliban’s mistrust of Prospero’s books than with any understanding of study as rapture.

Indeed, like Caliban, the vast majority of modern listeners would in all likelihood simply fail to register the possible broader scope of Prospero’s words. This is not simply a case of being lost in translation—since some of the overlapping meanings of the three key terms are of course long since obsolete—but speaks instead to a deeper and well cultivated mistrust. A fact of life for academics in many parts of the world is that their line of work and perhaps their very way of life is viewed in the press, in popular culture, in the speeches of politicians, and in the conversations of people in the street with a curious mixture of suspicion, mirth, and disdain. In Australia, for example, in recent years, such views were harnessed by a stunningly successful \$3.6 million dollar advertising campaign designed to divert University enrolments into trade-based apprenticeships (“Launch of New Apprenticeships” 2003). The campaign targeted school leavers with claims that apprentices were earning more money while training on the job than most graduates were earning within a year of completing their three or more years of study. The campaign spoke directly, that is, to the functional mindset to which we referred in the previous paragraph. Society seems content to tolerate academics only insofar as they provide a service by training today the workforce of tomorrow. Certainly, also, this tolerance extends principally only to those disciplines that address a functional worldview: society needs engineers to build better bridges, for example. The Humanities and Creative Arts have endured a well documented decline in the past decade in Australia, with the most staggering recent evidence being the disappearance of the School of Humanities and Human Services at the Queensland University of Technology in 2007.

We make such observations here simply to reinforce the point that many modern listeners would most likely side with Caliban—if indeed they felt Shakespeare to be relevant at all to their lives—at least to the point of exercising a degree of disdain for Prospero and his books. After all, Prospero incriminates himself with the admission of having neglected his material responsibilities, these “worldly ends” (1.2.91). To the functional mind, such an admission is not to be met with a sympathetic ear. Yet we note also once again that the functional mind would fail to register the scope of Prospero’s words. If he is to be held up as a figure of

scorn it is not because he is a scholar; rather, it is because of the type of book he reads: his “secret studies” will register to the modern listener simply as dabbling in black magic. Certainly, in the *OED* definition of “secret,” Prospero’s words are cited in support of the now obsolete meaning of the term as pertaining to “mystical or occult matters” (*OED* “secret” 1g). Thus, Prospero’s books, being “secret,” are to be regarded as occult objects and for this reason are to be destroyed. As occult objects, *they* possess Prospero rather than the other way around.

While Prospero’s books are viewed as only possibly being magical in nature, he possesses no agency and poses no direct threat. Yet we might consider that Prospero’s “secret studies” can refer to conventional scholarly practices in a more general sense, since “secret” can refer to a host of other possible meanings, many of which Shakespeare definitely used on occasion. The compilers of the *Oxford English Dictionary* even cite Shakespeare for no fewer than ten other meanings of the word “secret” in its form as an adjective alone. This brings us back to the point with which we started this introductory chapter: Prospero’s talk of secret studies is not simply about magic, though it does include a mystic edge; rather, his “secret” studies are to be understood more broadly as a shift in the nature of all scholarly pursuits. The magic in Prospero’s books extends imaginatively and dramatically the idea that words have a power to transport. Perhaps nowhere in Shakespeare is this idea expressed more cogently than in the “wooden O” speech by the chorus at the beginning of *Henry V*: “And let us, ciphers to this great accompt / On your imaginary forces work” (1.pro.17-18). Yet what began in *Henry V* as an appeal to the magic of the theatre to transport is transformed by *The Tempest* into the power of the written word. Reading, being a secret, silent pursuit, automatically involved the power of the imagination. Thus, the magic in Prospero’s books is analogous to the magic in all written text, an idea that is not foreign to Shakespeare and certainly not one that comes to him only late in his career—witness the claim in “Sonnet 18” of the power of “eternal lines” to be able to “give life to thee” (12, 14)—but it was not often realised in the plays in such a direct fashion as in this late play. Importantly, what Prospero tries to tell us from the outset is that the power of the written word is only unleashed in silent reading.

This power of silent reading also speaks to a shift in the nature of the liberal arts and all related scholarly pursuits. Whereas the ancient model on which the liberal arts were founded was based on communal practices like dialogue and reading aloud, the silent reading practice of the early modern scholar had transformed scholarly practice into the “secret studies” that Prospero describes. Thus, the suggestion that Prospero’s

secret studies are the opposite of the liberal arts he had perfected in Milan can now be retracted. Instead, we suggest that “rapt in secret studies” speaks to two ends of a single spectrum of scholarly pursuits, with the magic arts at one end and the traditional liberal arts at the other, but with being equally secret and, quite possibly to the early modern ear, equally prone to enervating a state of rapture. Could Prospero’s “secret studies” be read equally, then, as meaning “occult” *plus* any of these other meanings, such as “affording privacy or seclusion” (1b) or “known only to the subject” (1f), along such lines as to suggest he could be referring to any studies that, by definition, are not known to everybody? At this moment we must also remember that “study” in early modern theatre became used as the word to describe the process of committing lines to memory, and that success in studying lines would be measurable in the capacity of the performer to hold an audience in rapture, transporting them beyond the walls of the theatrical space. In Miranda, to whom Prospero first uses the phrase “rapt in secret studies” while recounting his history, we find the construction of the ideal spectator—her name, as Marjorie Garber has noted, literally means “to wonder at” (2004, 857). Yet Prospero and the play in which he exists consistently work to demystify the worlds of wonder at which Miranda is enraptured, telling her, and by extension the audience “collected” therein, “No more amazement” (1.2.13-14). For the early modern ear, then, “studies” would simultaneously invoke both the private world of the book and the public domain of the stage, which suggests that academics should avoid creating any division between these two worlds in our scholarship of early modern drama.

From the perspective of the present collection, the phrase “rapt in secret studies” offers a wonderfully rich ground for interpretation. Moreover, as we hope this account of the early modern meanings of the phrase’s three key terms will attest, there is in this phrase a sense of affirmation for the kind of practices represented by *this* particular book. As we have noted, a modern commonplace seems to be an assumption that academia should be marginalised, and that the more bookish disciplines, in particular, are the most marginalised. If study should be understood in functional terms as the means to an employable end, then the desire to continue studying long after the acquisition of an academic qualification is seen as thoroughly outside acceptable norms; it is seen, in other words, as the neglect of “worldly ends,” as Prospero had described his own *habitudes*. Shakespeare Studies or Early Modern Studies, in general, reside comfortably in this most marginalised domain. We need not document here the myriad cases around the globe of debates about the inclusion of Shakespeare in both secondary and tertiary curricula. What we can

document here is that amid the “crisis in the Humanities” over recent decades, Shakespeare Studies seems also to have experienced a decline, in the Antipodes at least, during the 1990s and into the early years of the new century. Yet it is our belief that the present collection represents one of the positive indices of an emerging generation of scholars in arrest of this decline. We would like to briefly recount the story of the emergence of this book as it coincides with—we would hope, indeed, that it significantly participates in—the emergence of new scholarship in this field.

As recently as 2004, at the annual general meeting of the Australian and New Zealand Shakespeare Association (ANZSA), it was observed that postgraduate membership was on a downward trend, a situation that would be increasingly difficult to reverse with the decision to move the following conference so as to avoid clashing with the World Congress of 2006. Darryl Chalk noted at that meeting that a postgraduate conference could be organised to be held in advance of the Congress, in order to stimulate postgraduate involvement, and a conference was duly scheduled to dovetail with the Congress, to run under the umbrella of ANZSA, with additional support from the Public Memory Research Centre at the University of Southern Queensland. In trying to come up with an idea for the theme of the postgraduate conference, the organisers took to the Shakespeare *oeuvre* in hopes of finding a suitably apt and pithy phrase. As if by magic, or as chance would have it, one finger descended onto *The Tempest* and struck upon the phrase “rapt in secret studies,” the relevance of which became immediately apparent. The success of the postgraduate conference that pursued this theme—a full program of presenters over two days—suggested that indications of a resurgence in interest in Shakespeare Studies were looking good. At the 2008 ANZSA conference, *Embodying Shakespeare*, held in Otago, a significant increase in postgraduate and early career presenters was noted at the annual general meeting. Signs of the demise of Shakespeare Studies were thus short lived.

Following on from the success of postgraduate conference and the subsequent resurgence in postgraduate and early career involvement at ANZSA, the editors of this book agreed that a full collection of essays could usefully mark this emergence of a new generation of scholars in Shakespeare Studies under the aegis of ANZSA. The suggestive theme that had been used for the postgraduate conference was retained, and over the next twelve months contributions were sought from promising new scholars attached to the Association in any capacity—the editors humbly submit to the reader that our own work qualifies us for inclusion, although we equally assure the reader that all contributions have been vetted by double blind peer review. The resulting collection of eighteen essays can

be read to some extent, then, as testimony to this emergent generation of scholarship in this field. More than this, though, we trust that the reader will recognise in these eighteen chapters a broad range of exciting new approaches to Shakespeare Studies and a rigorous critical engagement with received wisdom in the field, which we trust will invigorate thought and discussion with readers in any corner of the globe. In responding to the call to produce chapters that address any of the key terms in the phrase “rapt in secret studies,” our contributors have produced a stunning array of different ways to tackle the challenge of studying Shakespeare and his theatre, quite a few of which we could not have possibly foreshadowed when we first envisaged a collection of this kind, such is their scope and originality.

Such we would also claim is the richness of the phrase around which this collection has been themed, as we have set out to demonstrate in this Introduction. The collection has been organised around three separate sections, each being devoted to one of the three key terms in Prospero’s statement, yet many of the chapters are inevitably drawn into making comment on or responding in some way to more than one of these terms. In their engagement with these three small words—“rapt”, “secret”, and “studies”—the chapters contained herein provide in no small way a proof of the enduring truth of Prospero’s words: in the study of Shakespeare, there is indeed to be found a rich and continuing source of inspiration—a rapture, we dare to suggest, in the power of scholarship, however isolated, to unlock the power of words, texts, and performances.

Postscriptum: Bookends

The editors would like to acknowledge the passing of two people, the loss of whom to some extent bookends the resurgence in Shakespeare Studies to which the present collection is addressed. Lloyd Davis passed away in 2005. As an initial co-chair of the World Congress 2006, President of ANZSA, the editor of *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association*, author, co-author, and editor of no fewer than seven books in Shakespeare Studies (as well as a co-author of books on Academic Writing and Cultural Studies), and key figure in the academic development of many students in the field, Lloyd’s influence in flying the flag for Shakespeare Studies at a time when the field seemed under threat is immeasurable. Having mentored both of the editors in different capacities—Laurie Johnson was Lloyd’s first graduate supervision and Lloyd gave direct guidance to Darryl Chalk in his early career—his impact on the trajectories that culminate to date in this book is

also impossible to overstate. As President of ANZSA, Lloyd also played a direct and integral part in setting up the postgraduate conference that we argue was one of the markers of the current resurgence in Shakespeare Studies in this region. That he passed away before the conference was held means that Lloyd's death also provides a sad, initial bookend to the resurgence that his life had been committed to achieving.

The other unfortunate bookend to this resurgence is the passing of Susan Penberthy, who contributes one of the chapters included herein. Susan was awarded a PhD in 1997 for her thesis *Work, Idleness and Elizabethan Theatre*, following on from a decorated undergraduate career, and was already a published author of journal articles when she took a hiatus to raise a family. Her commitment to submit a contribution to this collection was part of Susan's plans to recommence her academic career. Susan passed away in 2008 before being able to submit her proposed essay on secrecy and contagion in *Coriolanus*, and it is with sincere thanks that the editors would like to acknowledge the work of Robert White in securing an extract from Susan's doctoral thesis to fit in with the theme of the book for the purposes of ensuring that Susan's work could be included in a collection of exciting new scholarship in Shakespeare Studies. It is without doubt in the minds of the editors as well as all who knew Susan and her work that she would surely have continued on to be a key figure in this new generation of scholars had she not been taken from this world in such untimely fashion.

We would like to dedicate this book to the memory of these two scholars.

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PART I

[RAPT, *ADJ.*]

[< classical Latin *raptus*, past participle of *rapere* to seize (see RAPE v.²), in post-classical Latin in sense “rapt in an ecstasy” (from 12th cent. in British sources).]

1. Carried up and transported into heaven. Also with *up*, *to*, *into*.

1577 S.BATMAN *Golden Bk. Leaden Goddes* f. 29, Fryer Gyles was rapt into Heauen.

2. Transported spiritually, by religious feeling or inspiration.

1621 R.BURTON *Anat. Melancholy* III. II. II. iii. 570 Anthonie was amased and rapt beyond himselfe.

3. Of a woman: carried away by force, abducted; raped. *Obs.*

1598 R. P. tr. M. Martínez *Sixth Bk. Myrroure of Knighthood* iii. sig. F^v, I was rapt by wanton Alexander.

4. **a.** Carried or removed from one place, position, or situation to another. Now *poet.* Chiefly said of persons.

1615 G.SANDYS *Relation of Journey* 206 The house of the blessed Virgin..was rapt from thence, and set in the woods of Picenum.

5. Deeply absorbed or buried *in* (a feeling, subject of thought, etc.); intent *upon*.

1601 R.JOHNSON tr. G. Botero *Travellers Breviat* (1603) 222 As men rapt in deep contemplation.

6. Transported with joy, intense delight, etc.; ravished, enraptured. Also with *with*, *by*, or *away*.

1596 SPENSER *Faerie Queene: 2nd Pt.* IV. ix. 6 With the sweetnesse of her rare delight The prince halfe rapt began on her to dote.

(*Oxford English Dictionary*, “rapt”)

CHAPTER ONE

“SOME ORACLE MUST RECTIFY OUR KNOWLEDGE”: USES OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE NEW WORLD AND *THE TEMPEST*

DAVID MCINNIS

Tempest criticism is reluctant to abandon the concept of power as the play's driving principle, and with good cause: the power dynamics within the play have lent themselves to a series of productive analyses, ranging from New World colonial practices and psychoanalytic interpretations, to reconfigurations of classical texts concerned with imperial expansion.¹ Almost without exception, though, critics value the power struggles in *The Tempest* for their ability to generate discussions which firmly belong to the play's post-history (especially the postcolonial discussions) rather than valuing power for any role it plays in *The Tempest's* textuality. While I do not deny the relevance of power, I propose that it may be more beneficial to displace the centrality of power in favour of what I take to be its source: knowledge. In essence, what this investigation offers is the opportunity to rearticulate the often problematic relationship between the New World and *The Tempest* from a new and potentially productive perspective through the paradigm of knowledge usage. In particular, I wish to focus on two related propositions: that the discursive strategies deployed by European travel writers to negotiate new information is echoed structurally in *The Tempest*, and that the uses to which knowledge is put by characters in *The Tempest* is analogous to that put by Europeans in the New World.

I

Power, as the play presents it, is the result of knowledge. Analyses which examine power, therefore, are dwelling on an effect (which is necessarily

limited) rather than on a cause (which, conversely, I take to be generative). The “power” effect is a valid and interesting one, but I believe that *Tempest* criticism has been hindered by neglecting its cause. Prospero’s power is undoubtedly important, but apart from liberating Ariel from the cloven pine, Prospero does not enact his own whims except by proxy, through Ariel: a clear suggestion that Prospero’s power stems not from some inherent ability *per se*, but from his knowledge (in this case, of magic—which he uses to ensure the servitude of Ariel, and Caliban). It is, in B. J. Sokol’s phrase, a type of “knowledge-based omnipotence” (2003, 168). Hence although power is central to the play, it is equally true that power in *The Tempest* is construed as being a product of knowledge: and it is this issue of knowledge usage or epistemology which I wish to focus on in this chapter.

To do so, I find it necessary to once again consider a popular *Tempest* context—the discovery and settlement of the Americas—but on the less frequently acknowledged basis (in *Tempest* studies) that it posed one of the most significant challenges to knowledge in early modern England. An immediate consequence of this premise is the recognition of at least two epistemological alternatives which are implicitly foregrounded in New World discourses and which receive a virtually unacknowledged (but valuable) treatment in *The Tempest*. The first is the process by which new knowledge overwrites (but never completely erases) old knowledge, and the second is the epistemological dilemma of choosing between reliance on backward-looking (and ultimately limited) uses of knowledge, or embracing forward-looking and constructive uses of knowledge. There are good reasons for linking the play to the New World *without* resorting to topical allusions or postcolonial readings.

While it is only natural that the travel documents pertaining to the New World revolve around changes in knowledge and new ways of knowing the world, it is perhaps surprising that the most prominent structural aspect of these travel documents is their reliance on allusions to classical literature. Curiously, this discursive feature is also prominent in *The Tempest*. For example, John Gillies and David Scott Wilson-Okamura have each noted that the distinctly Ovidian “principle of the moralised landscape” is a feature of both *The Tempest* and “the official portrait of Virginia” (Gillies 1986, 676; Wilson-Okamura 2003, 721ff), and Leo Marx has likewise addressed the contradiction within the Elizabethan perception of America:

Is the virgin land best described as a garden or a hideous wilderness? In *The Tempest*, as in the travel reports, we can find apparent confirmation of both images. The island, like America, could be Eden *or* a hellish desert. (1980, 66)

And although this device formed an integral component of pro-colonisation propaganda in Virginia-related documents, Jonathan Bate (2007) has also accounted for Caliban's differing perceptions of the island in *The Tempest* (it is variously a "hard rock" and "fertile") by noting that a "favourite Ovidian device was the representation of a landscape *in bono* or *in male* according to the state of mind of the describer."² The appearance of Ariel clad "*like a harpy*" (3.3.52) is a further example of a classical allusion—this time to *Aeneid* III—which was utilised by travel writers: consider, for example, Peter Martyr's vividly theatrical suggestion (in his *De Orbe Novo*) that a group of explorers fled from vicious New World bats "as from rauenous harpies" (1885, 103). Or again, there are the repeated references to the Minotaur myth in *The Tempest* and New World documents: Alonso observes, "This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod," (5.1.242) and Gonzalo remarks, "Here's a maze trod, indeed" (3.3.2), before later exclaiming,

All torment, trouble, wonder and *amazement*
 Inhabits here. Some heavenly power guide us
 Out of this fearful country. (5.1.105-106; my emphasis)

The maze trope is similarly evoked (though rejected in favour of Providence, as in *The Tempest*)³ in one of *The Tempest*'s probable sources, a travel document from 1610 called *A True Declaration*, in its succinct explanation of a shipwreck in Bermuda: "They fell betwixt a laberinth of rockes, which they conceiue are mouldred into the Sea, by thunder and lightning. This was not *Ariadnes* threed, but the direct line of Gods prouidence" (1963, 11). Given the context of Europeans confronting the unknown, it could be argued that the use of classical discourses by the shipwrecked Neapolitans in *The Tempest* constitutes an attempt to understand the novelty of sensory data by invoking the familiar. More specifically though, as the travel-narrative counterpart to these *Tempest* examples makes clear, this reaction to the unfamiliar also featured in New World documents.

The introduction of Providence as a Christian hermeneutic to overwrite the classical myth of Ariadne is typical of literary engagements with the New World: it illustrates the complicated process by which the new was inscribed onto the old, whilst simultaneously moving away from the old. By reading the travel documents alongside *The Tempest*, we see a surprising degree of commonality in the structure of their attempts to describe the unknown, which is broadly representative of the manner in which the Europeans dealt with the sudden influx of new knowledge. From a twenty-first century perspective, the most striking feature of New

World texts written by Europeans is the struggle to accommodate the unknown. In particular, the strained use of classical material in travel documents is noteworthy for its illustration of the inadequacy of extant, backward-looking epistemologies to cope with new knowledge. Bacon's empirical methodology was clearly better poised to handle New World discoveries than an antiquarian reliance on the ancients.

Yet despite the fact that the ætiological accounts offered by classical literature could not explain the existence of the New World, the classical tradition was not discarded on these grounds; rather, it was reconfigured for renewed relevance. This phenomenon can also be seen in *The Tempest*, where the classics are evoked, but their valence—no longer intrinsic and derived from within—becomes predicated on the classics' relevance to the relationship between the old and the new. There are different ways in which this functions in *The Tempest*. In some cases, when formulated rigidly according to traditional usage, the classical allusions in the play can constitute a negative exemplum. When Prospero abjures his "rough magic" (5.1.50) in the play's closing scenes, Shakespeare's deliberate modelling of the renunciation speech on material from Ovid ostensibly aligns Prospero's Art with the black magic of Medea, a witch who was of course firmly connected with the past of classical antiquity.⁴ Ovid's Medea passage, according to Jonathan Bate, was "viewed in the Renaissance as witchcraft's great set-piece," and was therefore easily recognisable to audiences as the source of Prospero's speech (2007, 252). Importantly though, in this instance the set-piece does not merely allude to the classics, but distances itself from them: Prospero has recognised the futility of "being transported / And rapt in secret studies" of the ancients and their magic (1.2.76-77), especially in the sense that by doing so he remained ignorant of the dramatic changes which were occurring all around him in his neglected dukedom. The Art which is identified with Medea's is also recognised as inappropriate. Prospero's knowledge of Medea's craft must be abandoned because it is irredeemably of a bygone era, and is no longer apposite to the present or future. Accordingly, although the allusion to Medea summons up the literature of classical antiquity, Prospero's abjuration of his Art serves not to tie the play down to narrow, past-oriented readings based entirely in the Old World, but functions progressively by rejecting inescapably Old World knowledge in favour of new approaches to interacting with the world and new ways of knowing one's surroundings.

Alternatively, the classical allusions in the play can also function as a guiding practice, when appropriated and given a present—or future—orientation beyond the scope of their original application. The lessons of

intemperance learnt from Dido at Carthage, for example, found new relevance as a proleptic anticipation of the difficulties encountered by the English settlers in Jamestown (Wilson-Okamura 2003). As John Gillies notes, intemperance was identified as an obstacle to colonial success:

Tales of hardship, mismanagement, hostile natives and a dawning awareness that Virginia was no El Dorado were so effective in dispelling the myth of Virginia as to deprive Raleigh of funds for a major venture in 1587. . . . The same threat hung over the heads of the Jacobean patentees, the Virginia Company of London; and their propaganda (like Raleigh's) was obliged to disable the counter-mythology. What was needed was a rhetorical strategy that would confirm the original myth of Virginia while instilling a new and more realistic mood of forbearance in inevitable hardship—along with a (less realistic) willingness to postpone profits indefinitely. Temperance was one answer to this promotional problem because (unlike fruitfulness) it could avail itself of a moral, as well as a geographical, dimension. (1986, 222)

And as David Scott Wilson-Okamura brilliantly illustrates, references to Dido became shorthand in the New World context for evoking the problem of intemperance as an obstacle to colonial success:

the language of sexual morality was also the language of colonial investment and administration. Dido . . . figured prominently in both discourses, and that . . . is why Shakespeare insists on the island's proximity to the locale of Dido's tragedy. (2003, 724)

Thus when Antonio and Sebastian banter playfully about “Widow Dido” and “widower Aeneas” (2.1.79-80) in an exchange which, according to Jan Kott, is “striking in its redundancy”, one possible explanation of Dido's baffling relevance to the play's concerns lies in the fact that in the context of the New World, Dido's chief feature had become her intemperance as a coloniser; thus the play's concerns with fruitfulness and intemperance, which receive their fullest treatment in the masque, are already implicitly foregrounded in Act 2 (Kott 1976, 424).⁵ While the original meanings of classical references in *The Tempest* can still be detected, they rarely (if ever) constitute the entire meaning of the allusion, but more usually appear as a spectre of the simultaneously evoked New World corollaries which have overwritten them. Crucially, if the concept of “power” is retained as the play's driving force, *Tempest* criticism can only lead to strained attempts to account for the presence of classical allusions in terms of allusions to key colonial texts like Virgil's *Aeneid*. By contrast, if the concept of “knowledge” is brought into focus when analysing the play, the

role of the classical allusions becomes brilliantly illustrative of the complex process of knowledge construction and acquisition.

II

The European encounter with the New World wonderfully demonstrates (on a national scale) the human reluctance to commit to new ideas—the tendency to resist change, to refuse to entertain foreign concepts that contradict existing beliefs. The trend amongst European travel writers *not* to embrace the Otherness of the New World discursively, but instead attempt to negotiate its alterity by subsuming it under extant European discourses, is indicative of the problematic nature of knowledge acquisition (especially when we acknowledge the extent to which preconditioned expectations affect the ability to understand, accept, and comprehend novel data). For while existing knowledge can be productive in assisting in the integration of new information, it can conversely be restrictive if that information is so discordant that it does not fall within the continuum of familiar knowledge. In that case, established knowledge hinders rather than facilitates the successful absorption of new information, and such was the case, I will argue, for the European encounter with the New World.

Broadly speaking, three courses were available to European travel writers: dissonant New World facts could be embraced in their alterity; they could be moulded and distorted to fit pre-established expectations; or they could simply be ignored. Europe as a whole (and for the purposes of this paper, England more particularly) reacted to the exigencies of New World information in essentially the same manner that an individual will react to the presentation of challenging ideas, hence I see great potential for *Tempest* scholarship in the reconsideration of the uses to which knowledge is put by individual characters in the play (even though they are clearly not explorers *per se* and do not have colonial ambitions). It is through the thematisation of knowledge usage therefore that I believe *The Tempest* can best be seen to engage with New World concerns. Prospero's obsession with knowledge is evident in *The Tempest* from the very outset, in his confessed dedication to "the bettering of [his] mind" at the expense of "neglecting worldly ends" (1.2.89-90), and his reference to himself as Miranda's "schoolmaster" rather than parent or guardian (1.2.172). Moreover, in his lengthy digression on "the dark backward and abysm of time" (1.2.50), Prospero accords notable prominence to the importance of the past, and especially to redressing Miranda's ignorance of it ("thou must now know further"), claiming that knowledge of it is most pertinent

to “the present business” (1.2.33, 136). Prospero reveals not only an interest in the acquisition of new information but also an interest in knowledge of history: both interests, as we shall see, resonate strongly with New World concerns. Perhaps of greatest significance for *Tempest* scholarship though is the extent to which the individual characters’ uses of knowledge mirrors, on a microcosmic level, the greater European crisis in epistemology ensuing from the New World’s discovery and documentation. The reconceptualisation of the play’s engagement with the New World which I propose has the advantage of moving beyond the insularly Mediterranean and atemporal readings of the text, to both heighten our appreciation of epistemological dilemmas on an individual level (in the characters’ uses of knowledge), and to explore the broader paradigm of knowledge construction on a European scale as it occurred historically and was preserved discursively in travel documents.

While the shock of American discovery was both disarming and unsettling for Europe, it was simultaneously liberating in terms of opening up a new horizon of possibilities and loosening the rigid constrictions of conventional ways of thinking about the world. The ancients had clearly remained ignorant of the Americas, hence the antiquarian project of turning to the annals of classical antiquity to explain the existence of the New World was inevitably a futile exercise. The New World demanded new ways of thinking about what had been a Mediterranean-centred world, and a re-thinking of the past. Integral to New World discourses is the concept of how knowledge is used. Whereas the knowledge preserved in classical literature — the traditional basis for Mediterranean aetiologies — is carved in the immutable stone of tradition (that is to say, it is knowledge of a preservative and therefore limited kind), the knowledge coming to hand in consequence of the exploration of the New World was generative: it altered conceptions of the world, of the future, and even, remarkably, of the past. A. J. Ayer expounds an epistemology which has obvious points of analogy to the early modern English mindset:

The past is thought of as being “there”, fixed, unalterable, indelibly recorded in the annals of time, whether we are able to decipher them or not. The future, on the other hand, is regarded as being not merely largely unknown but largely undecided. . . . Thus the future is thought to be open, whereas the past is closed. When we look backwards, the stream of history seems to flow along a single channel, but when we look forwards, there seem to be any number of courses it can take. Only, as soon as one of them is taken, the others are abolished. (1958, 188)⁶

The American discovery undermined this type of epistemology. Suddenly

the past had to be viewed as equally open to any number of courses, rather than flowing along a single channel: the very existence of the American Indians, in their relative simplicity, constituted a revelation that the evolution of humanity had not been uniform, and that the past was (in a sense) coexistent with the present. In the American Indians, Europeans saw and confronted a reflection of their own primitive origins. The past had to be reconceptualised in light of this revelation of a relatively underdeveloped humanity: evolution had not been uniform, nor had the European developmental trajectory been guaranteed (there were alternative paths; for instance, the path taken by the American Indians).

The discovery of the Americas cast doubt over what had previously been accepted as certain knowledge about the past: how, for example, had the Americas come to be populated if neither the Bible nor classical literature had made mention of the strange New World? Suddenly Europeans had to interrogate their past and question their Eurocentric conceptions of history as sensory data conflicted with ætiological accounts. Numerous and diverse attempts were made to account for the existence of the American Indians. In his *New English Canaan* (1632), Thomas Morton attempted to trace the American Indians' ancestry through the ætiological framework of classical mythology:

it may perhaps be granted that the Natives of this Country might originally come of the scattered Trojans: For after that Brutus, who was the forth from Aneas . . . did depart from Latium, we doe not finde that his whole number went with him at once, or arrived at one place; and being put to Sea might encounter with a storme, that would carry them out of sight of Land, and then they might sayle God knoweth whether, and so might be put upon this Coast, as well as any other. (1963, 16-17)

Predictably, this type of conjecture was impossible to substantiate, no matter how compelling the case made by its apologist. More significant difficulties were encountered by Christian writers, who were obliged to uphold the doctrine of the unity of creation. To posit the existence of a second, *American* Adam and Eve was simply unacceptable: polygenesis was heretical. Accordingly, authors attempted to exploit ambiguous aspects of the Bible to explain how and when Adam and Eve's descendants crossed the Atlantic. William Strachey, for example, devoted part of his 1612 tract, *The Historie of Travel into Virginia Britania*, to "how the vagabond Race of Cham might discend into this new world, without furniture (as may be questioned) of shipping, and meanes to tempt the Seas" (1953, 55). What is clear from these patently strained attempts to assimilate the New World into European histories, is that the radical