

## INTRODUCTION

Garnett Sedgewick was the first head of the English Department at the University of British Columbia; he served as head from 1920 to 1948 — an astonishing twenty-eight years. The Sedgewick Lectures, which began in 1955, honour our first head along with his legacy of literary scholarship at UBC. They are given annually by prominent and accomplished scholars from a variety of areas within English studies and from a variety of locations (and occasionally from UBC itself). Sedgewick Lecturers have included Harry Levin, Hugh MacLennan, Northrop Frye, Robert Bringhurst, Anne McClintock, and our own William H. New.

The Sedgewick Lecturer for 2011 is Jonathan Gil Harris, Professor of English at George Washington University in Washington DC. For the first Sedgewick Lecture that I had the privilege of organizing I felt it was suitable to ask a scholar who is a Shakespearean, just as Garnett Sedgewick himself was.

Originally from New Zealand, Dr. Harris did his doctorate at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom. He is the author of four monographs — most recently, *Shakespeare and Literary Theory* (Oxford, 2010) and *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Pennsylvania, 2009). Both these monographs have already been profoundly influential within Renaissance studies. Dr. Harris has edited and co-edited collections and written many articles and book chapters. He is also the associate editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*.

For almost twenty years, Dr. Harris has extended our sense of the ways in which Shakespeare (and Renaissance literature more generally) means. He combines a profound erudition with an enviable grasp of continental philosophy and literary theory. Throughout his writing he has demonstrated that historicism and theory cannot

only coexist, but even that they can inform each other and make each other stronger.

Dr. Harris's specific topics have ranged from sexuality to disease to theatre history and much else as well. His most recent work could be said to concentrate on things out of place — in space or in time or both. This concentration has led him to make important contributions to queer theory and to post-colonial theory; in particular he has worked on “Indianness” in Renaissance literature, a topic that is the subject of his next and eagerly-awaited monograph.

In his Sedgewick Lecture, Dr. Harris looked at *The Tempest* through the lens of Renaissance ideas about both the nature and the location of paradise. Taking one of Shakespeare's best-known plays, Dr. Harris produces a discussion that is utterly fresh and innovative. We thought we knew *The Tempest*, especially from the point of view of post-colonial studies. In this lecture, as in so much of his work, Dr. Harris demonstrates how much we have to learn.

— Stephen Guy-Bray,  
Professor and Head

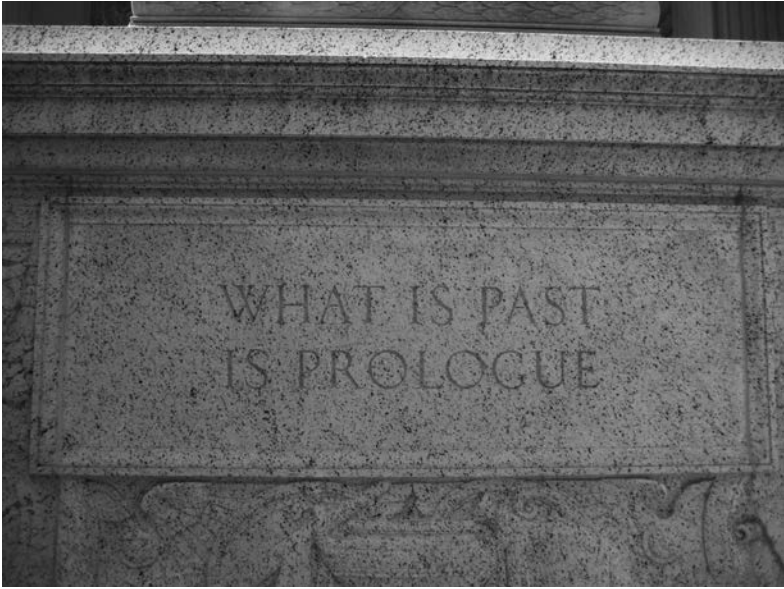
MARVELLOUS REPOSSESSIONS:  
*THE TEMPEST*, GLOBALIZATION, AND  
THE WAKING DREAM OF PARADISE

What's past is prologue. This much-cited aphorism, spoken by Antonio in *The Tempest* (2.1.261),<sup>1</sup> has become a pithy manifesto for teleological time. That is to say, it would seem to license a belief in orderly progress — even in manifest destiny. Little wonder that the quotation (emended to remove Antonio's suspiciously informal contraction) is engraved on the wall of the National Archives Building in Washington, DC. There, the phrase functions as justification for a patriotic version of what Jacques Derrida calls archive fever — the documents of the USA's past are sacralized as prophesies of its exceptional present and future. As Derrida argues, the archive “is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come.”<sup>2</sup> In this sense, the archive performs a version of the logic of typology. Christian interpretive tradition treats Old Testament events, people, and physical things as foreshadowing their corresponding antitypes in the life of Christ, the history of the Church, and the soul of the individual Christian. Events before the time of Christ thus find their meaning and fulfillment in the Christian future. As St. Augustine puts it, “In the Old Testament the New lies hid; in the New Testament the meaning of the Old becomes clear.”<sup>3</sup> On the wall of the National Archives Building, Antonio's

<sup>1</sup> All references to Shakespeare's texts are to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> G. W. H. Lampe, “The Reasonableness of Typology,” in G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woolfcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1957), p. 13.



*Fig. 1. Exterior wall of the National Archives Building, Washington DC; photograph by author*

remark adapts the scriptural “Old” and “New” for a seemingly secular, yet no less typological, understanding of global time. Fittingly, the words of the great playwright from the European Old World are relocated to the American New, as if constituting a veiled prophesy of the latter — a relocation that might seem to be licensed also by Antonio, for whom the past in Europe serves as prologue to an act destined to be performed in the suspiciously American terrain of Shakespeare’s island.

Yet the orderly progress from past as prologue to future as prophesized triumph is unsettled by a recursiveness that haunts the project of the archive. As Derrida argues, its future-oriented temporality is subtended by “a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire . . . an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement.”<sup>4</sup> That is, the archive’s fantasy of past as prologue

---

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever*, p. 91.

is a dream not only of progression but also of return or recovery. Antonio's aphorism may authorize an understanding of teleological time, of moving forward to a liberating end. But what if his past is prologue not to a glorious new future but, rather, to "an archaic place of absolute commencement" that stands in for the future? As Derrida notes elsewhere, the aphorism in general occasions "an exposure to *contretemps*" — to temporal eddies and undertows that tug against the linear, forward flow of time.<sup>5</sup> And Antonio's aphorism, whether in its original context or in its subsequent appropriations, is no exception. In what follows, I consider how the drama in which Antonio's remark appears is driven by a dream in which progress is subtended by return, future by past, chronology by *contretemps*. The shimmering object of this dream is arguably what has made *The Tempest* so enduringly seductive, even to those who have attempted to read the play against the grain of its supposedly proto-colonialist logic. But the dream is a perilously bottomless one: even when we think we have woken from it we potentially still dream of recovering the past in the name of moving forward to the future. Let us give the temporally bivalent object of this dream a local habitation and a name: Paradise.

## I

The storm of *The Tempest* is not just a disturbance in space. It is also a disturbance in time. This much is suggested by the play's title which, after all, derives from the Latin *tempus*. Shakespeare's play is obsessed with time: indeed, the word "time" appears twenty-three times in *The Tempest*. More specifically, the play is preoccupied with a certain kind of temporal anomaly, one hinted at by Prospero's well-known question to Miranda: "What seest thou else/ In the dark backward and abysm of time?" (1.1.49–50). This question, which comes but moments after the play's spectacular opening squall,

---

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Aphorism Countertime," in Derrida, *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 416–33, esp. 416.

suggests how Shakespeare's tempest is an event that ruptures the orderly lines of chronological time. Time is no longer a straight sequence but a "dark backward and abysm," a void or crack out of which an otherwise elusive past may or may not be recovered for the present and the future. We might call this recovery, which brings back to life a seemingly lost time, a renaissance. In *The Tempest*, as in so much literature of the time, this renaissance entails less the historical recovery of classical culture (a recovery that has since Jules Michelet and Jacob Burckhardt been called the Renaissance) than a more constitutive fantasy of recovery that pervades classical literature itself. As I will show, the understanding of the Renaissance as bounded historical period is proleptically shaped by a classical fantasy of reclaiming a lost wholeness that, in its repossession of the past as the future, also undoes that very boundedness. What I want to suggest is that the Renaissance dream of renaissance is equally a symptom of globalization — specifically, the "discovery" of the New World.

This claim may seem counterintuitive. After all, if early modern European globalization has a temporality, it is surely linear, not recursive. Columbus's voyages, and the subsequent histories of New World encounter, colonization, empire, and genocide that *The Tempest* is usually situated within, mark a decisive break with a European past in which the world was the flat T-and-O map of medieval theology, and the Americas still unknown. Similarly, on the shores of *The Tempest*'s island, we might glimpse the outlines of what Miranda revealingly calls a "brave new world" (5.1.183), an expanded globe that inaugurates our own. But Miranda's phrase is, of course, a misprision: as Prospero reminds us, she is referring not to the island and its inhabitants, but to European men whom she has not seen before. Her "new world" is her father's old world, a past that she and Prospero have seemingly left behind but which irrupts into her present as her future with the force of a rebirth.

Our willingness to univocally locate the island of *The Tempest* in the geographical New World is just as question-begging as

Miranda's misprision. This is not to deny that Shakespeare was influenced by travel literature about the West Indies and the Americas, as many important readings of the play from the past four decades have made abundantly clear.<sup>6</sup> Ariel refers to the "still-vexed Bermudas" (1.2.229); Caliban's name is a near-anagram of Cannibal, itself a reworking of Caniba, the name of a Caribbean people; Caliban refers twice to "Setebos" (1.2.373, 5.1.261), whose name is found in travel narratives as a god of the South American Patagonians; and some critics have argued that certain verbal and thematic details of the play derive from William Strachey's 1610 account of a shipwreck in the Bermudas.<sup>7</sup> But if we rely on such references to place the island, we ignore the play's North African coordinates. Sycorax is from Argiers or Algiers; the ship containing the Milanese and Neapolitan nobles has been blown off course from

---

<sup>6</sup> The "American" reading of *The Tempest* has a long history, though it has acquired near-orthodoxy in the wake of influential readings of the play's imbrications within American colonialist discourse. These include Stephen Greenblatt, "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century," in Fredi Chiappelli (ed.), *First Images of America*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 564–80, and reprinted in Stephen Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 16–39; Paul Brown, "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds.), *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp. 48–71; Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, "'Nymphs and reapers heavily vanish': The Discursive Con-texts of *The Tempest*," in John Drakakis, (ed.), *Alternative Shakespeares* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 191–205; and Peter Hulme, "Prospero and Caliban," in Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 89–136.

<sup>7</sup> There is by no means a critical consensus about this claim. Strachey's *A True Reportory of the Wracke and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Knight* was published in London only in 1625; for it to have influenced Shakespeare, he would have had to have read it in manuscript. Several Oxfordians have questioned Shakespeare's reliance on Strachey; for a counter-critique, see Alden T. Vaughan, "William Strachey's 'True Reportory' and Shakespeare: A Closer Look at the Evidence," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59 (2008), pp. 245–273.

Tunis.<sup>8</sup> But that does not mean the play is “really” set in, or adjacent to, the Muslim orient. *The Tempest* is a New World play; but fixing on a singular location for its island — one that we can locate on our modern maps — not only finesses how much early modern colonialist discourse entails, in the words of Barbara Fuchs, “a layering of referents” that include Ireland, North Africa, and Europe.<sup>9</sup> It also neglects the extent to which the New World of the early modern imagination is, as in Miranda’s remark, a palimpsested space, riddled with the traces of the old. It is, I will argue, a location that is not singular, but polytopic and polychronic, fashioned out of the “dark backward and abysm of time.”

## II

The palimpsested New World typifies a Renaissance understanding of global space. This is not the synchronic, cartographical space of the modern map; it is, rather, closer to the polychronic chorographical space limned by antiquarians such as John Stow and William Camden, for whom the space of the present is always superinscribed by the traces of the past.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, this polychronic con-

---

<sup>8</sup> These coordinates have become more apparent in recent criticism of the play influenced by work on the early modern Mediterranean and Ottoman culture: see Barbara Fuchs, “Conquering Islands: Contextualizing *The Tempest*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48 (1997): 45–62; Richard Wilson, “Voyage to Tunis: New History and the Old World of *The Tempest*,” *English Literary History* 64 (1997): 333–57; Jerry Brotton, “‘This Tunis, sir, was Carthage’: Contesting Colonialism,” in Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin, ed., *Post-Colonial Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 23–42; Benedict S. Robinson, “Leaving Claribel,” in *Islam and Early Modern English Literature* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 57–86.

<sup>9</sup> Fuchs, “Conquering Islands,” p. 45. Paul Brown’s influential reading, “‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine,’” similarly insists on the multi-referentiality of colonialist discourse in *The Tempest*, arguing that the play’s “America” is in many respects Irish.

<sup>10</sup> I discuss the polychronicity of John Stow’s chorographical time in *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: U Penn P, 2008), chapter three.