

Interactive comment on “Using geosciences and mythology to locate Prospero’s Island” by Tiziana Lanza

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Thank you Anonymous Referee #2 for taking the time to review my article, and for some stimulating hints that surely will help improving my paper. Though, I should do some remarks that I will address in my answer.

1 The topic broached by the author is a stimulating one, and I feel a genuine interest in the argument developed by the author. However, to my mind, the paper should be fully rewritten to be convincing and to appeal not only to specialists of geoscience, but also to Shakespeareans themselves. This is worth it. The first thing the author needs to consider is the length of her paper. It is much too long, all the more so as the first 12 pages or so seem more or less irrelevant and do not probe the issue of volcanism

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in the play.

MY ANSWER To #1 I totally agree that the paper is too long. I am not used to write long articles. In the specific case, the paper is conceived for a special issue devoted to Earth sciences and Art, so I had to address different audiences of expertise. The 12 pages that you consider more or less irrelevant have been written especially for literates (i.e. introduction; tempest storms and sea eruptions). I thought it would have been interesting for literates dealing with natural hazards to know a little bit more about the science behind a sea storm, and, in order to better understand my work, behind a sea eruption. Then, I wrote paragraphs especially addressed to the potential scientific readers. (par. 3.1; 3.2; 3.3). A paragraph is dedicated to the methodology I used to limit the area of interest, since, as we know, there are many interpretations of the *The Tempest*. The biography of WS is also subject to many controversies. Then, I believe that the text is the only reliable source worth to study, more than any other approach, and the interpretation of the verses, although difficult, can enlighten us on the possibility that WS was truly inspired by real places and by natural phenomena.

The paper will be surely shortened and will include some of your suggestions to appeal Shakespeareans too.

2 Generalities should be removed, as well as confusing considerations on Shakespeare’s authorship (Bacon, Florion), which have nothing to do with the scientific argument put forward here.

MY ANSWER TO #2 I didn’t discuss WS’s authorship, even though I consider this an important aspect to address to better understand his works. But I agree, I can remove what it is not immediately relevant to the present work.

3 De facto, it contains too many factual errors and inaccuracies, especially regarding Shakespeare and the play itself. For instance, -*The Tempest* is NOT “considered the last play of WS mainly because it is a container of all the themes” previously dealt with by the playwright.

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MY ANSWER TO # 3 I put the argument in the wrong way. In writing so, I refer to some literature considering *The Tempest* as a reflection on the theatre itself (metatheatre) (see Frye 1986; Kernan 1979; Lombardo 1986;). In other words, Prospero is a playwright and a director, and, in this sense, an alter ego of WS. I didn't consider this an argument relevant to my paper, till the present discussion. The island, in this perspective, is a stage, where Prospero put into scene his own drama. There is a play within the play, and the borders between reality and illusion are extremely subtle. Even those between life and death (see the popular verses "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep.") This raises questions of fundamental importance for the text and its performance.

#4 *The Tempest* is NOT "the only play where WS respect the time, place and action units of classic drama". –

MY ANSWER # 4 This is, actually, a specific argument not so relevant for my paper. What is relevant is that we can infer when the tempest takes place, from Ariel's words. The sentence will be deleted.

5 Shakespeare's favorite setting is NOT the UK.

MY ANSWER # 5 I didn't assert this in my paper. I provided a map of locations for his plays. UK and Italy are the places where he mostly located his works.

6 Alonso's son is NOT named Ferdinando.

MY ANSWER # 6 This is true. Ferdinando is the Italian for Ferdinand. I can easily correct this.

7 The first storm may indeed be an illusion, which explains why the shipwrecked victims remain dry.

This is not an argument. A storm is always an illusion when we are at theatre. The initial sea storm, is the "real storm", since it is the one that was put on stage. The audience don't know this is an illusion until the second scene of the play. Walking in

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the shoes of WS, it must have been a work to convince the audience that the storm was an illusion, after the first scene, where we read "enter mariners wet" (see #3)

8 But there are several storms on the island, and they are all treated differently (see Jones and Chiari for example).

This is not correct. In the island there are not several storms. There are only two storms taking place. The one in the first scene (an illusion or not) (I.i vv 1-67) and a storm in the island (vv.II.ii vv38-42). All the rest, are narrations of past and contemporary events (the sea storm experienced by Prospero and Miranda twelve years before; The witnessing of the tempest by Miranda from the shore; Ariel reporting to Prospero about the tempest he provoked)

9 Surprisingly, while the paper takes stock of recent trends in Shakespeare criticism, some fairly recent studies on ecocriticism (on Bacon in connection with *The Tempest*—see Popelard—and on storms, particularly) are never mentioned in this study, whereas obsolete works are repeatedly quoted. As a result, the bibliography should be updated with good references (Dan Falk, for example, cannot be said to be an absolute reference).

MY ANSWER #9 I never consider "obsolete" past works. Although in scientific studies it would be more appropriate to address recent research, in a humanistic context, where demonstrating is such a hard task, past studies are still enlightening for many aspects. Nevertheless, I don't have anything against reading and considering further literature, although it would have been more helpful from your part indicating at least the year of publication in addition to surnames. But I agree, updating my references will help to address other important aspects not considered in the present draft and that will surely be addressed. Dan Falk is a science journalist, not an academic, but I simply quoted the excellent summary he does of the celestial events occurred in Shakespeare's time.

10 Besides, the English should be checked and corrected by a native speaker: many sentences are awkward and the use of grammar is not always correct. For example:

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-[In recent years] a new trend towards the re-unification of the two main streams of culture, the humanistic and the scientific, is becoming more evident year by year. - Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (we should read *Metamorphoses*) -Archaeological and more recent remains found in the deep sea testify of a difficult navigation in dangerous water till present times. (we should read testify to) These mistakes are numerous and prevent a smooth reading of the text as a whole.

MY ANSWER # 10 The paper will surely benefit from a native speaker's linguistic revision.

#11 Methodologically, the author never relies on early modern translations, which is a problem. For we know that early modern translations were imperfect, and that there were important variants in the translated texts.

MY ANSWER # 11 Relying on early modern translation cannot be my methodology, since I am not an expert in early modern translation. I have clearly indicated my methodology at the beginning of the paper. But I can surely refer to other studies in this sense. Nevertheless, it would have been more useful indicating how relying on early modern translations would help my paper. For instance, in the case of St. Elmo's fire I quoted sources contemporary to W.S. Hakluyt and, in particular, the Strachey's letter where the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire is described. From this description it is immediately evident that Prospero couldn't have set up "a direful spectacle" inspired by this geophysical phenomenon.

12 Moreover, which texts were translated in Shakespeare's time, and which were not? What access did he have to Strabo, for example?

MY ANSWER # 12 Are these questions addressed in other papers? Have such studies already been performed? I will add, did Shakespeare know Greek and Latin to let us suppose that he didn't refer to second hand texts? This is not my task. But Again I can refer to some already existing literature in this sense. For instance, there is an interesting study by Werth, Andrew. "Shakespeare's 'Lesse Greek.'" *The Oxfordian* 5

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(2002): 11-29 see here:

<https://politicworm.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/werth-lesse-greek-tox022.pdf>

This and more recent studies testify that the debate is on.

Concerning Strabo, I believe it is not absurd thinking that his *Geography* circulated at the time of Shakespeare. See for instance this article: Cormack, Lesley B. "Britannia Rules The Waves?: Images of Empire in Elizabethan England." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4.2 / Special Issue 3 (September, 1998): 10.1-20 here: <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/04-2/cormbrit.htm#fn56>

The importance of geographical studies for students is underlined in this article. In Fig.4 you can see the title page of a printed commonplace book where among the other personalities appears Strabo. Did Shakespeare had access to Strabo? I don't know, but I see similarities between some verses of the *Tempest* and the excerpt I quoted from his *Geography*. Maybe, it has come the time to do some research in this direction.

#13 Regarding mythology, the same problems crop up. Neptune was the god of earthquakes, but he was not particularly known as such in Shakespeare's times. It would therefore be crucial to study early modern representations rather than foregrounding our own perceptions of mythology.

MY ANSWER #13 I believe it is a frail argument maintaining that since Neptune was not particularly known as the god of earthquakes in Shakespeare's time, then also Shakespeare wasn't aware of the double role of Neptune. In the Mediterranean mythology Neptune was also addressed as the *Ennosigaeum* (in Latin) the Earth shaker. The double role of Neptune is part of the ancient Mediterranean mythology. It all depends on whether we want to consider WS barely schooled in the classics or not (see # 12). In any case, I am here referring to mythology from a particular perspective as I have clearly indicated in my paragraph "The *Tempest* to the light of geo-mythology". In this

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perspective, myths and legends have origin in the natural world, and can be seen as a source of natural knowledge based on the observation of physical evidence. So, I am not foregrounding my own perception of mythology. For instance, the interpretation of the trance-like state of the ancient Priestess, The Oracle at Delphi, as due to inhaling gas coming from a natural vent underneath the temple, is not only supported by scientific evidences, but also by ancient sources (Plutarch). (you can see the updating here: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15563650701477803> In *The Tempest*, a state of mental confusion in some characters is reported after a natural event (being this an illusion or not). Then, one interpretation could be gas-inhaling as reported by Strabo.

14 Finally, some premises seem particularly frail. Shakespeare probably knew sailors, yes. But how can that be proved? How do we know what he learnt from their testimonies?

MY ANSWER # 14 These are not my premises. My premises are clearly indicated in par. 2 "It is our intention to collect all the indications that can help us to analyse all that in the play is connected to a real location in terms of an environmental and geophysical asset, using sources from geoscience studies, historical and others". In my article the fact that "WS could have had access to unknown sources as board diary of the vessel navigating those seas" is a hypothesis, since to this respect, as I have explained reporting Mercalli, there is a vulnus also in geophysical studies. Nevertheless, literary critics generally agree in indicating in Strachey's letter a source (that was not even published at the time he was writing *The Tempest*). Then, I don't see why WS shouldn't have considered the idea to find other "exotic" sources, especially if we think that the play indicates a very specific route (see Fig. 4)

#15 More importantly, what did we know of the Vulcano islands (since Prospero's island would be partly inspired from this specific location), in the period? If Shakespeare knew about vulcanism, why does the author never quote any early modern text devoted to this particular phenomenon?

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MY ANSWER #15 I didn't state that the island of *The Tempest* is Vulcano. I simply reports Roe's interpretation of some verses of the play. I have clearly stated since my abstract "We don't intend to identify the island". I respect the playwright's indication "An uninhabited island", although Volcano at the time of Shakespeare was an uninhabited island due to its volcanism, while as we read in Strachey, the Bermuda were wrongly considered uninhabitable. To my present study it is irrelevant to identify the island. In the same way, I didn't state that Shakespeare knew volcanism. Of course he didn't know about the causes of such phenomena. I believe he was familiar with volcanism as it appears directly from his verses. He may have read or heard about volcanic phenomena in the Mediterranean. Strabo is a source, these phenomena were observed since ancient times. Anyway an early modern text, J. Florio's dictionary *World of Words*, includes the definition of "Vulcani" as "always associated with fire". The dictionary includes also "Vulcanalia": "feastes dedicated to Vulcane", ancient celebrations typical of the Mediterranean. In the dictionary we read also a description of St Elmo's fires: "Sant'E'rmo, taken for faire weather for Mariners, or prefaging of faire weather".

#16 In the play text, words such as sulphur and fire are present, but that is not enough to assert that Shakespeare describes a volcanic phenomenon.

MY ANSWER #16 This could be true. I tried to analyse how WS uses words as "sulphurous", "fire" "roaring", and I have seen that in using "sulphurous" and "fire" he also refers to the sky. Nevertheless, volcanic phenomena were observed since ancient times, and no matter where or when, the descriptions of them are always similar since they have their origin in nature. In the second scene, the audience of the play, thanks to the words of Miranda, observes the tempest from the shore. She clearly says: "The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch, But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek, Dashes the fire out" (Mir. I.ii. 3-4) How do you interpret these verses? She clearly says that "it seems" (may I think that it is not raining?), this is reinforced by "the sea . . . dashes the fire out" where "fire" in this case is used with reference to the sky. She clearly says that "the sea mounts to the welkin's cheek". Then, it is a coincidence

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that, as we read in Strabo, during a sea eruption the sea can mount “to an enormous height”, in the same way it is described by Miranda’s words? Today we know why this happens, you can relate to my par 3.5. from where you can also infer that there is a difference with sea storms. Not to mention “stinking pitch”: you can clearly “smell” what is happening. And I believe it is not a case, if in *The Tempest*, we can literary “smell” the island. Finally, the timing, WS is so precise in this. When Miranda introduces the second scene she says: “If by your Art, my dearest father, you have Put the wild water in this roar, allay them.”

From this verses we are able to understand that while Miranda speaks, the tempest is still in progress. Concerning the audience, the only difference from the first scene is the point of view. Now the audience is on the shore, observing what is happening into the sea, through Miranda’s words. Secondly, the audience gets another description from Ariel’s words. Comparing these two descriptions with what happens in the first scene, we note how different they are.

#17 (sulphur, as a matter of fact, related to hell in the early modern period, and it had also much to do with the pyrotechnics used for the stage—and that could have been a challenging argument)

MY ANSWER #17 Sulphur related to hell not only in the early modern period, but also in Mediterranean mythology, and even today, because there is a reason: this imagery comes directly from volcanoes’ landscapes. “That it had also much to do with the pyrotechnics used for the stage” can be a challenging argument for you and not for me. It could be interesting even intriguing, but to me is challenging to understand if words as “yellow” coupled with “sand” have only an aesthetic value or if they are descriptive of a real place. Or understanding what kind of pool is the one beyond Prospero’s cell, and if WS when writing about “the foul lake” was inspired by a real landscape.

#18 He may very well describe, as has been argued elsewhere, a hurricane (and no need for that to rely on a wind imagery—suggestive images and evocative sentences

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were the very essence of early modern drama).

MY ANSWER #18 Hard to believe that the words of Ariel in vv. 193-206 l.ii describe a hurricane in an evocative manner. Even literates have searched for a geophysical explanation when they refer to St. Elmo’s fire. The problem is that the very essence of St Elmo’s fire is not fire. Likewise, the very essence of a sea storm or of a hurricane is not fire no matter how evocative a writer would like to be. This has been known since ancient times, because if it is true that there are few records about volcanic eruption at sea (as Mercalli reports) at the same time sea storms have been repeatedly described in similar ways in the literature worldwide.

#19 The paper actually heavily relies on Roe’s arguments, but these have not always been regarded as convincing by Shakespeare critics: the analysis of the text remains too superficial to be enlightening.

MY ANSWER # 19 My paper does not heavily relies on Roe’s arguments. I presented this work at a conference in 2008 see: <https://gsi.ir/en/articles/8455/sea-volcanism-in-sicily-and-mediterranean-myths-through-the-tempest-of-shakespeare> three years before his book was published. I report his conclusions since the chapter in his book named “The Tempest, Island of wind and fire” as far as I know is the only one that leads some verses of *The Tempest* to volcanic landscapes. Unfortunately, he doesn’t comment the verses I consider in par. 5.2. Saying that Roe’s arguments have not always been regarded as convincing by Shakespeare critics is not enough. You should have made reference to studies disproving his conclusions.

Thank you for the interesting discussion. My paper will surely benefit from it.

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