

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

Anonymous Referee #2

Received and published: 3 September 2020

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 in the play. 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.

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

C1

last play of WS mainly because it is a container of all the themes" previously dealt with by the playwright. -The Tempest is NOT "the only play where WS respect the time, place and action units of classic drama". -Shakespeare’s favorite setting is NOT the UK. -Alonso’s son is NOT named Ferdinando. -The first storm may indeed be an illusion, which explains why the shipwrecked victims remain dry. But there are several storms on the island, and they are all treated differently (see Jones and Chiari for example).

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).

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: -[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.

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

C2

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? 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?

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 (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). 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 were the very essence of early modern drama). 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.

Interactive comment on Geosci. Commun. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/gc-2020-8>, 2020.