

*The Tempest in the Trivium*

by Dan Harder

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**Note: This essay was sent to, and commented on, by Stephen Orgel, Keith Sagar, David Sullivan, Curtis Dozier, and numerous other Shakespeare and philology scholars and journals. Details of it were also discussed with various scholars on the phone in 2004, notably, and most helpfully, George Kennedy.**

Loosely defined, a “sinecure” is an easy job that pays the bills. Mine, while I was a student at UC Berkeley, was as the part-time gatekeeper for the little-known Graduate Classics and Art History Library. If twenty people walked past my desk in an hour, it was a very busy hour. And things were really hopping if someone actually checked out a book. In the vast and quiet in-between times, I would study, read, stare off into space, or eavesdrop on the occasional conversation that improvised itself in the small lounge in front of me.

One rainy afternoon at the chance convergence of three graduate Classics majors, a conversation sprang up about that age-old problem of scholarship; how to write something both new and true about a subject whose bones, figuratively and literally, had been picked over for thousands of years? Someone mentioned a similar problem when dealing with Shakespeare. “Ach! He’s even worse than Homer,” opined one sagacious scholar. “The only way to say something new about him is to be wrong.” There was a

quick titter of laughter then the congregation dispersed, sundered by the clever incontrovertibility of the remark.

What remained, like dust settling after an explosion, was the depressing realization that no one would be able to say something both new AND worthwhile about the Bard. We would all be able to discover for ourselves what someone else had already discovered.

So it has been for me. My insights have not been particularly particular to me. Someone's always been there first. In fact, the insight is usually crowded with others who got there first, saw it more clearly, and wrote about it more thoroughly. That is, until now. In defiance of that hand-grenade of wit detonated in the Classics Library so many years ago, I believe I have actually found something both new and true about Shakespeare. As exegetical issues go, this is not a hugely weighty discovery. I have not, for example, uncovered a thirty-ninth play, the incontestable identity of the Black Lady, or proof that the Bard was, indeed, of noble birth – and a woman. Nor, from truly careful hermeneutic analysis and brilliant insight am I ready to suggest that Lady Macbeth was a transvestite.

Still, the issue I have tackled, quite by chance, has vexed scholars for as long as scholars have thought about it. I refer, namely, to Sycorax – witch-mother of Caliban in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's last play. What in the world sort of word is "Sycorax"? She's a minor character, so minor, in fact, that she doesn't even make it onto stage (she's dead well before the action of the play begins). And yet, minor and unseen as she is, she is mentioned by name seven times and is a major topic of dispute between Caliban, her son, and Prospero, her rival. Over one hundred and twenty lines are devoted to

Prospero's wrangling, first, with Ariel then with Caliban about the nature and effect of "this damned witch Sycorax" (1. 2. 264) [1]. She represents nothing less important than the island's other magician to whom Prospero is implicitly compared.

Typically, the two are seen as ethical opposites, Prospero effecting needed changes with his "white" magic, Sycorax needlessly, and ineffectually, troubling with her "black" magic. This clear distinction confers upon Prospero the moral right to rule the island and all creatures – human and otherwise – that chance to be upon it. [2]

This is the scene in which the relationship between Prospero and his daughter Miranda is established. He teaches and commands, "Obey, and be attentive," (1. 38); she listens (more or less attentively) or obeys (more or less compliantly). It is also the scene in which Ariel "demands" his "liberty" (1. 245) from servitude to Prospero and, a few dozen lines later, Prospero's "slave", Caliban, angrily asserts that "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother." (1. 331) Ariel's reasonable request can't withstand Prospero's withering cross-examination, a rhetorical squeeze in which the weaker servant can do little more than answer, "Ay, sir," and "No, sir." This barrage of questions forces Ariel to admit, with laconic humility, that it was indeed Prospero's "art" that freed him from Sycorax's "torments", freed him from groaning imprisonment in a pine tree for twelve years. For this "artful" kindness, Ariel is moved to "thank you, master" and accept his servitude to Prospero un-"bated" (undiminished).

Having won this argument, Prospero moves on to the next. Caliban's matrilineal claim to the island and its kingship is, at least superficially, valid. The island really was his by Sycorax his mother unless, removed from civilized custom, such common notions of inheritance do not apply on the island now that Prospero is lord and master. It is quite

dramatically debatable whether something so seemingly loathsome as Caliban, spawned from the union of two things even more loathsome than himself, “this damned witch Sycorax” (l. 264) and “the devil himself” (Setebos) (l. 219), can claim in the court of civilized opinion any moral and, hence, legal rights to ownership. Echoes of the age-old formulae resonate: those who conquer are, perforce, correct; “might makes right” and it is the Manifest Destiny of those who conquer viz. the civilized and good, to wrest from those conquered the land they claim is theirs. (By the legal thumbscrews of escheat, such expropriation was, indeed, fairly common in the seventeenth century, particularly if the moral offender were proven to be a witch. And James I was known for an almost perverse interest in finding, and punishing, “witches”.) [3]

Shakespeare, however, is not so quick and easy with his judgements, if for no other reason than that he is presenting a play, not a formal disquisition. He has conflicts to build — dramatically; he has the attention of an audience to sustain with theatrical ‘give and take’. As presented early in the play, these contentious issues almost beg for some sort of courtroom adjudication. It is not, of course, Shakespeare’s style to send for the lawyers. Rather, his approach to this rival profession of dramatic wordsmiths may be glimpsed in Dick the butcher’s ghoulish suggestion, “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.” (H6, pt.2, 4. 2. 70) [4] In *The Tempest*, the lawyers are not killed, but neither are they called. Instead, Shakespeare lets his characters win or lose their cases on their own staged merits.

And how do they do? Ariel, in general, and Caliban, in certain particulars, present fairly powerful cases for themselves. It is Prospero, however, who is most theatrically successful at this point in the play. First, he is the most effective orator. His

language and rhetorical skill are far superior to either of his rival claimants. Further, and most relevant to our present concern, the “foul witch Sycorax” sits squarely, and offensively, at the center of the arguments. Prospero argues by rhetorical *synkrisis* that he is by far the lesser, though no less capable, of the two evils and that Ariel should therefore count his blessings that Sycorax is no longer master of the island. Further incentive to count such blessings comes when Prospero warns Ariel either to follow his commands or risk the punishment he suffered from Sycorax, though this time, instead of being imprisoned in soft-wooded pine, Prospero threatens to “peg” Ariel in hard-wooded oak. Ariel — and the audience — get the message. However legitimate they may or may not be, Prospero’s words are Law. As for Caliban, his mother is described in such foul terms that she, and her “hag-seed” son, cannot be seen as having any persuasive moral claim to power. She is presented as inhuman (and inhumane) and by conferring upon the brutish Caliban the kingship of the island prior to Prospero’s arrival, we see what sort of brutish new world she and her kind would have conjured had Prospero not washed up with a more civilized plan.

Thus portrayed as “wicked”, “foul”, and “damned”, it would not be surprising to find that the Bard had added some sort of pejorative barb to this witch’s name. Shakespeare was far from loath to load the names of his characters, particularly the bad and/or comic, with reverberant reference. Shakespeare’s approach to naming, however, was decidedly different from much of the referential rumpus that characterizes our more “sophisticated” modern poetics. (Oliver Mar-Text, Mistress Quickly, Anthony Dull, Malvolio, Sir Toby Belch, Armado, Bianca, Borachio, Justice Silence... to mention but a few.) Shakespeare seems to have been more interested in having and holding an audience

with words that could be readily recognized and understood than in Pound-ing them with impressively obscure erudition. Typically, Shakespeare either found some fairly well known historical and/or mythological precedent, used a clearly allegorical name, or coined a name from fairly recognizable parts or sources. As Davis and Fankforter note in *The Shakespeare Name Dictionary*, “It is not typical of Shakespeare to be that inventive with names.” [5] A careful perusal of said source proves this point readily enough.

Surprisingly, then, in his last play, it seems that the Bard broke the rules and coined a name of uncharacteristically recondite origin: “Sycorax”. We read in *The Shakespeare Name Dictionary* that Sycorax’s description, quote, “owes much to Ovid’s portrayal of Medea in *Metamorphoses*, 7. The name is not found in any source. It most likely derives from the Greek words for sow (*sys*) and raven (*corax*), both animals associated with witchcraft. The name may derive from a description of the raven in *Batman uppon Bartholome his booke De proprietatibus rerum* (1582), an encyclopedia, which suggests the wording of Caliban’s first speech at *1.1. 324*. Heartbreaker (*psychorrhax*) has also been suggested, as well as the Greek words for fig (*sukon*) and spider (*rax*). Another possibility is from Arabic, *shokoreth* ‘deceiver’. The Coraxi were a tribe in Colchis, a center for witchcraft, where Circe, the famous witch of mythology, was born. Pliny locates the Chalybeates (who have been proposed as the source of Caliban) as living near Coraxi. Circe was exiled to an island in the Mediterranean (like Sycorax) and her name derived from a bird (hawk, *kikros*), also.” [6] A few other suggestions are worthy of note. From Edwin Bormann we get the idea that the prefix, “Sy”, comes from Sirocco and, hence, we have Sycorax, an ill south-wind/raven. [7]. More recently, there is Stephen Orgel’s suggestion that Sycorax can be identified as Medea, the Scythian raven,

by combining the Greek “korax” with the “Sy” of the occasionally misspelled “Sythian” (Scythian). [8]. There is also the notion floating about that takes the Medea/Sycorax connection even further. Sycorax is (supposedly) derived from Ovid’s Medea and because Circe is Medea’s aunt, Sycorax is essentially Circe, the swine-making sorceress of old. [9] Finally, there is Katherine King’s creative suggestion that some of Shakespeare’s drinking buddies, in a moment of erudite outrage, might have sworn in Classical Greek, “*Es kórakas*”, “Go to Hell”, and the ever-opportunistic Bard picked up the colorful, cacophonous epithet and dropped it into a play with thematic aplomb. [10]

These are impressive guesses, all, but a bit of a stretch, I suspect. All suggest a level of education and/or scholarly concern for which there is scant evidence in Shakespeare’s work. Although I will return to this critical point later, suffice it to say that it is highly unlikely Shakespeare to have sought and used what would have been either to him or his audience, obscure and only marginally relevant references. Instead, I suggest a simpler, funnier, and more thematically pertinent solution and one that fits what Shakespeare was wont to do so often in his preceding plays, poke fun at pedants and pedantry. The target of his scorn this time is no less than the first “trial lawyer” and the founding father of “rhetoric”.

This “magician” of language, this witch of rhetorical exercise, was named (or commonly called) Corax of Syracuse. Snip a syllable from one word, snap it on another and, ‘quick and home’, Corax of Syracuse becomes... Sycorax, a portmanteau of significant jest.

The story of how I stumbled upon this possibility is, itself, illuminating. I was not scouring books for arcane possibility locked in (possibly relevant) homonyms. I was

simply preparing for a workshop I was to teach on how — best — to write an SAT essay. Pursuant to this task, I had taken stacks of books and articles to a hotel lost in the redwoods, there to scour the wisdom of others for hints about how to achieve my monumental task. As I was reading a surprisingly engaging book on the usually dull subject, I read the line, “The history of rhetoric covers almost 2500 years, beginning with the work of Corax of Syracuse in the fifth century B.C.E.” [11] Four pages later, I read the name again, this time with a bit more pertinent information; “Corax of Syracuse (fl. 460 B.C.E.), generally thought to have composed the first rhetorical treatise to help Sicilian landowners win title to disputed property, proposed that legal arguments have four parts.” I stopped. Here was someone central to the history, development, and understanding of language and I’d never heard of him — this “Corax of Syracuse”.

As I sat pondering the lacuna in my own education, up popped a silly pun, Corax of Syracuse, Sycorax. Now, to be perfectly honest, I had had this witch in mind not too long before. *The Tempest* was the last play and one of the last works I’d taught to my high school seniors three months before. We’d collectively wondered at the name but had left its meaning to the fine print of footnote arcana. And there it would have remained had I not stumbled upon the possibility of a bit of Elizabethan wordplay.

That Shakespeare *loved* wordplay is a ludicrous understatement. Shakespeare shaped, sculpted, contrasted, lambasted, and otherwise suggested all sorts of ideas and feelings through wordplay. Surely if I could come up with it, the great Wordwright himself would have been able to, had he had reason to. And here’s the heart of the issue: could he, plausibly, have known the reference and in such a way as to use it to name this

most illusive witch, and at least as important, is there clear evidence that Shakespeare had reason to use such a playful combination of words?

Although there is almost no external evidence that Shakespeare went to school, it is widely assumed that he got at least most, if not all, of a grammar school education. And of what did a grammar school education in Renaissance England circa 1570 – 1580 consist? Latin, almost exclusively. “The aim of the grammar-school curriculum was to enable the student to read, write, and speak Latin... The method prescribed unremitting exercise in grammar, rhetoric, and logic.” [12] In other words, he studied the famous and inescapable Trivium, the three subjects most basic to the “liberal arts”. In passing, it should be noted that Prospero claims to have had an unparalleled knowledge of these “liberal arts.” (l. 73)

Gladly leaving Shakespeare’s knowledge and use of grammar and logic for others to ponder, I will concentrate on a few details of his knowledge and use of rhetoric. Before we look into that, however, we need to look at what languages Shakespeare might have known, aside — clearly enough — from English. If, for example, he had studied not just Latin extensively but a good deal of Greek, we might not be completely surprised that at the end of his career, he would create an erudite neologism from scraps of his education. T. W. Baldwin, in his large two-volume work builds on the scholarship of others (Stapfer, Farmer, etc.) to exhaustively explore the implication of Ben Jonson’s phrase concerning Shakespeare’s knowledge of “small latine and lesse greeke”. Taking the issue of the “lesse” first, Baldwin says, “We have put the conventional Greek texts into the hands of Shakespeare, and to our interrogatories on most of them he has answered with a clear voice, ‘Graecus est; non legitur.’” [13] Shakespeare was not a

reader of Greek. Baldwin's evidence, however, cannot prove that Shakespeare didn't know important and/or useful bits and pieces of Classical Greek. I can impress my mother-in-law by occasionally trotting out one of the three dozen words I know in Yiddish but I can in no way claim to speak the language. It's spice, not speech. And but that it would have been an awfully obscure 'spice' on the Jacobean stage, Shakespeare may very well have known enough Greek to pepper his last play with a dash of it... maybe.

Latin, however, Shakespeare *did* know. Though he seems to have consulted translations with greater frequency and more expedient purpose, he did use the original Latin texts from time to time as "inspiration" for certain aspects and/or passages of his own work. A happy student he may not have been, but a good enough one he was to have gotten a lot from what he was asked to study.

Even more importantly, it is clear that Shakespeare was no casual student of one of the Trivium subjects: rhetoric. The Elizabethan age was, in fact, known for its obsessive, at times precious, fascination with rhetorical figures, tropes, and tricks. [14] And Shakespeare seems to have been, both by chance and by choice, at the center of this achievement. "That Shakespeare's works are massively influenced by rhetoric and that even his most powerful poetic creations were achieved on the basis of rhetoric is, after the intensive research in Renaissance rhetoric of the last decades, no longer a controversial statement," says Wolfgang Müller. "The vision of the Renaissance as a rhetorical culture – 'eine rhetorische Kulturepoche'(1) is increasingly taking shape, and in this context Shakespeare is accorded an outstanding position, as is confirmed by an authority on classical rhetoric and its tradition like George Kennedy, who says that

Shakespeare's works are 'in a very concrete way perhaps the greatest achievements of classical rhetoric.'" [15] Baldwin goes so far as to suggest that some explanation of Shakespeare's rhetorical facility "is obligatory." And the explanation he provides is that Shakespeare may have even *taught* rhetoric "for a time before he began writing his plays." [16]

Without some tangible evidence, we might not wish to put the roll-book in his hands just yet. Still, Shakespeare did receive a considerable education in rhetoric, the details of which are most relevant to our present concern. "Aristotle, the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero, and Quintilian were studied directly in the schools during the Renaissance and were the chief ultimate sources of the works on rhetoric and logic, whether in Latin or the vernaculars." [17] Significantly, all three authors just cited mention Corax as the sole founder of a system of rhetoric, or, with his student Tisias, co-founder of the entire field of rhetoric. [18] Furthermore, the extensively useful *Prolegomena* [19] mention Corax, his role in founding rhetoric, and his very Syracusan history. Far less believable than the notion that Shakespeare actually taught rhetoric is the idea that somehow, having studied it as much as he clearly had, he could have missed the name of Corax of Syracuse. Shakespeare has been shown to have used more than 200 rhetorical tropes and figures. [20] It's hard to see how he could have known as much about the details of the subject but slept through any and all mention of the subject's well-known founder.

Whether or not Shakespeare actually liked the rhetoric he had learned is, and will forever remain, beyond our ability to know. There is ample evidence from Shakespeare's work, however, that he was no fan of ostentatious learning and excessive formalism. In fact, he parodied both as often as he could. [21] And a surprising number of the targets of

this parody are either teachers *of* or learned *in* the subjects of the Trivium. Among others, there is the guileful Lucentio, AKA “Pedasculè” — little pedant, who, as a pretext for other things, “teaches” Bianca Latin (*The Taming of the Shrew*); there is school-teacher Sir Hugh Evans — relentlessly mocked for his Welsh accent, who tries to elicit well-schooled responses from young William Page before the (wickedly) witless audience of Miss Quickly (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*); there is the “well-bred” courtier, Touchstone, who, with self-defeating sophistication, runs his rhetoric onto the rocks of the shepherd’s simple truths (*As You Like It*); there is the sometimes wise, often gratuitous counselor Polonius (*Hamlet*); and there is the ever-excessive rhetorician, Holofernes (*Love’s Labor’s Lost*). It is, in fact, Holofernes who prefigures one of the complex conflicts in *The Tempest* when he says to Constable Dull, “O thou monster Ignorance, how deformed thou look,” to which the pompous curate Nathaniel adds, “Sir, he hath never fed of the dainties that are bread of a book.” Later, we hear such formulae echoed in the ‘deformed slave’, Caliban, who is ignorant of his own meaning and — but for the generous care of Prospero et filie, could not read or speak and yet, when he speaks, sometimes speaks most beautifully; hear them echoed in the book-obsessed lord who knows more about his books and art than either his temporal duties as once-was Duke of Milan or the natural wonders of his brave new ISLAND world — wonders that the deformed, hard to look at Caliban, alone, can show him; hear them echoed in the irony that that which *looks* deformed is not, necessarily, so very much more deformed than those who live by fine-formed form alone.

Upon occasion, clearly, Shakespeare enjoyed deriding the disingenuous formalist and the narrow-minded pedant. Is there any reason to believe, however, that Corax of Syracuse was the target for Shakespeare's last swipe at rhetorical pedantry?

The amount of tangible evidence we have about Corax does not nearly match the number of fanciful stories about who he was and what he did. Recently, some scholarship has begun to suggest that Corax may not have actually "invented" rhetoric at all, or if he did, it was a far less systematic creation than his post-third century biographers have made it out to be. It has even been suggested that Corax was not the real name of the fellow, whoever he was and whatever he did. Seriously, would someone trying to advertise his expertise in the art of "fine oratory" willingly apply to himself the moniker "crow"? A more likely scenario is that Corax was Tisias who, for reasons lost to obscurity but not impossible to guess, became known as the "crow" of Syracuse. [22]

Again, as the story goes, the types of cases Corax is said to have been interested in were cases involving property disputes arising, usually, from the claims of those whose property had been stolen under the Syracusan tyrants. The people — albeit wealthy, property owning people — wanted their property back and Corax was there to advise them in their claims, either as a sort of lawyer or as a supplier of oratorical methods that could be learned and applied to forensic advantage.

Be all of this as it may, what we do know is that the reference to Corax and/or Tisias in Plato and Aristotle is less than glowing. As D. A. G. Hinks says of Plato and Aristotle, "Whatever allowance is made for their polemical attitude and for their eagerness to point out a failing to which they consider themselves superior, we must conclude that that failing was real, and that the system of Tisias and Corax was indeed

adapted only to the oratory of the courts. No one who is familiar with the later tendencies of ancient rhetorical theory will find this surprising.” Hinks goes on to discuss, quite precisely, what that “system” was based on. “The principle part of that system is the celebrated doctrine of *εἰκός* or argument from probabilities.” [23] Reasoning from persuasive-sounding probabilities and not from actual evidence or indisputable deduction was seen by both Plato and Aristotle as a weak and unacceptable way to prove anything. Although there is no incontestable evidence from historical sources that Corax ever employed or created such a system, both Aristotle and Plato *thought* that he had and gave his “system” some rough reviews. Their reviews, appearing as they do in two popular and enduring sources, the *Rhetoric* and the *Phaedrus*, have undoubtedly contributed to some of the negative press Corax has received for millennia. It should be noted that many of the tales about Corax that appear in the *Prolegomena* are far more positive and would, as mentioned, have been well-known in Shakespeare’s time. Still, bad reviews by Aristotle and Plato are tough things to live down, even when dead.

Herewith we see the formal beginnings of that rift between those who cared more for the pragmatic uses of speech, viz. winning court cases, presenting persuasive arguments on a range of topics, and those for whom speech was to be strictly trained to the rigorous tasks of seeking and communicating truth. It is a very ancient battle, this conflict between those who use their communicative talents to persuade — artfully, and those for whom the only purpose is to discover ethical, rational, and/or phenomenological truth. It is the conflict between the lawyer for whom oratory is a means to courtroom victory — a victory not necessarily based on a clear and convincing presentation of “the truth and nothing but the truth” — and the philosopher who is, presumably, interested in

nothing but the truth. For Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists, et al of fifth and fourth centuries in Greece, the division between the legal and the philosophical was not nearly as wide as it is in our own far less truth-troubled era. In fact, the division was not between the legal and the philosophical but between the legal (diconic) and the political (deliberative), [24] in other words, between that which affected court decisions and that which affected the well-being of the *polis* — the “island” of people truly “citizen” to the state. As such, courtroom antics were far less important, ethically, than what one said and did in the political arena. And it was the philosopher’s task to find both the truth AND the ethical reality (the two usually seen as inextricably bound) and suggest from rigorous rational inference both proper epistemologies and behaviors. Fancy talkin’ on its own wasn’t one such behavior.

Seen in this light, Corax — or, as Plato says, “whatever he was called” [25] was the earliest known proponent of such relatively amoral oratory.

Further coloring the reputation of poor Corax was the well-known story of his dispute with his putative student, Tisias. This story comes, most clearly, from the *Prolegomena* and tells of his having sued Tisias for failing to pay him his teaching fee. Tisias took his case to court saying that if he won his case, he wouldn’t have to pay the fee, and if he lost the case, he shouldn’t have to pay the fee, either, since such loss would show that he’d not been taught well by ‘the master’. Corax, it is said, turned the argument around and claimed that if he won, he’d certainly need to be paid, and if he lost to his student, he should still be paid since such a loss would clearly show that his student had learned a great deal from him. The story ends with judge, jury, or assembled audience

(depending on the source) dismissing both master and student with the words, “From a bad crow, a bad egg.”

Add this less-than-honorific story to the reviews given to him by Plato and Aristotle and the scorn that would naturally accrue to the inventor of one of the Trivium’s subjects, a subject that would have been studied in maddening trope-and-figure drills, and one can see how, in the mind of one particular Renaissance schoolboy who had a talent for, though no clear love of, the details of rhetoric, the name Corax might have resonated with foul associations. As Thomas Cole says, any schoolboy could have told you that Corax “was a Sicilian from Syracuse, the inventor of rhetoric (defined by him as the art of persuasion).” [26] In other words, not only would Shakespeare quite likely have known this, but his all-important audience, or most of it, would have known this. The “crow” from Syracuse would have, at the mention of his name, or anything like it, reverberated with all sorts of recollections... and not all of them pleasant.

Thus far, it should be clear that the irrepressible punster would have far more likely known and remembered the name Corax of Syracuse, a name rich with associations of rhetoric, language, and schoolboy drills, than he either knew or remembered ANY ancient Greek he might have, though probably hadn’t, studied. *Korax* he knew, and he probably knew it meant “crow” (or raven) but not because he’d studied Greek and decided to dredge it up to form an obscure name in his last play. Therefore, *sys* “swine” *korax*; and *Sy* “Scythian” *korax*; and *sukon* “fig” *rax* “spider” *korax*; and *es korakas* “Go to Hell” *korax*; and the *Sy* “Sirocco” *korax* all seem less than likely. Shakespeare didn’t create names like this. He could have, yes, but habitually, he didn’t. And there is even

less reason to believe he stumbled upon obscure Arabic words — and that had he done so, he would have used them to confound (not entertain) his audience.

As for the suggestion that Shakespeare “owes much” of the description and origin of Sycorax “to Ovid’s portrayal of Medea in *Metamorphoses* 7,” it is hard for me to see specifically how. Yes, certain passages, particularly Prospero’s valediction to his magical minions, “Ye elves of hills, brooks...” (5.1.33 etc.), echo Golding’s 1567 translation of *Metamorphoses* 7 (“Ye Elves of Hills, of Brookes...”) [27]. There is even some credible evidence that he might have been inspired in certain details from Ovid’s Latin original. Shakespeare clearly had read, remembered, and used this work while working on *The Tempest*. However, the passage just cited, which is the passage most often cited for purposes of proof, is uttered by Prospero, not Sycorax or her living spokesman, Caliban. That Medea and Sycorax were both able to control the moon hardly helps the case, either. Such magical power is fairly “standard sorcerers’ issue”. And the phrasing of the passage in *Metamorphoses* 7 has nothing to do with “flows and ebbs” whereas “flows and ebbs” are central to Shakespeare’s last description of Sycorax’s magic. Ovid mentions nothing about tides in this passage. It is doubtful, then, that Shakespeare derived much direct inspiration from this passage to describe his own witch. [28] Yes, Medea lists a raven-like bird among the magical ingredients she brews up in a cauldron. And Caliban mentions Sycorax in relationship to raven’s feathers, “As wicked dew as e’er my mother brushed/ With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen...” (1. 2. 321-2). But look at the word Ovid uses. It is *cornicis* NOT *korax* or *corax*. [29] *Cornicis* is, instead, the genitive form of *cornix* — meaning “crow” — which, alas, connects rather poorly either to her name, Sy-corax, or to the raven’s feather Sycorax used to brush

“wicked dew”. If Shakespeare had used the original, he’d have seen this. And if he’d used Golding, he’d have read “Crowe”. [30] In Latin, *corax* was a rarely used transliteration of the Greek word *κόραξ* meaning “raven” (and occasionally “crow”) and was not the term used by Ovid. Further, *cornicis* was not intended to suggest something evil in this particular passage. Quite the opposite. The term is used in *Metamorphoses* 7 to suggest longevity. [31] And why did Medea care to conjure longevity? Because this “foul witch” was concocting a magical potion that would kindly restore youth to her beloved husband’s father. This, particularly, is “damned”? This, particularly, is “foul”? This, particularly, is a clear parallel to the “hag” in *The Tempest*?

But we are to find further reinforcements for this tenuous theory with the fact, not, by the way, mentioned anywhere in the *Metamorphoses*, that Medea was the niece of Circe who was the sister of her father. Fine. But this doesn’t prove very much. Circe means “hawk” or “circling in the air like a bird of prey”. No clear connection there. She lived on an island, but so did dozens of other “witch-like” gods and demi-gods, and Circe came from Colchis, not Algiers from whence Sycorax came, unceremoniously. No clear connection there. Yes, Circe is associated with “swine” (*sys*), but Circe wasn’t the swine; she turned men to swine (and other animals, as well, allowing them to find “their inner beasts”). The “circuitous” connection is very un-Shakespearean.

Given how far Shakespeare would have to have gone to get *corax* from any other source, Corax of Syracuse is most likely the source of the name. What needs to be shown, however, is whether such a name fits the context within which it functions in the play. Shakespeare’s purpose being to give a good show and not just show-off his fancy larnin’, he was inclined to use names and references that resonated with his varied audience.

Furthermore, what references he chose, readily known or not, tended to fit “the word to the action” with remarkable consistency. And so, does Sycorax fit?

As I’ve already suggested, Corax does, indeed, fit very snugly into the end of act one, scene two. The entire scene is either exposition or verbal jockeying for position. When it becomes the latter, when, that is, Ariel asks for his liberty and Caliban asks for his land, it becomes a forum for Prospero’s oratorical wizardry. And this is precisely the moment Sycorax comes on stage. Liberty, land, and Corax of Syracuse come together in the fifth century B.C.E. and I suspect — with a bit of wordplay — they resurfaced in the seventeenth century. Although act two, scene one is not uniquely rich in tropes and figures, it is built on a foundation of accomplished rhetorical skill. The *topoi* (topics) are important and organized for convincing effect. It would be hard, in fact, to argue that four of the five classic canons of rhetoric were not employed by Prospero to self-conscious advantage. There is clever *inventio*, careful *dispositio*, persuasive *elocutio*, and powerful *actio*. Can we be sure Shakespeare consciously manipulated all of these rhetorical elements? No, but they are there, and they certainly serve the purpose of his main character as he argues his way through his scenes with Ariel and Caliban.

Even more compelling is the nature of the rivalry between Prospero and Sycorax. Although both are magicians, Prospero is typically seen as the benevolent mage who, for ethical ends, employs nothing but white magic. Evil Sycorax, on the other hand, employs nothing but black magic. She is the incontestably “wicked dam.” Significantly, though, it is not her specifically witch-like powers that are important at her first mention. Instead, what is discussed is her treatment of Ariel and how that proves that Prospero really is the lesser of two evils. Implicit in her “sins” against Ariel is that “her grand hests” (l. 274),

her “earthy and abhorred commands” (l. 273), were too much for his delicate being, too “terrible/ to enter human hearing.” (l. 264) On one level, it’s clear that this line means that these sorceries were too terrible to mention (or hear). However, as so much of this passage concerns the utterance of commands, words, hearing, ears, etc, this line resonates with the idea that these sorceries simply “sounded bad.”

After being mentioned in relation to Ariel’s claim, Caliban, then, invokes Sycorax’s name to buttress his contention that the island is his. Alas for the poor fellow, her name has quite the opposite effect. By making him consanguineous with things “damned”, Sycorax weakens his case. Furthermore, the passage in which Caliban is introduced continually explores the effects, limits, importance, and curséd aspects of names and language. His ‘mother’ tongue allowed him to do little more than “gabble” nonsense. Not only could he not name the larger and the smaller lights before his gentle, well-taught tutor, Miranda, “learned” him the proper names for sun and moon but he could not even distinguish good from evil. This latter lesson he never learns. He has a nature no nurturing will civilize and “which good natures/ Could not abide to be with” (l. 259-60). Words fail to improve him. Instead of being appreciative that he has learned to articulate his purposes, he scoffs, “You taught me language and my profit on’t/ Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/ For learning me your language.” (l.363-65)

Furthermore, what charms he has learned from Sycorax his mother have distinctly uncharming effects. “Toads, beetles, bats, light on you!” (l. 340) This spell is intended to affright Prospero and the audience? I don’t think so. These are words, empty words. They contain no magic since they conjure nothing. Sycorax may have been able to raise and lower the tides but, at least speaking through her son, she can barely raise an

eyebrow. The Jacobean audience certainly knew that, as a witch, Sycorax and her son would have had no legitimate claim to the island. Shakespeare, however, is at no great pains to point out her truly witch-like qualities at this point in the play. Yes, apart from doing “mischief manifold” (whatever that means), and brushing wicked dew from an unwholesome fen with a raven’s feather (not exactly a frighteningly witch-like thing to do), she was the “dam” of the devil. It is interesting to note, however, that this devil, Setebos, was a very obscure foreign devil. [32] His name certainly didn’t conjure common notions of hellfire and damnation. At this point in the play, Sycorax is a rhetorical foil more than anything else. Clearly, she is not Hecuba, nor does she have any of the dramatic, on-stage weight of the Weird Sisters. She’s a name, only a name, but a name that — magically — conjures the world of rhetoric. As such, that name is used to highlight Prospero’s nimble wit and rhetorical superiority.

True, there is more to Prospero’s magic than the art of rhetoric. It is more than his ability to conjure positive results by being able to articulate goodness with *integritas*, *consonantia*, *claritas*. He does, with Ariel, raise a Tempest. He also conjures a Masque, stuns Ferdinand, worries Caliban and Co. with cramps and hounds, and makes Miranda fall asleep (although she does suggest that the “strangeness” of her father’s lengthy “story” made her drowsy!!).

Still, whatever supernatural powers he may have are essentially limited to his presence on the island/stage. It is “providence” that landed him on the island, “fortune” that brought the agents of his rescue to the island, an “auspicious star” that he must court to realize his plan, an audience’s liberating applause that can free him from the island/stage, and it is only after he buries his book and breaks his staff that he is ready

and able to voyage back to the world of others — the brave old world of Milan. It has been suggested that Prospero’s valedictory at act five, scene one abjures all “rough magic”. Not everyone is convinced of this, however. [33] That he had dark powers which he chose not to use, except (presumably) for good ends, suggests more about the nature of his “character” in the play than it does about the nature of his supernatural powers outside the play.

More importantly, however, is the fact that magic in *The Tempest* is less supernatural than it is one of two other varieties. There is a sort of ironic “supernatural” magic that works through nature itself: love and its ability to move souls; a daughter – “my art” – and her ability to move a father to all sorts of concerns (ordinate or inordinate); liquor and its abilities to ‘teach’ the looser forms of language, etc. The other magic is the magic of ART, Prospero’s most visible and dramatically important power. Although we certainly witness this magic later in the play, it is introduced right at the beginning. The first command of the play, the first command of a master to his servant is to “speak to th’ mariners” (1. 1. 3). As the servant/boatswain begins to do just that, Gonzalo comes on deck/stage and demands to see the master. He is troubled by the storm and sure that a higher authority than the boatswain can do something. To his request, the boatswain irreverently replies, “What cares these roarers for the name of king?” (1. 1. 14-15) Names, status, words in place of action – all are meaningless — except that it is Prospero’s words that have raised “these roarers”(!!). Antonio, then, far less politely than Gonzalo, insults the ineffectual boatswain by calling him an “insolent noise-maker” (1. 41) and a “wide-chopped rascal” (1. 53). Who, then, has the best “art” at controlling this tempest? Who speaks and commands best?

Miranda answers this question by asking it on stage in the very first line of the next scene, “If by your art, my dearest father, you have/ Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.” (1. 2. 1-2) Interestingly, hers is the first “command” on the island and though she lacks Prospero’s art to make such things happen “magically,” what she requests does come to pass. Miranda – by her humanity – gets what she commands. Who, indeed, has the best “art” at controlling this tempest? [34]

Much of the important business at the end of *The Tempest’s* long second scene deals with establishing who has the better claim to the island, AND who can present that claim most convincingly, most persuasively. Echoes of Syracuse, circa 463 B.C.E.? It is because of Prospero’s superior skill at rhetorical manipulation that he wins the argument. Clearly, his claim is based on his superior “nature” — he is the civilized one and brings to the island superior qualities. Most essentially, it is not the cacophony that bothers but the vile nature of the sorceries that is most offensive. However, it is clear that some of the threads Shakespeare braids into his web of motifs explore the use and abuse of rhetoric and the magical/poetical art of language. The “nature” of the evil may be the most important aspect, [35] but its fundamental, inextricable relationship to the art of expression cannot be ignored. Since both Sycorax and Prospero have used the darker aspects of magic, it is not enough simply to suggest that these rivals are ethical opposites. They are, perhaps, more similar than we might wish to acknowledge. Note the important and obvious similarities between these two characters: both are banished, both are saved from worse fates because they are with “child”, both are magicians. And Prospero exhibits his own “darker” side. His proud and angry excesses are not only numerous but truly painful to other worthy creatures on the isle, Ariel, Gonzalo, Ferdinand, and

Miranda being but a few of them. Yes, he is teaching them lessons. And more importantly, we are watching these lessons play out on stage. The ‘true’ magic of the play, however, is in the way the humans come around to being more human. Prospero’s supernatural magic, more than anything, compresses these transformations and reveals their worthwhile effects. He is the agent of nature creating struggles by which various characters discover themselves, viz., Ferdinand and Miranda and their discovered love for one another. This magic resides, mostly, in the ability to aid the action of nature to do what is ‘natural’, just, and good; punish those deserving of punishment and enlighten those worthy — and capable — of enlightenment: “Oh brave new world...” cries Miranda at her vision of others, though that world of others is only new to her. Still, even if we see Prospero’s supernatural magic as an essentially benevolent sort of goad to nature itself, he, very naturally, gets a bit carried away with his own powers. In Act 4, it is Ariel who must bring Prospero back to a more human concern for all of those in his magical thrall.

Ariel: “Your charms so strongly works ‘em,  
That if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.”

Prospero: “Dost thou think so, spirit?”

Ariel: “Mine would, sir, were I human.” (4. 2. 17-20)

Let us not forget, too, that it was this art and his obsession with the study of the “liberal arts” that contributed to his woe in the first place. Proud of his unparalleled abilities, his duties to his “state” or *polis* “grew strange” while he, instead, becomes “transported/ And rapt in secret studies.” For him, his “library/ Was dukedom large

enough” (1. 2. 109) and, in the absence of his attentions to matters of state, his brother takes advantage of the vacuum of power, usurps his dukedom, and banishes the man from human company. It is only when Prospero renounces his books and ART that all can be freed, and returned to their natural state.

Still, before his “charms are all o’erthrown” (5. 1. 319), we witness a very entertaining display of Prospero’s powers. His art *is* great, is impressive, is persuasive, gets results, and the results he wants (applause and hence freedom from his island stage, a “proper” son-in-law, his dukedom restored, revenge on his enemies, etc.). He is a master at the magic of rhetoric. And so his rival, with whom he shares some darker qualities/interests/talents, shares at least a ‘nominal’ connection with his ART. As that art is founded and expressed through oratorical skill, it is necessary that that rival be less adept at that art. Clearly, both the “hag-seed” son and the mother are no match for Prospero’s verbal skills. They were designed very craftily not to be — “You taught me language and my profit on’t/ Is I know how to curse!” The “foul witch Sycorax” has a foul-mouthed kid. Truly, the old crow who founded rhetoric’s rules in an effort to win property cases with potentially dubious arguments is a suitable parallel, indeed. “From a bad crow; a bad egg”.

But the probable connection between Sycorax and Corax of Syracuse does not, in my opinion, end here. If we look at a map of the Mediterranean, it is abundantly clear that Prospero was never bundled out the gates of Milan and hurried “aboard a bark” (1. 2. 144). Milan is a good two-day ride on swift horses from the sea. And speaking of distances, Naples is about 400 miles from Milano (!!) — a good 10 day ride on horse, and yet, the Neapolitan King controls the Duke of Milan (!?!). I suspect our Bard, caring

more for rhetoric than geography, confuses Naples with Milan when describing the midnight banishment of Prospero. If this is the case, my case is better made. If we draw a line from Naples to Algiers, but for Sardinia, Sicily is the closest island to that line. And even if we allow Shakespeare to have magically reduced the distance of Milan from the sea and had Prospero leave from, say, Genoa, Sicily is not an impossible place to have washed up on, certainly not if the navigator is a less than careful geographer. Personally, I vote for a Neapolitan debarkation, but then, I do have my non-cartological reasons.

Syracuse is a Sicilian city. If, as I suspect, Shakespeare cobbled the name of Sycorax from the combination of Corax and Syracuse, the island of Sicily is a right fine choice for the setting of the play. It is, as well, not an unlikely island on which Sycorax might have landed after having been banished from nearby Algeria.

Be all of this geography as it may, what I believe Shakespeare to have been suggesting in his last play is that his protagonist/parallel had achieved the pinnacle of rhetorical skill, and such skill was, as his audiences witnessed, truly magical. Prospero, and by extension, Shakespeare, had bested the best, the very founder of one of the three “liberal arts”, the reputed inventor of rhetoric. In *The Tempest*, Corax of Syracuse is unseated by the “upstart crowe” on the Jacobean stage.

But, this is not Shakespeare’s final point. Prospero must release his magical minions and, conversely, be released from his own magic, before returning to his much-missed Milan. Rhetorical achievement is not the ultimate goal. It’s a handy skill, gets one close to godliness on “the great globe itself” (5. 1. 153), but, in a sense, keeps one too “rapt” to be able to be in the world fully. To perform the magic of parenthood requires some very good talking — and then some. To regain the right to rule a state requires

some fine oratory — and then some. To get those who are subordinates to do your bidding quickly and without complaint requires some powerful rhetoric — and then some. That “then some” is no single thing but is a combination of strength, natural goodness, and artful care. As Mercutio says to Romeo upon recognizing the return of his friend to friendly balance, “Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo, now art thou who thou art, by art as well as by nature.” (2. 4. 83-85) [36] When Prospero frees Ariel, breaks his staff (magic raven’s feather/pen??), and buries his book, he frees himself to return to his former state where he can reign, not by supernatural magic but by a sort of magical humanity. No longer “transported/ And rapt” in isolated artistry, he is free to rejoin others in the art of living.

Notes:

Acknowledgements: Stephen Orgel for his open-minded interest, “I prefer my idea,” said he, “but I think you’re onto something very interesting. See where it takes you...” And so, I have. Thanks. Thanks, as well, to Curtis Dozier, graduate student at UC Berkeley who, like a tireless Virgil, guided me through the ever-deeper obscurities of the *Prolegomena* and back to the light; to eminent classicist George Kennedy for entertaining the “distinct possibility” that classical Corax could have morphed into Elizabethan Sycorax and for suggesting places to go to find more “evidence”; to my wife and kids for putting up with an often absent and usually absent-minded husband/dad; to David Sullivan of the UC Berkeley Art History/Classics Library for his timely and lively translations and for his help in getting me access to some essential texts; to Franck Bessone for his help in straightening out some of my circuitous translations; to Professor

Keith Sagar and his helpful advice and wonderfully thought-provoking essays; to the most helpful libraries and librarians at UC Berkeley, San Francisco State University, UCLA, and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library.

[1] *The Tempest*, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972)

[2] Frank Kermode suggests that Prospero's "... Art, being the Art of supernatural virtue which belongs to the redeemed world of civility and learning, is the antithesis of the black magic of Sycorax. Caliban's deformity is the result of evil natural magic and it stands as a natural criterion by which we measure the world of Art." *The Tempest* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard U. Press, 1958): xli.

[3] Many have alluded to the possible connection between the marriage of James I's daughter, Elizabeth, and the marriage of Prospero's daughter, Miranda (the masque being the clearest, though by no means the only, parallel). Clearer, still, is the fact that this play seems to have first been performed for James I at Whitehall Palace on November 1, 1611; *The Tempest* was, if not *intended* for, at least significantly *performed* for King James. What has not, to my knowledge, been explored are the rich, even disturbing, parallels between Prospero and James. The succession of the Stuarts to the Tudor throne was anything but clear cut. Intrigue upon intrigue ascended that lofty perch. Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Essex, both sometime-friends and lastly rivals, were executed on charges of treason for having backed, in Raleigh's case, the wrong horse, and in Essex's case, the right horse at the wrong time. And these were some of Elizabeth's most trusted aids and counselors. Possible successors were many and extended all the way (and even quite legitimately) to the Spanish Infanta, though England wasn't going to have a Spanish

king or queen if it could possibly avoid it (Remember the Armada!). Propinquity, thus, meaning more than consanguinity at this particular moment in history, King James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England. As this is simply a footnote, I cannot explore the complexity of James' claim, which certainly had more (and less) going for it than simple geography. Be that as it may, James was not the most obvious choice in the eyes of many an Englishman. *The Tempest* clearly supports the rights of the 'somewhat' foreign, that is to say, Scottish, James to assume power. Prospero, too, is 'somewhat' foreign to his island. Caliban should, if blood alone confers regency, be king. And so he states. But he can't be, and not just for the reasons stated most clearly in act one, scene two. Implicit in this passage is another reason why Caliban cannot be King. He is born of a witch and by the laws of England, notably the statute of 1563 and the Witchcraft Act of 1604, he is ineligible. He is the spawn of a witch and the devil, and therefore, a more 'civilized' State could, by the principle of "escheat", take possession of his property and all rights adhering thereto. Caliban is tainted by a "corruption of blood" (note the US Constitution, Article 3, section 3, to see the strange "bloodline" of this word). The statute of 1563 and the Act of 1604 extended escheat to both treason AND witchcraft — as had various laws in the American colonies. The idea that one's blood could be "corrupted" had serious legal implications well known to Shakespeare and his audience. It was, interestingly, the period from roughly 1550 to 1650 that saw the largest, most deadly witch-hunts in English history (so, too, in France, Germany, and colonial America). But, and here's my point: was Shakespeare clearly presenting James with a poetic gift that would publicly reinforce his legitimacy or, as I suspect, was Shakespeare having it two (and a few other) ways at the same time? Surely James and Prospero are to be seen as the rightful

sovereigns. However, both overstep their bounds and both spend time in self-serving conflict with “witches”. James had a known, one might even say perverse, fascination with witchcraft. In 1597, he penned the *Daemonologie*, an influential book that, among other things, described the qualities that characterized a “real” witch. He also attended the North Berwick Witch Trial “in which several people were convicted of having used witchcraft to create a storm [a “tempest”??] in an attempt to sink the ship on which James... had been travelling” (I thank Wikipedia.org for the wording of this last detail). As Prospero is at least something of a parallel to James I, Sycorax might be seen as a parallel, albeit very distant, to Elizabeth or, better, to *any* rival claimant. (The far-fetched suggestion of Dr. Knut Clement might make more sense than I’d original considered, considered in this light. He suggests that Sycorax comes from *sukon* and *rax*, Greek for “fig” and “poisonous spider” which, he believes, refer to an “exalted personage, whom the poet desired here to indicate” namely, Queen Elizabeth “who could be as sweet as a fig, and could weave webs as poisonous as the bunch-backed spider” [*A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, Volume IX, The Tempest*, (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1892) Ed. Furness].) Even more compellingly, although Sycorax *is* a witch, and her mate *is* “the devil”, that devil is Setebos, an obscure Patagonian deity which, alas, if chosen to affright the typical Jacobean imagination of Hell eternal was a bit distant. This devil, Setebos, was more infernally ineffectual in an English context than eternally dreadful. Was, therefore, Shakespeare suggesting a message to the King? Legitimate as he had to be to maintain order in dear old England, still, Shakespeare may have been warning James not to take himself too seriously. “Monarchy is the greatest thing on earth,” said James in an address to Parliament in 1614 (yes, after the writing of the play, but the attitude was

evident well before this by most accounts). He continues, ominously, “Kings are rightly called gods since just like God they have power of life and death over all their subjects in all things. They are accountable to God only... so it is a crime for anyone to argue about what a king can do.” Was Ariel’s gentle exhortation for a kinder, more virtuous, more humane treatment of those enthralled by “absolute” Prospero intended but for the character on the stage? Was the witch really worthy of roasting and her son of acquisitive escheat? One can both make war at the behest and wage peace at the request of Shakespeare’s words. Still, ambivalent as it must remain, the context is suggestive. There is an imperious attitude about Prospero that needs must be chastened by his insubstantial servant. Whether intended to mirror James or not, such a chastening/artful reflection might not have been a bad thing for the king to have contemplated. There’s something in the mirror here which, I feel, needs more looking into. Another paper, perhaps?

[4] Henry the Sixth, Part 2 in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972)

[5] J. Madison Davis and A. Daniel Frankforter, *The Shakespeare Name Dictionary* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995): 359

[6] Davis: 472

[7] Edwin Bormann, *The Shakespeare-Secret*, translated by Harry Brett, (London: Thwohlleben, 1895). Bormann, funnily enough, says that because so many aspects of Bacon’s *History of the Winds* can be found in *The Tempest*, this further proves that Shakespeare was Francis Bacon. Wacky, yes, but I do rather like his suggestion about the origin of Sycorax’s name; it’s one of the most compellingly appropriate.

[8] Stephen Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare, The Tempest* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1998): 19

[9] Implicitly, Frank Kermode, novelist and scholar Marina Warner, sci-fi writer Dan Simmons, Davis and Frankforter (see endnote 6), etc.

[10] Katherine Callen King, “Go To Hell, Sycorax”, *English Language Notes* 27:4 (1990):1-3 esp. 3. King suggests that “*Es kórakas*”, “Go to Hell”, “represents the exact opposite of Prospero, whose name in Latin means ‘make happy or successful.’ There arises a splendid symmetry between the names of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ families on the Island: Go-to-Hell is the logical progenitor of the unregenerate malformed ‘Cannibal’ just as Makehappy is the logical progenitor of the lovable ‘Wonderwoman’.” A wonderfully inventive suggestion, but for the sake of his enduring success, thank God the Bard was rarely so logical.

[11] Erika Lindemann, *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 37-41

[12] Sister Miriam Joseph, c.s.c., *Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947): 8

[13] T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespere’s Small Latine and Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944): Vol. 2, 661

[14] “During the European Renaissance... rhetoric attained its greatest preeminence, both in terms of range of influence and in value.” Brian Vickers, “On the Practicalities of Renaissance Rhetoric”, in *Rhetoric Revalued*, ed. Brian Vickers (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982): 133-141 esp. 133

[15] Wolfgang G. Müller, “Syllogism and Enthymeme in Shakespeare”, in *Rhetoric Movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honour of Heinrich F. Plett (Symbola Et Emblemata, Vol. 9* (Philadelphia: Brill Academic Publishing, 1999): 171.

Further, Nancy Struever says in her essay, “Shakespeare and Rhetoric”, *Rhetorica* 6 (1988): 140, “... there is a strong tendency in modern scholarly accounts of Shakespeare to suggest Shakespeare’s appropriation of a very learned, and very ‘literary’ body of rhetorical doctrine.”

[16] Baldwin: Vol. 2, 672.

[17] Joseph: 20. Note, as well, “The sixteenth-century texts on rhetoric and logic make frequent explicit reference to Tully and Quintilian and also to Aristotle, though often these references, especially to the last, represent intermediary rather than direct acquaintance.” 20

[18] Quintilian, the hugely influential first century rhetorician claims that, “... *the earliest writers of [rhetoric] text-books are the Sicilians, Corax and Tisias....*” *Institutio Oratoria* 3. 1. 8., translated by H. E. Butler, (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1920). Cicero similarly credits Corax and Tisias as the founders of rhetoric, his source being, presumably, the *Synagoge Technae*, a lost work of Aristotle’s, “Thus Aristotle says that in Sicily, after the expulsion of tyrants, when after a long interval restitution of private property was sought by legal means, Corax and Tisias the Sicilians, with the acuteness and controversial habit of their people, first put together some theoretical precepts;” *Brutus* 46, translated by G. L. Hendrickson, (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1952). Aristotle, in a work definitely NOT lost, speaks at length about the “dubious” contribution Corax made to the

development of rhetoric in his own “compendium” on the subject, *Rhetorik*, “As in eristics the deception lies in not adding the conditions, application, or manner in which our statement is valid, so in rhetoric it lies in the probability’s being not absolute but conditional. On this topic Corax’s system is constructed.” as quoted by D. A. G. Hinks, “Tisias and Corax and the Invention of Rhetoric”, *Classical Quarterly* 34 (1940): 61-69, esp. 64.

[19] The *Prolegomena* are the work of eight authors, who, between the latter part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and the 13<sup>th</sup> century wrote “introductions” — *prolegomena* — to the study of rhetoric in which they relate, among other things, its history. As Stanley Wilcox says, these introductions “were used by generations of school teachers” as standard openings to the study of rhetoric and all were pretty much the same in their treatment of the essential details. For an interesting discussion of the similarities, differences, and possible origins of these “stories”, see Stanley Wilcox, “Corax and the *Prolegomena*”, *American Journal of Philology* 64:1 (1943). One essential aspect of the “accepted” story was that Corax invented rhetoric in “response to the challenges of democratic politics after the popular revolution which deposed the last of the Syracusan tyrants, Hieron’s brother Thrasybulus.” See Thomas Cole’s article, “Who was Corax?”, *Illinois Classical Studies* 16 (1992): 65-84, esp. 65. Clearly, Corax wasn’t just “of Syracuse”; rhetoric was “of Syracuse” and its uniquely debate-fertile context, circa 463 B. C. E.

[20] Vickers: 137

[21] Shakespeare’s “response to academic, scholarly moralism is parody.” Struever: 137

[22] Cole: 82-83.

[23] Hinks: 63-65. Aristotle illustrates the problem by citing the case of a small man accused of attacking a larger man. It is probable that a small man would not be foolish enough to attack a larger man. However, as Aristotle, citing Agathon, says, “Well might one say just this is probable/ that much not probable should come to pass.” Since this contention is as conditionally true as the contention about the small man, it follows that a larger man accused of attacking a smaller man could not have done it since it is probable that the improbable will occur — that is, that the big guy was attacked by the small guy. Clearly, nothing absolute can be deduced from this way of arguing, and it is this way, or “system”, that Aristotle ascribes to Corax, and then trashes.

[24] Cicero’s account at *Brutus* 46, “whether or not it corresponds to anything in Syracusan history, certainly accords better than the Byzantine [*Prolegomena*] account with the testimony of Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who complain consistently that writers on public speaking concentrate on dicanic [legal] oratory to the total or nearly total exclusion of political oratory.” Cole: 68

[25] Cole: 82

[26] Cole: 65

[27] Arthur Golding, *The Fifteen Books of Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, Book 7: line 265.

Originally published 1567.

[28] Ovid, *Metamorphosen Liber Septimus*: line 207

[29] Ovid: line 274

[30] Golding: line 358

[31] Ovid: line 273-74

[32] Orgel: 121n

[33] “Our information about Prospero’s magical activities prior to the beginning of the play comes largely from the speech in which he renounces his Art (5.1. 33-57). This famous speech, beginning ‘Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves’, derives directly from a passage in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* spoken by the black witch Medea. ... Kermode claims that ‘only those elements which are consistent with ‘white’ magic are taken over for Prospero’. (149) This is not so: ‘graves at my command/Have wak’d their sleepers, op’d, and let ‘em forth/By me so potent Art.’ What had been his benevolent purpose in raising the dead? There is not a hint of benevolence in the entire speech.” Keith Sagar, essay “The Tempest”, [www.keithsagar.co.uk](http://www.keithsagar.co.uk). A version of this essay will appear as “The Crime Against Caliban” in Sagar’s forthcoming book *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*, (London: The Chaucer Press, 2005).

[34] Prospero does, after all, and in that most proud/parental way, call his daughter his “art” (1. 2. 25).

[35] Kermode: xxiv-xxv, “Caliban represents (at present we must over-simplify) nature without benefit of nurture... he is born to slavery, not to freedom [but... wasn’t he free until Prospero got there?!?] of a vile and not a noble union; and his parents represent an evil natural magic which is the antithesis of Prospero’s benevolent Art.”

[36] “Romeo and Juliet”, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Baltimore Penguin Books, 1972)