

# DID "THE TEMPEST" COME FROM A SAILOR'S YARN?

*Kipling Eavesdrops While Shakespeare  
Plies Stephano With Liquor  
to Get His Story*

ONE of the numerous Shakespeare controversies involves the origin of "The Tempest." Was Shakespeare familiar with the circumstances of the memorable wreck of Admiral Sir George Somers and his party of Virginia colonists on the Bermuda Islands—the still vexed Bermoothes—in 1609, and was he acquainted with the stirring accounts of that disaster written by William Strachy and Silvanus Jordan, both members of the Sea Venture's company? And had he heard the tale of Carter, Waters, and Chard, the three adventurers who elected to remain on the Isla de Demonios, as superstitious mariners called Bermuda, and uphold British sovereignty, until settlers could be sent out from England?

Washington Irving in "The Three Kings of Bermuda and Their Treasure of Ambergris" sees Carter, Waters, and Chard typified in Sebastian, Trinculo, and their worthy companion, Caliban, and surmises that the wreck of Sir George's ship Sea Venture and subsequent events on the lonely island may have furnished Shakespeare with some of the elements of his drama. And Rudyard Kipling, who knows Bermuda almost as well as he knows many other parts of the British Empire, has written in characteristic style that Shakespeare wove his material from nothing more promising than the chatter of a half-tipsy sailor at a theatre.

Kipling's opinion, almost forgotten among his writings, is found in a letter to the editor of The London Spectator published on July 2, 1898. He wrote:

**Rudyard Kipling's Letter**

To the Editor of The Spectator:  
SIR: Your article on "Landscape and Literature" in The Spectator of June 18 has the following, among other suggestive passages: "But whence came the vision of the enchanted island in 'The Tempest'? It had no existence in Shakespeare's world, but was woven out of such stuff as dreams are made of."

May I take Malone's suggestion connecting the play with the casting away of Sir George Somers on the island of Bermuda in 1609, and further may I be allowed to say how it seems to me possible that the vision was woven from the most prosaic material, from nothing more promising, in

fact, than the chatter of a half-tipsy sailor at a theatre. Thus:

A stage manager who writes and vamps plays, moving among his audience, overhears a mariner discoursing to his neighbor of a grievous wreck, and of the behavior of the passengers, for whom all sailors have ever entertained a natural contempt. He describes, with the wealth of detail peculiar to sailors, measures taken to claw the ship off a lee shore, how helm and sails were worked, what the passengers did, and what he said. One pungent phrase is rendered later into "What care these brawlers for the name of the King—" strikes the manager's ear, and he stands behind the talkers.

Perhaps only one-tenth of the earnestly delivered hand-on-shoulder sea talk was actually used of all that was automatically and unconsciously stored by the inland man who knew all inland arts and crafts. Now is it too fanciful to imagine a half-turn to the second listener as the mariner, banning his luck, as mariners will, says there are those who will not give a dolt to a poor man while they will lay out ten to see a rare show—a dead Indian? Were he in foreign parts, as now he is in England, he could show people something in the way of strange fish. Is it to consider too curiously to see a drink ensue on this hint (the manager dealt but little in his plays with the sea at first hand, and his instinct for new words would have been waked by what he had already caught) and with the drink a sailor's minute description of how he went across through the reefs to the island of this calamity—or islands, rather, for there were many? Some you could almost carry away in your pocket. They were sown broadcast like—like nutshells on the stage there. "Many islands in truth," says the manager, patiently, and afterward his Sebastian says to his Antonio: "I think he will carry an island home in his pocket and give it to his son for an apple." To which Antonio answers: "And sowing the kernels of it in the sea bring forth more islands."

"But what was the land like?" says the manager. The sailor tries to explain. "It was green, with yellow in it; a tawny colored country"—the color, that is to say, of the coral beached, cedar-covered Bermuda of today—and the air made one sleepy, and the place was full of noises—the muttering and the roaring of the sea among the islands and between the reefs—and there was a sou'west wind that blistered one all over." The Elizabethan mariner would not distinguish finely between blisters and prickly heat, but the Bermudian of today will tell that the sou'west, or Lighthouse, wind in Summer brings that plague and general discomfort. That the coral rock, battered by the sea, rings hollow with strange sounds, answered by the winds in the little cramped valleys, is a matter of common knowledge.



The Tempest, Act IV, Scene I.  
*Spirits, which by mine art I have from their confines call'd,  
to enact My present fancies.* Painted by Joseph Wright

The man, refreshed with more drink, then describes the geography of the landing place—the spot where Trinculo makes his first appearance. He insists and insists on details which to him at one time meant life or death, and the manager follows attentively. He can give his audience no more than a few hangings and a placard for scenery, but that his lines shall lift them beyond that bare show to the place he would have them, the manager needs for himself the clearest possible understanding—the most ample detail. He must see the scene in the round—solid—ere he peoples it. Much, doubtless, he discarded, but so closely did he keep to his original information that those who go today to a certain beach some two miles from Hamilton will find the stage set for Act II, Scene 2, of "The Tempest"—a bare beach, with the wind singing through the scrub at the land's edge, a gap in the reefs, wide enough for the passage of Stephano's butt of sack, and (these eyes have seen it) a cave in the coral within easy reach of the tide, where such a butt might be conveniently rolled ("My cellar is in a rock by the seaside, where my wine is hid.")

There is no other cave for some two miles. "Here's neither bush nor shrub," one is exposed to the wrath of "yond" same black cloud, and here the currents strand wreckage. It was so well done that after two hundred years a stray tripper, and no Shakespeare scholar, recognized in a flash that old first set of all.

So far good. Up to this point the manager has gained little except some suggestions for his opening scene, and some notion of an uncanny island. The mariner (one cannot believe that Shakespeare was mean in these little things) is disposed to a deeper drunkenness. Suddenly he launches into a preposterous tale of himself and his fellows flung ashore, separated from their officers, horribly afraid of the devil-haunted beach of noises, with their heads full of the fumes of broached liquor. One castaway was found hiding under the ribs of a dead whale, which smelt abominably. They hauled him out by the legs—he mistook them for lumps—and gave him drink. And now, discipline being melted, they would strike out for themselves, defy their officers, and take possession of the island. The narrator's mates in the enter-

prise were probably described as fools. He was the only sober man in the company.

So they went inland, faring badly as they staggered up and down this pestilent country. They were pricked with palmettos, and the cedar branches rasped their faces. Then they found and stole some of their officers' clothes which were hanging up to dry. But presently they fell into a swamp, and, what was worse, into the hands of their officers; and the great expedition ended in muck and mire.

Truly an island bewitched. Else why their cramps and sickness? Sack never made a man more than reasonably drunk. He was prepared for unlimited sack; but what befell his stomach and head was the purest magic that honest man ever met.

A drunken sailor of today, wandering about Bermuda, would probably sympathize with him; and today, as then, if one takes the easiest inland road from Trinculo's beach, near Hamilton, the path that a drunken man would infallibly follow, it ends abruptly in a swamp. The one point that our mariner did not dwell upon was that he and the others were suffering from acute alcoholism, combined with the effects

of nerve-shattering peril and exposure. Hence the magic. That a wizard should control such an island was demanded by the beliefs of the seafarers of that date.

Accept this theory and you will conceive that "The Tempest" came to the manager sanely and normally in the course of his daily life. He may have been casting about for a new play; he may have proposed to vamp an old one—say "Aurelio and Isabella"; or he may have been merely waiting on his demon. But it is all Prospero's wealth against Caliban's pignuts that to him in a receptive hour, sent by Heaven, entered the original Stephano fresh from the seas and half-seas over. To him Stephano tells his tale, all in one piece, a two hours' discourse of most glorious absurdities. His profligate abundance of detail at the beginning, when he was more or less sober, supplied and surely established the earth-basis of the play in accordance with the great law that a story to be truly miraculous must be ballasted with facts. His manderings of magic and incomprehensible ambushes when he was without reservation drunk (and this is just the time when a lesser-minded man than Shakespeare would have paid the reckoning and turned him out) suggested to the manager the peculiar note of its supernatural mechanism.

Truly it was a dream, but that there may be doubt of its source or of his obligation Shakespeare has also made the dreamer immortal.

I am, Sir, &c.,  
RUDYARD KIPLING.



Laura Keane  
as Miranda in "The Tempest"



The Tempest, Act IV, Scene I. Prospero and Ariel driving out Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban—Drawn by Moritz Retszsch



The Tempest, Act I, Scene II. Caliban. You taught me language, and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse! Drawn by Moritz Retszsch, a noted German artist of the fifties.



A Younger as Stephano, H Nye as Trinculo, in the mid-century production of The Tempest

## COLERIDGE ON ARIEL AND CALIBAN

*The Creature of the Air and the Creature of the Earth*

From Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Lectures on Shakespeare

IF a doubt could ever be entertained whether Shakespeare was a great poet, acting upon laws arising out of his own nature and not without law, as has sometimes been idly asserted, that doubt must be removed by the character of Ariel. The very first words uttered by this being introduce the spirit not as an angel, above man; not a gnome, or a fiend, below man; but while the poet gives him the faculties and the advantages of reason, he divests him of all mortal character, not positively, it is true, but negatively.

In air he lives, from air he derives his being, in air he acts, and all his colors and properties seem to have been obtained from the rainbow and the skies. There is nothing about Ariel that cannot be conceived to exist either at sunrise or at sunset; hence all that belongs to Ariel belongs to the delight the mind is capable of receiving from the most lovely external appearances. Shakespeare has properly made Ariel's very first speech characteristic of him. After he has described the manner in which he had raised the storm and produced its harmless consequences, we find that Ariel is discontented—that he has been freed, it is true, from a cruel confinement, but still that he is bound to obey Prospero, and to execute any commands imposed upon him. We feel that such a state of

bondage is almost unnatural to him, yet we see that it is delightful for him to be so employed. It is as if we were to command one of the winds in a different direction to that which nature dictates, or one of the waves, now rising and now sinking, to recede before it bursts upon the shore; such is the feeling we experience when we learn that a being like Ariel is commanded to fulfill any mortal behest.

When, however, Shakespeare contrasts the treatment of Ariel by Prospero with that of Sycorax we are sensible that the liberated spirit ought to be grateful, and Ariel does feel and acknowledge the obligation; he immediately assumes the air being with a mind so elastically correspondent that when once a feeling has passed from it not a trace is left behind.

Is there anything in nature from which Shakespeare caught the idea of this delicate and delightful being with such childlike simplicity, yet with such preternatural powers? He is neither born of heaven nor of earth; but, as it were, between both, like a May blossom kept suspended in air by the fanning breeze, which prevents it from falling to the ground, and only finally, and by compulsion, touching earth. This reluctance of the Sylph to be under the command even of Prospero is kept up through the whole play, and in the exercise of his admirable judgment Shakespeare has availed himself of it in order to give Ariel an interest in the event, looking forward to that moment when he was to gain his last and only reward—simple and eternal liberty.

Another instance of admirable judgment and excellent preparation is to be found

in the creature contrasted with Ariel—Caliban, who is described in such a manner by Prospero as to lead us to expect the appearance of a foul, unnatural monster. He is not seen at once; his voice is heard, this is the preparation; he was too offensive to be seen first in all his deformity, and in nature we do not receive so much disgust from sound as from sight. After we have heard Caliban's voice he does not enter until Ariel has entered like a water-nymph. All the strength of contrast is thus acquired without any of the shock of abruptness or of that unpleasant sensation which we experience when the object presented is in any way hateful to our vision.

The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived; he is a sort of creature of the earth, as Ariel is a sort of creature of the air. He partakes of the qualities of the brute, but is distinguished from brutes in two ways—by having mere understanding without moral reason, and by not possessing the instincts which pertain to absolute animals. Still, Caliban is in some respects a noble being; the poet has raised him far above contempt; he is a man in the sense of the imagination; all the images he uses are drawn from nature and are highly poetical; they fit in with the images of Ariel. Caliban gives us images from the earth, Ariel images from the air. Caliban talks of the difficulty of finding fresh water, of the situation of morasses, and of other circumstances which even brute instinct without reason could comprehend. No mean figure is employed, no mean passion displayed beyond animal passion and repugnance to command.

## The Pageant Passes

Written for THE NEW YORK TIMES  
By Stacia Crowley

O, ye who know the master, stop, I pray you,  
Whatever be your ways.  
Pause and give thought to what is here before you.  
This is a day of days,  
This is your day, you wear the mystic token,  
The ring upon your hand.  
Be glad and proud. Others may look and listen,  
But you can understand.

And let us, while his world is all around us,  
These creatures of his pen,  
Say over by what magic through the ages  
He holds the heart of men.  
His far-off past he filled with what is present,  
And will be to the last,  
Humanity, that knows through all the ages  
No present and no past.

He touched the chord of self with hand so knowing,  
That other selves reply,  
Time is forgot, and shrinking, trembling,  
wondering,  
We answer, "It is I."  
Strong soul! He dared to be, nor joyed in seeming,  
Spoke what he felt of what he knew and dreamed,  
Spoke from the human in him, little deeming  
That schools would clash on what he was and seemed.

Unschool'd! some cry, and with accusing finger,  
Point to the skill that has transfixed some thought,

Forgetting Art is only Nature's pupil,  
And knows what Nature taught.  
True to himself he modeled, not improving  
Upon the primal plan,  
And so his creatures in all times and places  
Are true to every man.

"Such stuff as dreams are made on," are his stories.  
Impossible; unreal! Ah, but then  
Greece, England, fairyland, where'er you find them,  
His men are always men.  
His lines that take their places in our memory,  
What is it gives them their eternal youth?  
Beauty would pall did there not lie beneath it  
The elemental, everlasting truth.

From the far vistas of the years come-trooping  
These friends our memories claim.  
We know them well. To each his pen has given  
"A local habitation and a name."  
This land he never saw, whose dawning glories  
Once through his "Tempest" gleamed.  
This "brave new world" has just such people in it  
As those of whom he dreamed.

The pageant passes. Sordid life, scarce knowing,  
Absorbs this afterglow  
Of one who wrote, "Our revels now are ended."  
Three hundred years ago.