



## *Othello, The Tempest and the Grotesque*

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# EPI-REVEL

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## *Othello, The Tempest* and the Grotesque \*

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If one is to establish a comparison between *Othello* and one of the last plays, *Cymbeline* or *The Winter's Tale* are more likely to come to mind, because of their common preoccupation with the combined themes of male jealousy and female innocence. Yet, after close examination of the two plays, I find that the parallels between *Othello* and *The Tempest* are much deeper and more extensive than any of these surface thematic correlations.

Indeed, both plays can generally be described as "island" dramas as they share a common sense of confinement and are both marked by a certain unity of place, time and action (this, of course, only applies to the 'Cyprus' section in *Othello*, from act II to V), which is otherwise quite rare in Shakespeare. *Othello's* first act prologue in Venice finds its counterpart in Prospero's flashbacks to his former life as ruler in Milan, twelve years before (*The Tempest*, I, ii, 38-168), just as, in both cases, we, spectators, are introduced "unto those yellow sands" by means of two 'miraculous' tempests. One causes the Turkish fleet to disperse without a naval engagement with the Venetians :

<i>Montano</i>	If it hath ruffianed so upon the sea, What ribs of oak, when mountains melt on them, Can hold the mortise? What shall we hear of this?
<i>Sec. Gentleman</i>	A segregation of the Turkish fleet : For do but stand upon the banning shore, The chidden billow seems to pelt the clouds; The wind-shaked surge, with high and monstrous mane, Seems to cast water on the burning Bear And quench the guards of th'ever fixèd Pole. I never did like molestation view On the enchafed flood [...]
<i>Third Gentleman</i>	The desperate tempest hath so banged the Turks That their designment halts. A noble ship of
Venice	Hath seen a grievous wrack and sufferance On most part of their fleet (II, i, 7-24).

*The Tempest*, on the other hand, provides a providential rescue where, in spite of the frightful spectacle of "the fire and cracks Of sulphurous roaring [that] the most mighty Neptune Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble Yea, his trident shake" (I, ii, 203-205), "Not a hair perished" (I. 217), as Ariel says to Prospero in his account of the wreck.

The two plots develop in isolated places, away from the influence and civilization of Italian courts and cities, Venice or Florence (Cassio is described by Iago as a 'Florentine') in the first case, Milan or Naples in the second, and the two plays are similarly bent on an exploration and an explosion of the primitive (mostly primitive man

and primitive nature, although the primitive way of life appears as a fascinating element of Gonzalo's ideal 'Commonwealth' in II, i, 150-167). There is certainly in both plays a rather ambivalent conflict between the elegant corruption of the city world, on the one hand, and the dark fascination with a natural man that is not presupposed innocent, on the other, but they both move away from the idealization of the pastoral 'philosophy', which Shakespeare had both exploited and mocked in *As You Like It* or *The Winter's Tale*. Nor are these plays dark pastorals in any way comparable to the blasted worlds of *Titus Andronicus*, *King Lear* or *Timon of Athens*, which are far more desperate and pessimistic. *Othello* and *The Tempest* seem to have been commonly influenced by travel literature, by maps, by the mythography and iconography relating to the lore of foreign and distant lands (Mauritania, Brazil, Guiana and the New World). Othello and Caliban, the 'Noble Moor' and the 'savage and deformed slave' are the closest things to the myth of the "Noble Savage" Shakespeare ever came to.

There are also a number of structural parallels between *Othello* and *The Tempest* to which I would like to turn first. Indeed, the two plays are similarly dominated by a powerful mind and a towering dramatic figure who seems to have the whole action of the play under control and who makes the other personages mere accessories to his own designs, looking on the whole rather pale compared to him, I mean Iago and Prospero. Of course such a comparison may seem shocking at first since one, in his own patriarchal way, is after all working for redress and for 'good' while the other is constantly trying to undermine and ultimately to destroy those we naturally perceive as the representatives of 'good' (Cassio, Desdemona, Othello). But both are motivated by a desire for revenge, even though Prospero's reasons are clear and acceptable enough while Iago's are dark and tortuous. It is also true that Prospero finally decides that "the rarer action is In virtue than in vengeance" (V, i, 27-28), while Iago, similar in that to Antonio, remains totally unrepentant at the end. But it is also easier to forgive your enemies when they lie at your mercy!

Prospero resorts to magic, with a magic garment, a staff and books that evoke the practises and paraphernalia of the Renaissance magus (Cornelius Agrippa or John Dee) and his prescience as well as his ability to raise a storm and command spirits look impressive enough (his name after all amounts to an Italian translation of the Latin 'Faustus' or 'Fortune') although Iago, working by "wit not by witchcraft" (II, iii, 361), is almost able to achieve as much. Iago's 'magic', which looks Satanic if we are to believe his curses (e.g. "Divinity of hell!", II, iii, 340), resorts indeed essentially to verbal and rhetorical gambits, to insinuation and persuasion, to gesture and dramatic poses and supposes in order to achieve the desired effects upon his victims. But in totally unsimilar attitudes at the end of each play, Prospero abjures his "rough magic" (V, i, 50-51) and forgives his enemies while Iago, the "demi-devil" prefers to immerse himself in obdurate silence (or in manic laughter in Bob Hoskins's interpretation in the BBC version of the play) --an obvious figure of damnation for such a good speaker!

Both Iago and Prospero are manipulators who pursue ulterior motives by using other people to oblige them to meet their chosen and rather selfish ends. In a way they are both chess players and chess masters, although Prospero comes out better in the end than Iago who is finally check-mated by his wife Emilia, whose spontaneous and totally generous reaction he could not have foreseen. They are cold-blooded machiavels, Iago following "but himself" like Barrabas in *The Jew of Malta* or Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, while Prospero can be described as a good Machiavellian or Machiavel of good to take up Richard Marienstras's felicitous expression in his article about *The Tempest* (1). Starting from Charles Cowden-Clarke's remark that "we perforce must acknowledge Prospero to be of a revengeful nature" (2), Marienstras goes on to say that Prospero shares with Duke Vincentio when he says "Craft against Vice I must apply" (3) a "perverse pleasure in inflicting torment upon others". He also remarks that, alongside

with Richard III and Iago, Prospero resorts to lying, to terror and to hidden or manifest forms of violence against others" (4). These various characters are also highly lonely persons and they give vent to their satisfaction or anger in asides or soliloquies. Prospero, like Iago, is isolated from the rest of the human community around him by his secret plan, which he makes sure no one other than himself will know. Iago and Richard, however, are able to confide their sadistic pleasure to his audience like the old Vice of the Morality plays, while Prospero, as Ann Richter remarks, remains "curiously opaque [as] the theatre audience is never really allowed to penetrate his consciousness" (5).

Iago's and Prospero's situations in both plays are criss-crossed, as they pass from a position of servant or ensign into that of the omnipotent master and father figure. In that respect, it might be rewarding to have a look at the positions of the other two characters whose fate is so intimately linked to theirs, namely Othello and Caliban. Their respective situations are also put upside down from one play to the next (from commanding general to base slave), yet there are a number of intriguing similarities between them.

Both are strangers or aliens (in terms of outward appearance at least as they are immediately perceived as strange --indeed spoken of as a devil or a monster--in a world with different norms and values) and their outside physical features are seen by others as the sign of their depravity or barbarity. In the eyes of the 'civilized', these "noble savages" appear like beasts, mooncalves or devils ("an old black ram", "a Barbary horse", "an extravagant and wheeling stranger Of here and everywhere" for Othello, "a freckled whelp", "a thing most brutish", "a fish", a "misshapen knave", a "thing of darkness" for Caliban). Of course, as far as Othello is concerned, these adjectives that revile him belong to Iago's blackening strategy to try and make his General appear only through the initial obscene filter that slanders him and taints his better nature. Othello's noble mind, though, is allowed to express itself beautifully in the first and second acts, where Iago's slander is contradicted by the Moor's impressive physique, his military virtue and noble nature that percolate most powerfully in his strong oratory and beautiful command of language. His romantic love for Desdemona also serves to exonerate him, at least up to a certain extent, while Caliban is described, right from the beginning, as a potential rapist who tried repeated sexual assaults against young and chaste Miranda. It may be noted in passing that the two women share a common capacity for wonder and an innocence that makes them incapable of suspecting evil.

Now Caliban appears to be governed only by the 'laws' of lust and instinct and he pursues the dream of peopling "the isle with Calibans" (I, ii, 351), a project that naturally sounds like a teratological nightmare to Prospero and Miranda. They may well squirm at the thought, but the irony is that this sounds like a grotesque or inverted application of the poet's advice to the young man in the early section of the Sonnets --the urge to breed and leave the world a shadow of his own beautiful and lovable self (Caliban would replace this with his own upside down version and replace the lovely child with an ugly changeling). One also thinks here of Benedick's ultimate argument to resolve himself to marry Beatrice and break his vow, that "the world must be peopled" (6). This, incidentally, shows the difference between the situation of the gentleman, who finds the idea of sexual intercourse leading to reproduction a sort of practical necessity which he must ultimately resign himself to (with an undertone of irony) and that of the "country copulatives" (7) (the clown or the 'savage') who simply follow their uninhibited impulses and for whom this constitutes the primary goal to be achieved with a female. Later, when he tries to allure Stephano to participate in his plot against Prospero, Caliban will praise the beauty of Miranda to him and say :

[...] She will become thy bed, I warrant,  
And bring thee forth brave brood (III, ii, 95-96).

But, the way Iago presents Othello's elopement with Desdemona to the Sagittary (a name which some overscrupulous or perhaps simply naive historians are surprised not to find among lists of the XVIth-XVIIth century inns of Venice but which is used by Shakespeare as a means to evoke the mythical image of the raping Centaur) is presented through the Rabelaisian image of "the beast with two backs". Subsequently it will be described as the climax of bestial intercourse ("an old black ram Is tugging your white ewe" I, i, 89-90) and will later evoke the copulation with horses leading to a "progeny of evils" and monsters ("you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and gennets for Germans", I, i, 111-114). This abusive language is rather powerful stuff in the ears of a high and mighty Venitian magnifico who is thus presented with the nightmare of social, racial and human miscegenation, which is quite close to what Prospero and Miranda express in their horrified rejection of Caliban's lust.

In *The Tempest*, we can notice that if Claribel, the Neapolitan princess leaves her Italian city for the shores of Africa to marry a Moor, the King of Tunis, it is with the entire approval of her father, while Caliban takes over the function of the wild man or satyr in the play. Now, if we are to translate the problems in modern terms, I would say that the Elizabethan attitude to Caliban may be seen as analogous to the one the white Australians take towards the Aborigenes. Like Caliban, the Aborigenes declare themselves unassimilable to Western civilization, preferring to stick to their traditional tribal life, and they also claim that the "island" (or continent rather) is theirs by their birthright. They will know where to find fresh water and any fertile areas in the desert and be able to survive where the white man would quickly die. This idea, incidentally, is beautifully illustrated in Peter Weir's film *Walkabout*, a pastoral and primitive fable which shows a teenage girl and her younger brother walking together in the Australian desert after they have been abandoned there by their father (who committed suicide in his car) until they are rescued from a horrible death there by an Aborigine who shows them the wonders of the place and finally allows them to go back to the city. Caliban says that he showed Prospero "all the qualities o'th'isle, The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (I, ii, 338-339) and, besides Gonzalo's initial help in Milan (I, ii, 160-168), it is probably due to his help that they were able to survive on a mysterious island which looks "green" to Gonzalo and "tawny" to Antonio and Sebastian (II, i, 56, 58).

Caliban moreover is susceptible to music, to the magic of sleep and dreams and his speeches have a strong emotional and poetic quality:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices  
 That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
 I cried to dream again (III, ii, 136-145).

Contrary to his clownish masters, Stephano and Trinculo, whose parts are entirely in prose as is generally the case in Shakespeare with the lower comic characters, Caliban speaks verse. This poetic quality is another resemblance with Othello or with a complex comic character like Falstaff. Caliban possesses a dark, dionysiac energy, which builds up a contrast against Prospero's sober and somewhat stilted type of reason. Ann Righter remarks Prospero's "totally unexplained concern with Miranda's chastity" while Ernest B. Gilman calls attention, in the Masque scene, to the 'cold nymphs', the 'lass-lorn' bachelors, the weary 'sunburned sicklemen', "all elements that reveal either the frigid

extremes of Prospero's mind, or glimpses of a harsher world that cannot be exorcized" (8).

Another common feature between Othello and Caliban is their connection with the fabulous backgrounds of contemporary travel literature and mythography. Othello, who rehearses for the Venetians senators the "story of his life", mentions "[...] the Cannibals that each other eat, The Anthropophagi" (I, iii, 142-143) while, in *The Tempest*, the name of Caliban is probably an anagram of 'Canibal'. Cannibals had been described earlier on by many writers from Herodotus (in his description of the Scythians of the Black Sea) to Mandeville and, in such contemporary travel books as Richard Eden's *Treatyse of the new India* (1553), translated from Münster's *Cosmographia* (1572), where the author speaks "of the people called Canibales or Athropophagi, which are accustomed to eate mans flesh" (9). Montaigne himself, whose essay "Of the Cannibales" is at the origin of the myth of the "Noble Savage" and is echoed in a parodic way in Gonzalo's 'Utopia' speech in *The Tempest* (II, i, 150-159), had been influenced by the narratives of French Huguenot travellers to 'Antartick France' or Brazil, such as Jean de Léry or André Thévet, who describe the cannibal mores of the Tupinamba Indians of the Rio de Janeiro bay. But the cannibals were also represented on a number of contemporary maps as you can see on this illustration from Grynaeus's *Novus Orbis* (1532) [PLATE 1], showing in a corner, underneath the globe itself, scenes of cannibal life : on the right you can see a member of the tribe bringing home a dead human body on his horse; in the centre, two men are busy hacking him into pieces. A third savage watches while roasting legs on the spit (arms are also seen boiling in a cauldron at the back). On the left hand side of the picture, the head is stuck upon a pole at the top of a primitive hut made with foliate branches. J.M. French, in an article called "Othello among the Anthropophagi", suggests that the images in Othello's speech were influenced by the pictures in Ptolemy's maps (10). But there are also similar and even stranger allusions, in both plays, to "men whose heads Do grow beneath their shoulders" (*Othello*, I, iii, 143-144) and to "men Whose heads stood in their breasts" (*Tempest*, III, iii, 47-48). These images refer to the accounts of the so-called "Acephali" (i.e. the headless men), found in Herodotus, Pliny, Mandeville but also in Raleigh's *Discovery of Guiana* :

Next unto Ami there are two rivers Africa and Cavra, and on that branch which is called Cavra, are a nation of people, whose heads appear not above their shoulders; which though it may be thought a meere fable, yet for mine owne part I am resolved it is true (11).

On the following plate, which is found in Münster's *Cosmographia* [PRINT 2] one sees a representation of one of these "Acephali", or headless men, in the second monster starting from the right hand side. Interestingly enough, the Patagonian god Setebos, whom Caliban invokes in his curses (I, ii, 373) is mentioned in accounts of Magellan's voyages (12) as well as in François de Belleforest's edition of *Cosmographia* and we can therefore assume that Shakespeare had seen this book (13).

These images or "spectacles of strangeness" (14) were then an element of wonder that were highly appreciated as Desdemona's fascination with them reveals. These Indians, Brazilians or Wild Men were also used in pageantry, Royal entries and entertainments during the Renaissance. A 1552 entry of king Henry II into Rouen shows naked men hunting monkeys with arrows and spears, others climbing trees to get fruit, while a group of men and women dance in a clearing, in a way that is reminiscent of the Elizabethan May games [PLATE 3, in the centre left part of the picture]. Stephen Mullaney describes this "Figure des Brazilians" as a "polymorphous tableau [where] along with its version of Edenic pastoral it reveals a land of unbiblical license and enterprise" (15). These elements are part of the New World topos in the Renaissance,

where the savage societies described contain cannibalism, Utopia (or the absence of personal property) and free love, as in a German broadside quoted by Hugh Honour in *The New Golden Legend* :

The people are naked, handsome, brown, well-built, their heads, necks, arms, genitals, feet of both women and men are lightly covered with feathers [...] No one owns anything, but all things are held in common. And the men have as wives whoever pleases them [...] They also eat each other, even those who have been killed, and hang their flesh in smoke (16) [PRINT 4]

They will later be found in the Stuart masques as main components of the antimasque, as in Chapman's *Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn* presented at the court at Whitehall in 1613 for the wedding festivities of Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine (17). But they were also found attractive in the popular entertainments and fairs in English and continental cities as the remarks of Trinculo and Antonio lead us to believe in *The Tempest* :

*Trinculo* A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday fool there but would give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian (II, ii, 27-32).

Antonio echoes this even more cynically at the end when he discovers Caliban and exclaims :

One of them is a plain fish, and no doubt marketable (V, i, 265-266).

It was then customary for travellers to the New World to bring back to London "samples" of the savage tribes they had defeated in battle there. For instance, in 1577, Martin Frobisher brought an Eskimo couple back from his voyage to Meta Incognita, the name given to what was to become Nova Scotia and the captives survived there for over a year, which, Stephen Mullaney remarks, was "a lengthy duration for such ethnic 'tokens' of New World' voyages (18). Savages or Wild Men were also quite popular as the whiffers of Midsummer pageants in Tudor London, and it is quite possible that Caliban should also have some affinity with these festive figures that would both frighten and delight the crowds with their squibs, fierce shouts and gestures. It is also worth noting, as a panel in the London Museum explains, that, after the colonization of Virginia in 1607, "James I became particularly interested in American wild life and he installed a menagerie of American birds and animals, with an American Indian, in St James's park". At the end of this long structural comparison between *Othello* and *The Tempest* and before turning to the main aspect of my paper, which is the analysis of the grotesque in the two plays, I would like to make it clear that it would be quite unreasonable to deny the fact that Caliban has sinister sides that bring him closer to Iago than to Othello, while the latter's virtue and nobleness of mind could perhaps be seen as corresponding to the idealized portrait of Prospero. But what I hope has appeared in this parallel and what I intended it for in the first place, is the deep and constant feeling of ambivalence, i.e. the simultaneously 'good' and 'bad' aspects that are suggested by each of those four characters, which is evoked in those two plays. Caliban like Iago is at once likeable and repulsive, frightening and funny; Caliban like Othello has a certain naivety and a proneness to emotional outbursts; Othello like Prospero is dignified and daunting, at least in the first two acts; Prospero like Iago is a cold brain that stage-manages the whole play. This ambivalence is the direct effect of the importance devoted to the strategy of the grotesque in two plays that are "neither right Tragedies, nor right comedies mingling Kinges and Clownes", to paraphrase Sir Philip Sidney's disapproval of non classical play structures in *The Defence of Poesie* (19), *Othello* being, in a way, a comedy

perverted into a tragedy (20), while *The Tempest* is a revenge tragedy with a happy ending.

The term grotesque originally belongs to the visual arts and to the Italian Renaissance which introduced it around 1480, as a panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum (England 1500-1750) clearly explains :

From about 1480 artists and archaeologists began to explore the surviving rooms of the Golden House of the Emperor Nero in Rome, which had been buried underground when the Emperor Trajan built baths on the site. They discovered elaborate painted or plaster decorative schemes incorporating chimerical monsters, attenuated architecture, vases, trophies, acanthus and so on; because such ornament were found underground in grottoes they were called Grotesques [...] In England, the original term for Grotesque was 'Anticke', variously spelt [...] and in about 1533 Robert Skynke of London, 'moulder of Antyke-worke' was paid for a 'trayle of antyk' in Henry VIII's new hall at Hampton Court.

On the next illustration a reproduction of a painted canvas panel from Nonesuch palace (the now entirely destroyed palace built by Henry VIII to rival François I's castle at Fontainebleau and which was situated in South West of London between Cheam and Ewell), which gives a rough idea of what these English antic or grotesque decorations were like [PLATE 5] : the lower part is adorned with a pair of sphinges, one also recognizes satyrs' masks on either sides of the central motif, while the upper part of the design shows horses with serpentine tails that intertwine and clawed feet, instead of hooves, that branch out into strange interlacings or scrolls (21).

As far as literature is concerned, the great masters of the grotesque were prose writers such as Rabelais in France, Dekker and Nashe in England, and they all emphasize the body and physical substances in a shocking manner that deforms shapes or blends the frivolous and the macabre, combines festivity and violence. Interestingly, a writer like Montaigne, whose influence on *The Tempest* I have already mentioned, refers in his *Essays* to these 'grotesque' and fantastic paintings (he had himself commissioned such murals for his house near Bordeaux) and these serve him as an image to describe his way of writing ("Que sont-ce ici, à la vérité, que crotesques" [what are these, indeed, but grotesques?"] (22). He also speaks of the "so many chimeras and monsters one on top of the other, without order or distinction" which his idleness gives birth to ("[l'oïsveté [...] m'enfante tant de chimères et monstres fantasques les uns sur les autres, sans ordre et sans propos..."] (23), which are proper to the grotesque mode.

Giorgio Vasari, describing the grotesques in Rome said that "[the ancients] had created all kinds of absurd monsters, formed by a freak of nature or by the whims and fancies of the workmen, who in this kind of picture are subject to no rule.." (24). Grotesque frescoes could thus be described as a sort of painters' carnival, who would then give a free rein to their wildest fancies in the marginal spaces of mural decoration. I should perhaps add that this could be compared with the gargoyles and various monsters carved by the stone and wood-workers, in the steeples, pillars or pews of countless cathedrals and abbeys (or even colleges, if one thinks of the grotesque figures that adorn the eaves of New College, Oxford). The stone and wood artists, who thus indulged their own Feast of Fools and gave it a lasting shape which has remained for us to admire or laugh at, were also cautious to hide their devils, 'green men' or licentious motifs in some secret places, which one must have a special experience or knowledge to discover. As in the 'Novus Orbis' map, where the cannibal scene is hidden below in a remote corner, away from the main points of attention, these scenes are generally situated in a marginal space.



In the case of drama, it is probable that another specific influence intervened, namely that of *Commedia dell'Arte*, with its buffooneries brought over from the streets and the world of carnival. In *Othello*, the waking up of the old father by two ruffians in the middle of night is an old trick of the trade which associates Brabantio with a figure like Pantalone, while the romantic Desdemona choosing to leave her house to follow a stranger seems remodelled from the 'inamorata' type, and Othello himself (at least in the portrait which Iago makes of him when he speaks of the Moor's "bombast circumstance Horribly stuffed with epithets of war" (I, i, 13-14)) can be compared to Bragadoccio, the Braggart Captain. A production of the play at the Young Vic in 1982 tried to capitalize on these analogies, according to the review published in *The Shakespeare Quarterly* :

*Othello* began with a dumbshow of masked commedia dell'arte figures acting out, as the programme put it, "the abduction of Pantalone's daughter by the braggart-captain [...]"

To what the reviewer adds, with a note of scorn, that "the keynote of the play seemed to be Iago's obscene joking" (25). This was apparently rather unsuccessful. Shakespeare probably borrowed elements from popular Italian comedy for this scene, but these are simple analogues built into the text, not the dominant note, even in the early scenes that combine bawdy, satirical wit, heroic postures and romantic comedy. On the other hand, as I have tried to show elsewhere (26), the world of popular traditions and particularly the shaming ritual of the cuckold's procession, paraded along the streets riding backwards on a donkey (the continental equivalent of the Skimmington ride in England), was probably one of the images at the background of Iago's taunts, as he plays the role of the black zany to raise the irrepressibly comic demon of sex to provoke the fury of Othello. Such mock-rituals were fairly common sights in European carnivals and I have here a reproduction of a print showing "La chevauchée du cocu" (the cuckold's ride) as well as two engravings of *Commedia dell'Arte* scenes by Jacques Callot that show the importance of the bellows and the clyster-pipes [PLATE 6a & 6b]. As to *The Tempest*, K.M. Lea has shown that the two clowns, Stephano and Trinculo had been inspired by very similar *Commedia dell'Arte* figures (those of Zanni and Burattino) (27).

I will now pass on to the analysis of some short scenes of *Othello* and *The Tempest* that exploit and very much depend on, and this on the page as well as on the stage, the dynamics of the grotesque as previously defined. We have seen that Caliban, Shakespeare's most original creation for the theatre, was already, in his own being, speech and appearance, the epitome of the grotesque. But his most surprising, and probably also his funniest avatar is the four-legged monster he forms with Trinculo underneath his gaberdine in II, ii, 64-105, where he is transformed into some medieval grylle with a forward and a backward voice. This is the beast with two mouths rather than the "beast with two backs" which Iago mentions after Rabelais in *Othello*, I, i, 117-118 :

*Stephano* Four legs and two voices --a most delicate monster. His forward voice now is to speak well of his friend. His backward voice is to utter foul speeches and to detract (II, ii, 88-91).

This type of comedy is quite irresistible, but, as Ann Righter points out, it is more memorable "for the absurdity, the grotesque humour of the situations" than for "the dazzling and ingenious games that can be played with words", which characterize Shakespeare's earlier clowns (28). The grotesque reaches its climax when Stephano exclaims:

If thou beest Trinculo, come forth. I'll pull thee by the lesser legs. If any be Trinculo's legs, these are they. Thou art very Trinculo indeed! How cam'st thou to be the siege of this moon-calf? can he vent Trinculos? (II, ii, 101-105).

The humour becomes here obscene, even scatological, which is also one of the features of the grotesque, as the word "siege" means excrement and "to vent" to expel or discharge through the anus. So what Stephano describes in his gross chain of submerged images is no less than a scene of male birth giving through the anal orifices in which Caliban is, as it were, delivered of Trinculo, who seems to come to light 'in a siege', i.e. with his legs, rather than his head, first. This comes quite close to the scene in Rabelais where Gargantua emerges upward through his mother's ear, because her fundament escaped from the softening of the straight intestine [...] which came about through eating too much tripe [in a Shrovetide feast] (29). Neil Rhodes writes that "the passage is celebratory, not disgusted and that the exuberance derives from the gross plenitude of physical activity in a cycle of eating, excreting, and giving birth" (one should also add 'and of dying too!') (30). Mikhaïl Bakhtin comments on this particular passage in a more general way :

One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one : the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. This is the pregnant and begetting body, or at least a body ready for conception and fertilization...(31)

The passage of grotesque male birth-giving in *The Tempest* certainly gains in being connected with an earlier passage in *1 Henry IV*, when Hotspur is taunting Glendower for his pretension that the earth trembled on the day of his nativity :

Diseased nature oftentimes breaks forth  
In strange eruptions; oft the teeming earth  
Is with a kind of colic pinch'd and vex'd  
By the imprisoning of unruly wind  
Within the womb; which, for enlargement striving,  
Shakes the old bedlams earth, and topples down  
Steeple and moss-grown towers. At your birth  
Our grandam earth, having this distemperature,  
In passion shook...(III, i, 27-35).

Birth ("teeming earth") is here assimilated to colic and to breaking wind in a truly Saturnalian turn of phrase. The "wind" image is particularly interesting as it looks forward to Stephano's use of the verb to "vent" whose etymology comes from the Latin "ventus" and the French "vent" for wind. This parody of birth that is pure release of wind, simple "ventositas" in Galenic or contemporary medical idiom, is certainly an important trait of the grotesque vision and of grotesque humour. This partly explains the importance of the potbelly, of inflated cheeks or bagpipes in Bruegel, Rabelais or the Falstaff scenes in *1&2 Henry IV*. Writing about the same scene, K.M. Lea says that "when Trinculo is dragged from under 'the siege of this mooncalf' the effect is equivalent to the sensational appearance of Burattino from the mouth of the whale and Zanni from the boulder", which offers another analogue with *Commedia dell' Arte* scenari.

In *Othello*, the wind imagery appears as linked to medical jargon and to carnival traditions (both used the clyster-pipes for treatment and for its gibes) and Iago, who masquerades as mock-healer and zany in the play mentions them in II, 173 ("were they clyster-pipes for your sake"). But it is also suggested in the much neglected scene of the Clown in III, i, when Cassio enters with musicians to play an aubade to Desdemona :

*Clown* Why, masters, have your instruments been in Naples, that they speak i'th' nose thus?  
*First Musician* How, sir, how?  
*Clown* I pray you, wind instruments?  
*First Musician* Ay, marry are they, sir.  
*Clown* O, thereby hangs a tail.  
*First Musician* Whereby hangs a tale, sir?  
*Clown* Marry, sir, by many a wind instrument that I know (III, i, 3-10).

The Clown's later remark to the musician ("put up your pipes in your bags") suggests that, by a sort of inversion and complicated wordplay, it is a means of evoking the bagpipes (32). This bacchic and phallic-shaped instrument was commonly used as an emblem of drunkenness, deceit and falsehood, especially by Hieronymus Bosch in his *Garden of Delights* triptych (in the third panel which shows Hell, there is a bagpipe-shaped man in the middle of the scene). In the *Othello* passage, the bagpipe is visibly a grotesque transmogrification of the human body that obsessively and obscenely focusses on what Bakhtin calls "the material bodily principle in grotesque realism" that tends to degrade and parody the higher spheres of human activity to translate them into abusive terms or into language concentrating on the lower stratum of the body (33). All this cacophony is of course, highly inappropriate to greet the newly-wed Desdemona and is closer to the rough music of charivari than to the sweet music of the traditional "Morgengabe" (the moment when family and friends would offer their presents to the bride and groom in Lombardy) or of "Mattinata" (its equivalent in Florence) (34).

After presiding as Lord of Misrule over the camp revels in Cyprus and turning them into a drunken brawl, Iago goes on perverting sweet music into a "black Sanctus" that will bring about more mischief and trouble rather than the appropriate joy and relief. Although Prospero also obviously enjoys confusing the king's party as well as the comic triumvirate of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, he will finally abjure his "rough magic" while Iago will not give up his rough music in the play. Passing from the bagpipe to the bellows, he will inflate Othello with the foul, bawdy wind of lustful suspicion that will make him so frantic as to stop Desdemona's wind by stifling her under her pillow.

This evil strategy amounts to a perversion of the Carnival tradition where the absorption of tumescent food (beans, pancakes) or the mock-blowing of bellows (Latin "follis") up the fundament as in Callot's engravings, later lead to the liberation forces of dehibernation (the expulsion of winter forces) symbolized by the Candlemas bear coming out into the open and breaking wind. These strange popular customs, which Shakespeare shows some knowledge of, both in *Othello* (Othello's black or 'begrimed' face makes him an easy bear figure in the play) and in *The Tempest* (where Caliban can be seen as the bear-man of carnival games) are explained by Claude Gaignebet, an expert on Medieval and Renaissance folklore and popular iconography, as linked to the name of St Blaise, the patron saint of weavers, whose feast was celebrated on 3rd February, the first possible date in the calendar for the celebration of Shrove Tuesday (pun on blow -- coming from the old Teutonic blaesen-- and Blasius, the Latin name for Blaise) (35). All this finally tails in with the theme of the tempest in both plays, where the fury of the natural elements is eventually miniaturized in the letting loose of the bad winds of melancholy and jealousy inside the inner world of man. The blending of comedy tragedy and folklore in both plays is also something very much akin to the grotesque mode.

By focussing the analysis on the grotesque in *Othello* and *The Tempest*, I have been led to examine scenes that are often neglected or which go unnoticed by most readers although certainly not by most spectators on condition the director does not cut off them altogether. These scenes take place on the margins of the plays and are thus

analogous to the grotesque decorations of Renaissance stately houses and castles. As far as the dramatic structure is concerned, they can also be referred to as elements of the antimasque, which Jonson had defined as "a spectacle of strangeness".

But there is probably more to these scenes than just getting cheap laughs from the groundlings. They are also relevant to the main plot, for which they offer an upside down or distorted image. This can be called an anamorphic relation, from the pictorial device of anamorphosis where the distorted shape which reveals itself in perspective to be a skull (as in Holbein's *Ambassadors* in The National Gallery in London) is both a signature (through a pun on the name of the artist "Hole bein" meaning hollow bone in German) and a "memento mori" device. The clown in *Othello* is a double of Iago, himself a parody of the Vice and a form of antic, or sinister jester, while in *The Tempest*, Caliban can appear as a beastly double of Antonio (and as a revelation of his deeply wicked inner nature). It is also worth pointing out that Prospero later acknowledges "this thing of darkness", contrary to Hal who coldly rejects Falstaff at the end of *2 Henry IV*. This may mean many different things to be sure. I take it to mean that the world and the law cannot go unchallenged or without being periodically put upside down by revelry or disorder and that some sort of accommodation for misrule has to be found in real life. The ethereal world of the magician is not human enough and it needs to put up with the grosser world of carnival and with the ways of the flesh, of youth and folly.

In those two plays, Shakespeare suggests that wisdom can coexist with folly, virtue with blind passion, vice with apparent honesty and that "the web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together" as the First Lord Dumaine says in *All's Well That Ends Well* (IV, iii, 73-75).

Besides this lesson in relativity and perspective, the function of the grotesque in those two plays was to cater to the new taste for the strange and for the excitement of curiosity. Commenting on the "Figur des Brazilians" displayed in the Rouen entry, Stephen Mullaney writes that "the ethnographic attention and knowledge displayed at Rouen was genuine, amazingly thorough, and richly detailed; the object however, was not to understand Brazilian culture but to perform it" (36).

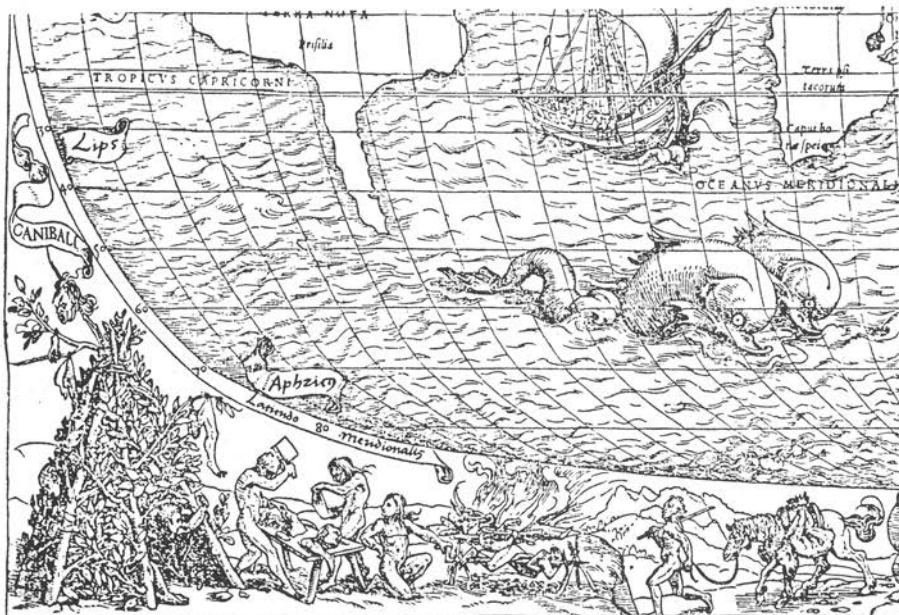
In Elizabethan England, the popular stage could offer a collection of strange things --cannibals, savages, 'men of Ind'-- marginal pastimes (May games, Morris dances and the terminal jig) and subcultures, but it was itself established on the margins of society and situated outside the city limits on the then disreputable other bank of the Thames in Southwark. The stage was then itself as much an object of ambivalent fascination as any of the incredible or outlandish cultural fragments it was presenting in some of its productions. The miracle of the popular stage was that it could, through the grotesque among many other means, express in its altogether rather simple and plain locale and props, the *mirabilia* of a wonder-struck age.

## NOTES

- \* This article was first presented as a lecture in the Drama Department of Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, University of London, in November 1988.
- (1) "Prospero ou le machiavélisme du bien" in *Hommage à Shakespeare*, Bulletin de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg, Mai-Juin 1965, pp. 899-917.
  - (2) *Shakespeare's Characters*, London, 1863.
  - (3) *Measure for Measure*, III, ii, 265.
  - (4) *Op. cit.*, pp. 904-909.
  - (5) Introduction to *The Tempest*, New Penguin, 1968, rept 1988, p. 11.
  - (6) *Much Ado About Nothing*, III, i, 229-230.
  - (7) The phrase is in *As You Like It*, V, iv, 54-55.
  - (8) Ann Righter, introduction to *The Tempest*, p. 16; Ernest B. Gilman, "Prospero's Inverted Masque", *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. XXXIII, Nb 2, Summer 1980, p. 224.
  - (9) Quoted in *Shakespeare's Books. A Dissertation on Shakespeare's Reading and the Immediate Sources of His Works*, by H.R.D. Anders, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
  - (10) *PMLA*, vol. XLIX, pp. 807-809.
  - (11) Hakluyt, *Voyages* III, p. 652, quoted by H.R.D. Anders, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
  - (12) See Stephen Orgel, "Shakespeare and the Cannibals" in *Cannibals, Witches and Divorce. Estranging the Renaissance*, ed. Marjorie Garber, London, 1987, pp. 40-41.
  - (13) Paris, 1575, Tome II, p. 2041, quoted by H.R.D. Anders, *op. cit.*, p. 226.
  - (14) "The Masque of Queenes" in Ben Jonson : *Selected Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel, New Haven, 1975, p. 81.
  - (15) Stephen Mullaney, "Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs : The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance" in *Representing the Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Berkeley, 1988, p. 71.
  - (16) New York, 1975, p. 12.
  - (17) Mullaney, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-92. Chapman's *Masque of the Middle Temple and Lincoln's Inn*, presented at Whitehall in 1613 for the wedding festivities of Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine, showed figures of Indian torchbearers. The drawings by Inigo Jones are in the Devonshire collection at Chatsworth. See Stephen Orgel, *Ben Jonson : Selected Masques*, pp. 44-54.
  - (18) Mullaney, *ibidem*, p. 69.
  - (19) London, 1595. Scholar Press Facsimile, Menston, 1968, sig. I v.
  - (20) See my articles "Figures de la perversion dans *Othello*" in *Autour d'Othello*, ed. Dominique Goy-Blanquet, Amiens, 1987, pp. 59-60 and "An Archaeology of the Dramatic Text : *Othello* and Popular Traditions", *Cahiers Elisabéthains*, October 1987, Nb 32, pp. 13-19.
  - (21) In this connection, see André Chastel, *La grottesque*, Paris, 1988, pp. 19-43.
  - (22) See *Montaigne : Oeuvres complètes*, eds. Albert Thibaudet and Maurice Rat, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Paris, 1962, book I, chapter 28 ("De l'amitié"), p. 181. For a more complete definition of the grotesque, see Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, Bloomington, Indiana, 1963 and Neil Rhodes, *Elizabethan Grottesque*, London, 1980, pp. 3-17.
  - (23) *Montaigne, op. cit.*, p. 34 (book I, chapter 8, "De l'oisiveté").
  - (24) Quoted and translated by Neil Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
  - (25) *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 34, Nb 3 (Autumn 1983), p. 338.
  - (26) "*Othello* and Popular Traditions", pp. 25-27.
  - (27) *Italian Popular Comedy. A Study in The Commedia dell' Arte, 1560-1620, with Special Reference to the English Stage*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1934, II, pp. 448-449.
  - (28) Introduction to *The Tempest*, pp. 18-19.

- (29) Quoted and translated by N. Rhodes, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- (30) *Ibidem*, pp. 15-16.
- (31) Mikhaïl Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helen Iswolsky, Bloomington, Indiana, 1968, p. 26.
- (32) In this connection, see Lawrence J. Ross, "Shakespeare's Dull Clown and symbolic Music", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. XVII, 1966, pp. 107-129, and Pierre Iselin, "Les musiques d'*Othello*" in *Autour d'Othello*, p. 68.
- (33) Bakhtin, *op. cit.*, pp. 19 ff.
- (34) "*Othello* and Popular Traditions", p. 21; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "La mattinata médiévale d'Italie", in Jacques Le Goff and Jean-Claude Schmitt eds., *Le charivari*, Paris, 1981, pp. 150-153.
- (35) See "*Othello* and Popular Traditions", pp. 26-28; Claude Gaignebet, *A plus Hault Sens. L'ésotérisme spirituel et charnel de Rabelais*, 2 vols, Paris 1986, II, pp. 60 & 217.
- (36) Mullaney, *op. cit.*, p. 73.





104 Gynaeus. Novus Orbis (1532).

Fig. 1



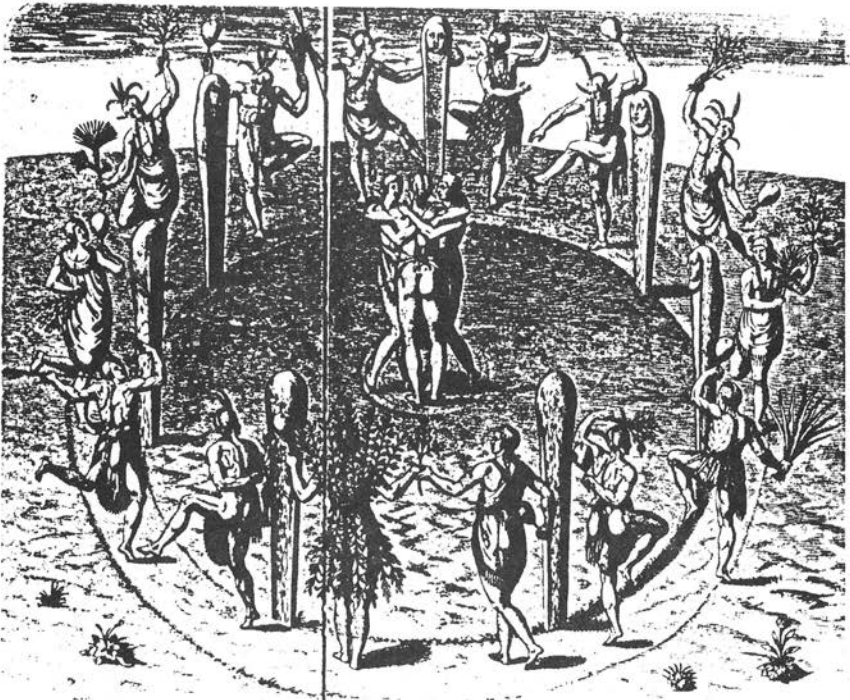
Fig. 2





From *C'est la Deduction...* (Rouen, 1551).

Fig. 3



Theodore de Bry, after John White, *Their Dances Which They Use at Their Hyghe Feastes*, from Thomas Harriot, *A Briefe and True Report of the*

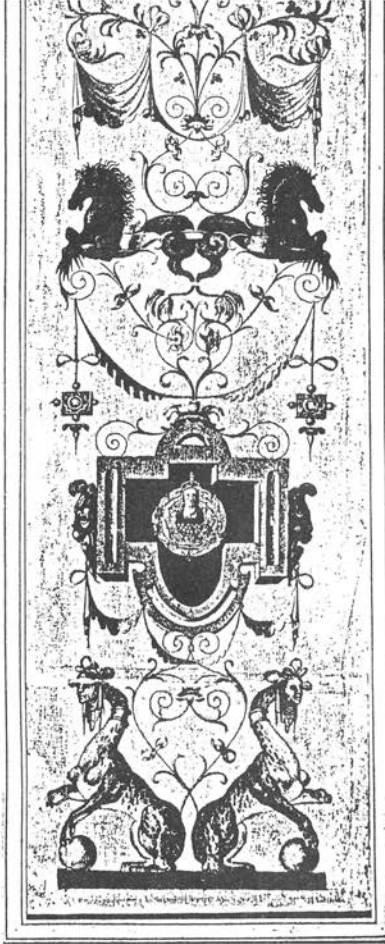


Fig. 5





Two prints by Jacques Callot showing Commedia dell' Arte scenes

Fig.6b