

**THE PLAYS OF
SHAKESPEARE:
THE TEMPEST**

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The Plays of Shakespeare: The Tempest by William Shakespeare & Georg Brandes

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE & GEORG BRANDES

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SHAKESPEARE

THE
TEMPEST

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GEORGE BRANDES
and a Plate representing Miss FRANCESCA HERRON
(Mrs. German Reed) as 'Ariel'



LONDON
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INTRODUCTION.

1.

We possess no knowledge of any one particular source from which *The Tempest* might have been drawn, but it seems probable that Shakespeare constructed his drama upon some already existing foundation. A childish old-fashioned play by Jacob Ayrer, *Comedia von der schönen Sidea*, seems to have been founded upon a variant of the story used by Shakespeare.¹ Ayrer died in 1605, and his work, therefore, cannot have owed anything to that of the great dramatist, which was the last of Shakespeare's plays, written for the Princess Elizabeth's wedding in 1613. The similarity between the two plays is confined to the relations between Prospero and Alonso, and Ferdinand and Miranda. In the German play we have a banished sovereign, his daughter, and a captive prince, who is compelled to atone for his audacity in making love to the daughter by carrying and cutting firewood. He promises his beloved she shall be queen, and attempting to draw his sword upon his father-in-law, is rendered powerless by magic. There is no real resemblance between the dramas. It is, of course, possible that Dowland, or some other English actor, might have introduced the *Sidea* from Germany, but Shakespeare did not know German, and in any case the play was too

¹ Jacob Ayrer: *Opera Theatrica*. Nurnburg, 1618. L. Tieck: *Deutsches Theater*, i. p. 323. Albert Cohn: *Shakespeare in Germany*, ii. pp. 1-75.

poor a one to interest him. Moreover, since we know that Ayler did occasionally copy English works, we may safely conclude that both dramatists were indebted to some earlier English source. There is nothing specially original about the above incidents. In Greene's *Friar Bacon*, four men make fruitless efforts to draw swords held in their scabbards by magic, and *The Tempest* would naturally possess traits in common with other plays representing sorcery upon the stage. In Marlowe's drama, *Dr. Faustus*, for instance, the hero punishes his would-be murderers by making them wallow in filth (*Faustus*, Act iv. Sc. 2), just as Prospero drives Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano into the marsh and leaves them there up to their chins in mire (*Tempest*, Act iv.).

It was an early and correct observation that various minor details of *The Tempest* were taken from different books of travel. Shakespeare found the name of Setebos, and, possibly, the first idea of Caliban himself, in an account of Magellan's voyage to the south pole in Eden's *Historye of Travaille in East and West Indies* (1577). From Raleigh's *Discovery of the large, rich, and beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1596) he took the fable of the men whose heads stood upon their breasts. Raleigh writes that, though this may be an invention, he is inclined to believe it true, because every child in the provinces of Arramai and Canuri maintains that their mouths were in the middle of their breasts. (See Gonzalo's speech in *The Tempest*, Act iii. Sc. 2.)

It is far more remarkable that the famous and beautiful passage (Act iv.) proclaiming the transitoriness of all earthly things—a passage which seems to be a mournful epitome of the philosophy of Shakespeare's last years of productiveness—may be an easy adaptation of an inferior and quite unknown poet of his day.

When the spirit play conjured up by Prospero has vanished, he says :—

‘These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air :
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.’

In Count Stirling’s tragedy of *Darius*, published in London, 1604, the following verses occur :

‘Let Greatness of her glassy scepters vaunt,
Not scepters, no, but reeds, soon bruis’d, soon broken ;
And let this worldly pomp our wits enchant,
All fades, and scarcely leaves behind a token.
Those golden palaces, those gorgeous halls,
With furniture superfluously fair,
Those stately courts, those sky-encount’ring walls,
Evanish all like vapours in the air.’

History could scarcely afford a more striking proof that in art the style is all, subject and meaning being of comparatively small importance. Stirling’s verses are by no means bad, nor even poor, and their decidedly pleasing rhymes express, in very similar words, exactly the same idea we find in Shakespeare’s lines, and were, moreover, their precursors. Nevertheless, both they and the name of their author would be utterly forgotten long since if Shakespeare had not, by a marvellous touch or two, transformed them into a few lines of blank verse which will hold their own in the memory of man as long as the English language lasts.

Shakespeare may have found the first suggestions of Caliban and Ariel in Greene's *Friar Bacon*. In the ninth scene of this play, two necromancers, Bungay and Vandermast, dispute as to which possess the greater power, the pyromantic (fire) spirits or the geomantic (earth) spirits. The fire spirits, says Bungay, are mere transparent shadows that float past us like heralds, while the spirits of earth are strong enough to burst rocks asunder. Vandermast maintains that earth spirits are dull, as befits their place of abode. They are coarse and earthly, less intelligent than other spirits, and thus it is they are at the service of jugglers, witches, and common sorcerers. But the fire spirits are mighty and swift, their power is far-reaching.

A more striking example of Shakespeare's taste and talent for adaptation is presented by Prospero's farewell speech to the elves (Act v. Sc. 1), 'Ye elves of hills, brooks,' etc. Warburton was the first to draw attention to the fact that this speech, in which Shakespeare bids farewell to his art, and tells, through the medium of Prospero's marvellous eloquence, of all that he has accomplished, was founded upon the great incantation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (vii. 197-219), where, after the conquest of the golden fleece, Medea, at Jason's request, invokes the spirits of night to obtain the prolongation of his old father's life. A comparison of the text plainly proves Shakespeare's indebtedness to Golding's translation of the Latin work :—

'Ye Ayres and Windes & ye Elues of Hilles, of Brooks, of Woods
alone,
Of standing Lakes, and of the Night approche ye everyone
Through helpe of whom (the crooked bankes much wondring at
the thing)
I have compelled streames to run cleane backward to their
spring.

By charmes I make the calme seas rough, and make the rough
 seas playne,
*And cover all the Skie with clouds and chase them thence
 againe.*
*By charmes I raise and lay the windes and burst the Viper's
 law,*
And from the bowels of the earth both stones and trees do draw.
*Whole woods and Forrests I remoove: I make the Mountains
 shake,*
 And euen the earth it selfe to grone and fearefully to quake.
*I call up dead men from their graues, and thee, O lightsome
 Moone,*
 I darken oft, though beaten brass abate thy perill soone.
*Our Sorcerie dimmes the Morning faire, and darkes the Sun
 at Noone.*

Among the earth-bred brothers you a mortall warre did set
 And brought asleepe the Dragon fell whose eyes were neuer
 shot.'

The corresponding lines in *The Tempest* run:—

'*Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
 And ye that on the sands with printless foot
 Do chase the ebbing Neptune and do fly him
 When he comes back; you . . .
 by whose aid,
 Weak masters though ye be, I have bedimm'd
 The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azure vault
 Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
 Have I given fire and rifted Jove's stout oak
 With his own bolt: the strong-bas'd promontory
 Have I made shake and by the spurs pluck'd up
 The pine and cedar: graves at my command
 Have wak'd their sleepers, open'd, and let 'em forth
 By my so potent art.'*

We now seem to have exhausted the available literary sources of *The Tempest*, and we need only add that Dryden and Davenant, in their abominable adaptation