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Players in a storm: Climate and political migrants in The Tempest and Othello

Darcie Rees

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Players in a Storm: Climate and Political Migrants in *The Tempest* and *Othello*

by

Darcie Rees

Thesis

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Thesis Committee:

Elisabeth Däumer, PhD

Craig Dionne, PhD

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Abstract
This paper presents a reading of migrants and their relationships with political and environmental slow violence in William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *Othello*. Using Steve Mentz’s work with water and shipwreck, Lowell Duckert’s work on water in Shakespeare, Rob Nixon’s concept “slow violence,” Patricia Fumerton’s book on vagrancy in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and Ken Hiltner’s work with environmental advocacy of the same time, I read the social history of vagrancy of the time (presented by Hiltner and Fumerton) alongside the Poor Laws. This social history is combined with water-focused ecocriticism, shipwreck and a postcolonial reading of migrancy. Ultimately, the enmeshed position of the migrant in history, economics, and their environment in Shakespeare’s works is more clearly articulated.
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Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself
Till by broad spreading it disperse to nought.
- Henry VI Part One, I.ii.133-135

He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker;
He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished.
-Proverbs 17:5

**Introduction**

Ecocriticism allows one to look at the nonhuman and environs as players in a literary work. Instead of the human individual being the only point of analysis and inquiry, ecocriticism opens the realm of theory to a broader non-human context. Common questions an ecotheorist asks herself are what is the role and representation of the environment in this text? What nonhumans influence and impact the humans? Imagining a new way to think about matter, New Materialism radically splits from old materialist assumptions about material contexts and causality. In their introduction to *New Materialisms*, Coole and Frost explain that New Materialists do not accept binaries of human and nonhuman relations but rather see all of their interactions in life, science, and politics as complex networks of association. One of the three main themes of New Materialism is a new perspective on matter: seeing it as having “vibrant” agency, not as passive or subject to human action alone. Although matter becomes more integral to New Materialist study, humans are not completely removed from the picture, rather they are placed appropriately within the overall schema of the world. The second theme of New Materialism Coole and Frost discuss concerns bioethics and biopolitics, specifically that the very presence of human bodies, though they should not be privileged over other matter, have political needs that must be met yet balanced with the needs of the environment and other biological creatures. Various groups such as biotechnologists and political scientists are thrown into closer
quarters as the relationships and rights of humans and smaller units of life, like genes, are navigated. Impacting economics and culture, these groups’ opinions and decisions have a major impact on the world. Coole and Frost’s third theme concerns the relation between materiality and culture, recognizing that though culture affects materiality, it is not the only thing that influences and shapes it. Seeing the complicated interaction between the material object world and human subjectivity, theorists concerned with this focus of New Materialism seek to track how culture, matter, and subjectivity are constructed. While identity is often described as being constructed by cultural, historical, and societal influences, material means have been traditionally brushed aside as uninvolved in the formation of identity. However, both material and constructions of human subjectivity influence culture. These theorists are interested in articulating how materiality and cultural constructions of existence influence and shape human subjectivity. These three themes shape the scope of the research presented below. I will examine material environments, material means, and constructions of individual subjectivity and how these impact, influence, and mutually reflect one another.

Eroding the myth of human exceptionalism, ecocriticism reveals the complex interconnectivity of humans, things, and environs. While Deep Ecology insists that we view nature as something inherently useful and important outside human need and that humans are a part of this ecology but by no means the master of it, Posthumanism asks us to look beyond the human, not necessarily to a world without humans but to a world where humans are not the center. At its core Posthumanism asks us to see the human as enmeshed with many other kinds of actants.¹ Perhaps we think that environmental consciousness is a new way of seeing the world

¹ See Serpil Oppermann’s “From Posthumanism to Posthuman Ecocriticism” for more on this move to see the humans as enmeshed figures in the world. Oppermann presents the large scale movements of Posthumanism and other current ecocritical theories in a straightforward way which also captures the nuances and goals in contemporary ecocriticism
and somehow unique to our modern moment. Amazingly the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had their share of environmental crises, migrant troubles, and advocacy. Reading Shakespeare’s plays with an ecocritical lens allows us to see the enmeshed nature of the environment, humans, and objects in a premodern setting. During this time, England witnessed tremendous social upheaval due to rapidly changing economic conditions and shifting agricultural practices which led to a massive migration of rural poor into urban centers. Although the wealthy can be displaced and re-established quickly because of their wealth, the poor cannot so quickly relocate without proper resources. When climate or environmental changes force people to move, it is the poor and marginalized groups of society who face the most difficulty. Water often plays a role in environmental devastation, whether because there is too much of it or too little. Large scale groups of moving migrants are also frequently referred to as a “wave” or a “flood”; they are seen as something unstoppable and destructive. Because of the role of water as metaphor for migrants and their relationships with the environment, water is a key environmental feature in my analysis. In many ways unsettled peoples are like water: flexible, uncontrollable, complex, and shifting in purpose. Because they do not have the resources to shape their environment, migrants become like their environment.

My paper presents a unique reading of Steve Mentz’s work with water and wet globalization, Lowell Duckert’s work on water in Shakespeare, Rob Nixon’s concept “slow violence,” Patricia Fumerton’s book on vagrancy in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, and Ken Hiltner’s work on environmental advocacy of the same time. Reading Fumerton and Hiltner’s social history alongside the Poor Laws, combining this with water-focused ecocriticism and a postcolonial reading of migrancy, I hope to reveal the enmeshed nature of humans, their
history, and their environment. Ultimately, the position of the migrant in Shakespeare’s works will be more clearly articulated.

Why examine *The Tempest* and *Othello* to find connections between migrants, water, slow violence, political upheaval, and other environs? What we see time and again in Shakespeare’s plays is a network of political and environmental causes of migrants and refugees. Exiled from Milan for political reasons, Miranda and Prospero wind up on the open sea as refugees with no definitive destination. Caliban lives as a colonial slave and environmentally displaced person even as he never physically leaves the island. Ariel was once a part of the natural landscape of the island but has been harnessed by Prospero for his own uses and displaced from the land. Othello, when safely arrived at port after a storm destroys the fleet of his enemy, soon becomes tossed and unsettled by a different kind of tempest. Iago reigns as the king of fluid identity who refuses to be permanently placed after being refused stability. These characters along with a few others from their respective plays are key instances of migrant figures in Shakespeare’s plays. Exhibiting the characteristics of a refugee, exile, and displaced person, the migrant has been forced to leave her home for political, economic, or environmental reasons. Almost always the three affect one another. Shakespeare’s plays often demonstrate that political exile is also a story about humans struggling to survive in a hostile environment. What we will see in *The Tempest* and *Othello* is the intersectionality of the climate and political migrant. When examining migrants in Shakespeare's plays, we will see humans and nonhuman actors displaced due to political and environmental reasons. These climate migrants and refugees are also the victims of colonial oppression. The climate migrant is also always a colonial figure.

Seldom do the political actions of man happen in isolation. Continually influencing one another, political decisions and environmental changes do not happen in isolation as the world is
too much a network of human and nonhuman agents. Sometimes environmental catastrophes cause political catastrophe and other times it is the other way around. To believe political or environmental upheaval do not affect one another is to be shortsighted about how humans impact the environment and how the environment impacts humans. In “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us that literary historicism has ignored the scientific narrative of climate change within the periods in which we chart the shifts of social development. Chakrabarty explains how recent political choices made by the United States government have affected the global environment. Political and capitalist interests, which are focused on the needs of the human, often overrule the needs of the environment. Importantly, he asserts we need to move beyond culture and language when “historicizing” human experience. Asking us to rethink our history, Chakrabarty’s third thesis states, “The geological hypothesis regarding the Anthropocene requires us to put global history of capital in conversation with the species history of humans” (212). Humans have an environmental impact. Most people agree with this even if they disagree with how or to what degree and effect (Chakrabarty 201). As biological agents, humans’ political and economic choices directly impact the environment. Understanding capital, which is wrapped up in contemporary politics, is needed to perceive our role as a species in the world. We enter into the enmeshed nature of the world with our own political and economic issues, which impact the environment. Amitav Ghosh puts it this way:

The freakish weather events of today, despite their radically nonhuman nature, are nonetheless animated by cumulative human actions. In that sense, the events set in motion by global warming have a more intimate connection with humans than did
Humans impact climate, and climate change then impacts human history. Briefly consider how President Bush’s response to Hurricane Katrina damaged the country’s opinion of him and, more recently, how President Trump’s trip to Texas after Hurricane Harvey initially appeased the average American. Both environmental violence and political violence can have lasting impact. Introducing his theory of slow violence, Rob Nixon explains in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* how disasters can last much longer than what can be seen with the eye and continue to affect people years after an initial tragedy. This can be true for both political decisions and environmental disasters. Impacting American politics, the two hurricanes mentioned above also continue to economically and psychologically affect those who lost their homes long after the initial displacement. Similarly government policies can continue to impact society long after any initial ramifications. Refusing to pass a policy to curtail environmental waste is not just damaging in the short term, but the long-term damages affect landscapes and people who live in affected areas. This correlation between environmental and political impact is apparent in the sixteenth century as well. While environmental violence may be more visible at times to us today, these kinds of interactions between human politics and the environment have been around for a long time. As we will see, these problems almost always create social displacement and forced migration. Nixon explains the relationship between displaced people and disasters: “Attritional catastrophes that overspill clear boundaries in time and space are marked above all by displacements---temporal, geographical, rhetorical, and technological displacements that simplify violence and underestimate, in advance and in retrospect, the human
in environmental costs” (Nixon 7). Any form of displacement and migration is a strong, visual
sign that environmental catastrophe has occurred.

Another important critic who emphasizes historical reading of nature and the
environment is Timothy Morton. In the introduction to his book *Ecology Without Nature*,
Morton discusses how art often creates a fantastic version of nature that in fact distances us from
the reality of it. When I discuss environmental disasters or environs, I will be thinking as
concretely as possible, attempting to see the substance and the essence of the material world in
Shakespeare’s plays. Storms are real phenomena that occur in these plays as well as a external
effects of things going on internally in characters. I wish to focus on the role the environment
plays in Shakespeare’s narratives. Analyzing the ocean and water as agents—working like
invisible characters on the list of dramatis personae—I will view bodies of water as meaningful
actants in the unfolding plots of these narratives of migration, mobility, and refugee survivalism.
Thinking with the ocean means we recognize the pervasive instability in the world we live in
now (Mentz, *Ocean* xii). Steve Mentz in his work *Shipwreck Modernity* claims a whole era of
human life is characterized by shipwreck, the ultimate sign of human instability. Deliberately, he
uses the term Naufragocene instead of Anthropocene to categorize our present age, which began
around 1550, because it is in this era humans began their far-reaching explorations of the globe
and experienced the immense power and unpredictability of the ocean. As we understand the
substance and essence of nature we realize that human existence is not quite as stable as we once
supposed. Reading nature as something more than a pretty thing to be represented in art means

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2 See Morton pg. 18 where he discusses the substance and essence of nature and how it does not easily fit into our
poetic representations of it: “Nature is… animals, trees, the weather… the bioregion, the ecosystem. It is both the set
and the contents of the set. It is the world and the entities in that world” (18). We must allow nature to be both
essence and substance and not shoehorn it into a poetic sense of value but real, material value.

3 For more on the Naufragocene, see Mentz’s *Shipwreck Modernity*, “For Western cultures increasingly fascinated
with oceanic totality, shipwreck became… an ecological parable” (xix). Shipwreck occurred more often and became
a driving characteristic of an epoch because Western powers yearned for total control like that of the immense and
powerful ocean.
we open up our understanding of how the world works to include how nature and the environment impact humanity and how humanity impacts the environment. Another reason to look to the seas is because The “new maritime humanities speak to at least three current critical discourses: globalization, postcolonialism, and environmentalism” (Mentz, Shipwreck xi). These very issues are also wrapped up in the figure of the migrant; a colonial and climate figure.

**Displaced Peoples of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries**

Displaced peoples are not only a contemporary problem. The seventeenth century had its own issues with unsettled and migrant peoples. In her book *Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*, Patricia Fumerton sheds tremendous light on the history of displaced people in England. She explains that the laws of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries dealing with displaced peoples were called “Vagrancy Laws” and the perpetrators named “vagrants.” Describing her own renaming of the vagrant as “unsettled,” Fumerton states:

More often than not, the “vagrant” was not shiftless, but a shifting or mobile worker, moving from job to job as well as place to place. Though I cautiously continue to use the term *vagrant* as a recognizable label of the time, I embrace as more accurate and spacious the less emotionally charged descriptor *unsettled*. The term *unsettled* allows us to escape knee-jerk thoughts of “loafer,” “vagabond,” or “rogue” and more readily to entertain images of the poor as mobile but gainfully employed and as not only physically but also psychologically unfixed. (xvi)
This renaming is key as Fumerton seeks to see the displaced human figure underneath the fictional constructions of rogues created by the poor laws. While the laws could seem reasonable, they were not very specific concerning who met the requirements of being a vagrant. This caused problems for many different kinds of travelers and displaced people, as Fumerton explains, “The 1572 act that attempted to define who exactly constituted the vagrant, hashed out over much hot debate, was deliberately broad in its scope, leaving considerable room for interpretation. As a result, the ‘legitimate’ destitute traveler not only rubbed elbows with the ‘illegitimate’ vagrant, but also risked at any moment being identified as such” (xii). In texts documenting individuals picked up for vagrancy, the lists of occupations for these persons are extensive. Even the Poor Law itself, “An Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds, and for Relief of the Poor and Impotent, 1572,” gets caught up in listing the kinds of people who meet the definition of “vagrant:”

And for the full expressing what persons shall be intended within this branch to be rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars … it is now set forth … that all persons that be or utter themselves to be proctors or procurators … without sufficient authority …, and all other idle persons … using subtle, crafty and unlawful games or plays, and some of them feigning themselves to have knowledge of physiognomy, palmistry or other abused sciences, … and all persons being whole and mighty in body and able to labor, having not land or master nor using any lawful merchandise, craft of mystery …; and all fencers, bearwards, common players in interludes and minstrels, not belonging to any baron of this realm or towards any other honorable personage of greater degree; all jugglers, peddlers, tinkers and petty chapmen; which said fencers [&c] shall wander abroad have
have not license of two justices of the peace … ; and all common laborers being persons able in body using loitering, and refusing to work for such reasonable wages as is taxed and commonly given …; and all counterfeiters of licenses, passports and all users of the same, knowing the same to be counterfeit; and all scholars of the universities of Oxford or Cambridge that go about begging, not being authorized under the seal of said universities …; and all shipmen pretending losses by sea, other than such as shall be hereafter provided for; and all persons delivered out of gaols that beg for their fees … not having license from two justices of the peace …, shall be deemed rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars…

This law used descriptions from fictional documents like the cony-catching pamphlets to generate its lists.\(^4\) Shockingly, the vagrants the laws described were not real people, but fictional characters. Policy makers did not understand the complexity of migrating peoples or how to categorize them. It is no wonder that unsettled peoples had a complex relationship with identity. Constantly in flux, individual identities of these “vagrants” were necessarily fluid. In order to adjust and survive in a fluctuating economy, people became less tied to one kind of identity. Itinerant people could not rely on their economic status, physical location, or social standing to be the foundation of their identity. This does not mean that they were not autonomous, but that their identities were not grounded in the same things as landed people. Unsettled peoples did not have the opportunity for self-fashioning but were fashioned by a provisional relationship with their environs (Fumerton 51). Fumerton says an unsettled person developed a “multidual”

\(^4\) See Craig Dionne, “Fashioning Outlaws.” Vagrants and rogues were constructed from fictional texts and adopted by legal ones. As we look to Shakespeare’s “rogues” we will see fictional representations of fictional vagrants collapse in on one another. Who really were these rogues? Was there ever really such a thing?
identity, which was the most extreme form of displacement. She describes the “multividual identity” as “Composed of dispersed, serial ‘selves’---variously defined occupationally, relationally, or spatially;” this identity “could be taken up, adjusted, and cast off as occasion demanded” (Fumerton 51). Unclear laws also impacted people who had to work multiple jobs to live, which was a fair number of the lower class at the time. As Fumerton explains, many people, even those with homes, had to take on a few jobs to make ends meet. Working multiple jobs did not necessarily mean someone was a vagrant. An unsettled identity was not only experienced by certain kinds of people, but “unsettled subjectivity, that is, might be experienced by some, if not all, of the housed poor, if only on a one/time or intermittent basis” (Fumerton xv). Whereas early in England’s history someone may have been an apprentice for years and then become a journeyman and later a master, now apprentices hardly stayed a year in one place. Similarly, maids serving in a house used to stay in the same house for their entire lives, but in the sixteenth century they began to leave at unexpected times and seek new employment. Often the nature of a profession caused people to move:

The working poor were subject to arrest as they moved geographically along various lines of gainful employment: same-kind itinerant labor (for example, chapmen, peddlers, carriers, entertainers, tinkers, wire-drawers, button-makers), changing from one like job to another (harvest workers, wage laborers), or switching between entirely different jobs (such as the Wiltshire man arrested in 1605 for vagrancy and listed as “sometimes a weaver, sometimes a surgeon, sometimes a minstrel, sometimes a dyer, and now a bullard”). (Fumerton xii)
Fumerton’s example of the Wiltshire man reveals that it was common for people to have multiple professions and move about frequently. In the unsettled person, economic, political, and environmental factors meet. Financially unstable persons moved to new spaces and were not allowed to enter or were driven out because of the vagrancy laws. “Those unprovided for,” Fumerton explains,

Or inadequately provided for (mostly members of the laboring for struggling all along to stave off penury), necessarily resorted to begging, theft, and/or migration to other towns in search of food, lodging, and opportunity. But many towns strictly enforced the Tudor poor laws, ejecting poor migrants of recent date, which often compelled the migrant to become perpetually unsettled. Driven (and sometimes whipped) from town to town, the urban mobile poor occupied not so much a place as a space of alienation. (6)

Separated from their environment as well as from society, unsettled migrants of the sixteenth century experienced a perfect storm of environmental alienation, political abuse, and economic neglect. Rejection of displaced persons from the towns they went to seek help from should sound familiar to us because of our contemporary problems with large-scale migration. Many modern “first world” countries are rejecting the incoming migrants because of their own constructs of what makes a human a viable citizen. Fumerton reminds us that our own modern migration problems are not new but descended from the treatment of unsettled peoples in the sixteenth century.

In a section of her book, Fumerton closely reads the journal of a seaman Edward Barlow and analyzes the unsettled subjectivity of mariners in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
She believes that “seamen are the *ne plus ultra* of the displaced laborer, quite literally landless or ‘at sea’” (65). No one could be more unsettled than a seaman. Doubly displaced in many ways, mariners have been separated from land both monetarily and physically. Being unsettled is a mariner’s occupation. Not only because they live on the sea, which is physically unstable, but because they move from ship to ship and between different kinds of landed relationships. Below, I will examine the role of the ocean in the representation of environmental catastrophe and its unsettling effects on Shakespeare’s characters. The unsettled figure of the seaman will act as an exemplar as we consider other migrant figures who sail on various sorts of seas. By placing mariners alongside characters of other occupations, we will see who adjusts to their unsettled environs and who does not.

Unsettled peoples of the sixteenth century were displaced and forced to move for many of the same reasons people today are meant to move: for political or environmental reasons or, as I am arguing, almost always both. Importantly, the story of the Poor Laws is one of environmental displacement because they reflect the social ravages of the emergence of England’s wool trade supplanting long-standing agricultural practices by using arable land for wheat and barley.\(^5\)

Streaming into London, many displaced people sought better economic opportunities. Because of this influx of people there was need for more food. Agricultural changes were made to meet the new demands, and these affected the environment. Unfortunately, the draining of the fens created more migrants and caused large riots. As the government converted shared grazing land into arable land for planting, these enclosures caused more political upheaval. A vicious cycle presents itself. Moving because they have lost a job or lost their land for some reason, people

went to London. The influx of people to London launched environmental projects, which displaced other people. Frequent movement for work or a better life was not the exception but the rule for many lower and lower middle class people in the sixteenth century.

In his book *What Else is Pastoral?*, Ken Hiltner spends a chapter examining the environmental protest literature of the fenlanders. Explaining that fenlanders fought for their lands by writing poems, songs, and pamphlets to defend their position passionately against the draining of the fens, Hiltner states, “It is important to distinguish between a culture intent on destroying a unique ecosystem so that it might be remade entirely to serve human needs and another fighting for its preservation, its people having adapted themselves over the centuries to the unique character of the place” (135). Ultimately the fenlanders wanted to protect the land itself, which they the people had adapted to and lived off of. Because they had developed a strong bond with their land, the people wanted to save the land for its own sake as much as for their own. They understood that to lose the fens was to lose their livelihood. Motivated by money, the drainers did not consider what would benefit the land or how draining the fens would impact the people who lived their. They only cared what draining the land would get them: more places to plant crops and therefore more profit. Additionally, the debate about draining the fens contributed to the English civil war and continued to be a problem after the war was over. In order to promote their cause, the drainers painted the fenlanders as vagrants; people who did not know how to best use the land: “In order to justify the drainage, a wholesale effort was undertaken to depict the fenlanders as being little more than beggars in order to make the reclamation not just socially important, but indeed an act of charity” (Hiltner 146). As with the

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6 Hiltner goes on to say, “Consequently, what is important about these environmental protests of the seventeenth century is that they raised a debate over just how human beings should dwell in environs that were already inhabited by human beings” (135). Questioning how to live in one’s environment reveals itself as a much older problem than we perhaps expected. In the seventeenth century there were people who recognized the enmeshed relationship of human, land, animal, and other objects. While fighting for their own material needs, the fenlanders were also fighting for the rights and needs of the environment itself.
invented image of the rogue in the Poor Laws to criminalize itinerant laborers, we here see the migrant figure being created in a certain image for the benefit of those seeking capital. Those in support of the draining of the fens portrayed the fenlanders as helpless and themselves as saviors (Hiltner 146). We see this argument in many colonial and neo-colonial regimes. Casting the people who have lived in an environment for a long time as helpless and ignorant allows an imperial power to come in and take over business, agriculture, and even government. As we turn to look at how modern theorists think about the lasting effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism on a “third world” country’s people through environmental destruction, we keep the fenlanders and countless “vagrants” roaming the byways of England in mind. Although the effects of the Poor Laws or the fen draining might not have been immediately visible, they continued to impact the landscape and unsettled peoples for a long time. The fenlander’s protests reveal the deeply enmeshed connections between political decisions; people’s environments, homes, and means; and the environment’s autonomy.

**Slow Violence and Shipwreck**

What we are calling the inward psychological trauma of forced social mobility—the feeling of being unsettled—Rob Nixon has identified as a symptom of the slow violence of environmental neglect. In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, the violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). We will see slow violence at work both in *The Tempest* and *Othello*. Nixon points out that as a modern culture we are more interested in calamities that are quick and noteworthy; we don’t have time to wait and see the effects of slow
violence. Unfortunately, people in poorer countries continue to be affected by environmental issues caused by multinational corporations often located in foreign countries years after the initial decision is made. Though slow violence does not appear to be shiny on the screen, a writer-activist engaged in writing about the movement can help keep the effects of slow violence in the limelight. Violence can be difficult to see, as Nixon explains, “Violence, above all environmental violence, needs to be seen---and deeply considered---as a contest not only over space, or bodies, or labor, or resources, but also over time” (8). Luckily writers can help convey violence that is not easily seen. Shakespeare provides a spectacle of environmental and political displacement through his plays. For the fenlanders and other unsettled peoples, the violence done to them is difficult to see. Certainly, the sixteenth and seventeenth century visual culture was not what it is today, but also the harassment of the fenlanders could not be seen by people in London. As for learning about unsettled peoples of the sixteenth century today, Fumerton recognizes it is difficult to find detailed information on these people because they were not valued at the time, so we do not have much writing about them (47). This lack of writing is a result of slow violence. However, Shakespeare acts as a writer-activist, presenting the lives of vagrants visually on the stage.

Shakespeare intimates the powerful effect of slow violence in moments of arresting clarity where characters speak of this inward sense of remorse and sorrow. Articulating the language of unsettled psychology in a dislocated “frame” of romance and tragedy, Shakespeare’s characters ventriloquize the logic of this environmental unsteadiness. I wish to restore the hidden environmental context of these scenes. Nixon might describe this unsettled affect as a psychological process tied to the larger economic forces at work in slow violence, “instead of referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging, [displacement] refers
rather to the loss of the land and the resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (9). Specifically, Nixon here describes the uncanny process of living in a place that you know but are no longer able to recognize (Interview). This is exactly what the fenlanders were fighting against. While they did not want to be forced to move, they also did not want their home to be unrecognizable. This displacement in place is very much what indigenous populations experienced when imperial powers came in and took over their lands and resources. After experiencing displacement in place on its own island, England later inflicted this same experience on the people they invaded. We will see displacement without moving most keenly when we discuss Caliban and Ariel in *The Tempest.*

How can I talk about slow violence and shipwreck in the same breath? As a catastrophe, shipwreck appears to be impossible to pair with a theorization of slow violence. However, shipwrecks are only seen by the victims, not the public at large. Shipwrecks are a “distant catastrophe,” removed from immediate spectacle, invisible to their home countries. Often people back home would not know a shipwreck had happened until long after it occurred. But like other kinds of slow violence, the effects of shipwreck can last long after the catastrophe ends (if one survives, that is.) Additionally, there is a fear of shipwreck, a language and experience around it (before or after) that exceeds the catastrophe itself. Shipwrecks happen as part of migration and they force migration; they define the experience of migration. They force humans out of their created environ of a ship and move them toward a new environment, whether deeper into the ocean or toward shore.

Living in one of the largest port towns at the time, Shakespeare was preoccupied by the special violence of shipwrecks: not just their inward pressures of anxiety associated with
economic risk—Antonio’s “want-wit” sadness in the opening scene of *Merchant of Venice* which can be seen as the weighted symbol of this special psychic duress—but as an imagined moment of survival and self-renewal. *The Tempest, Othello,* and *Twelfth Night* all prominently feature oceanic shipwrecks. These three plays all involve shipwreck and each one is unique, showing different aspects of the shipwreck’s particular effects. What does Prospero’s “magically” orchestrated tempest say about humanity and shipwreck? Is Shakespeare trying to control the untamable ocean? The shipwreck in *Othello* is lucky and timely. The shipwreck in *Twelfth Night* instigates the action of the play. Those thrown overboard are migrants, moved by the sea. Often, in these plays and others, we will see that these people affected by physical shipwrecks or political shipwrecks are forced to move in order to survive.

*The Tempest* is a New World play, preoccupied with the exploration just beginning to fascinate England. Mentz wisely points out that the interest in the New World and discovery is linked to shipwreck and catastrophe (*Shipwreck* xxiv). Exploration, which led to the project of empire, is interwoven and laced with shipwreck and catastrophe. Obviously, venturing out onto the sea creates the possibility for wreckage. Similarly, colonialism opens one up to the possibility of political and economic shipwreck. Mentz says that “An oceanic perspective speaks to our emerging sense that crisis, not stability, defines the world in which we live now” (*Ocean* xii). Thinking with the ocean allows us to see the instability of life instead of an illusion of solid ground. This kind of instability is seen in the unsettled people of the sixteenth and seventeenth century as well as in the breakers of the ocean. We will see fluid humans and nonhumans meet and break apart in Shakespeare's plays, reflecting the breakers and waves of the sea. For example, when Ariel whispers in Ferdinand’s ear to enthrall him in an overpowering sense of remorse that his father’s bones “are coral made” and “those are pearls that were his eyes,” he
causes Ferdinand to look at the bottom of the sea (1.2.396-97). Through his falsehood, Ariel destabilizes Ferdinand as the prince looks into the deep, unfathomable nature of the ocean. When Othello imagines his heart is a “cistern for foul toads” after thinking he has suffered the loss of Desdemona’s love, he sees the unstable, internal fluidity of his life which causes foul things to grow (4.2.60). These are moments that attest to the profoundly unstable nature of the self in relation to its oceanic environment. Both Ferdinand and Othello are manipulated and seem to understand the fluid nature of existence, though not the extent of their own bondage to it.

By examining the environment in Shakespeare’s plays, we begin to see how external environments and internal unsettledness mirror and influence one another. Timothy Morton prompts us to ask the question of the texts we read, “What does this say about the environment” (5). Shakespeare certainly should not be exempt from this examination. What do The Tempest and Othello say about the environment? I believe what these texts are saying is that the environment has been separated from people, and people from their environments through political and imperial programs, resulting in figures who are displaced and distanced from their environments. The internal lives of Shakespeare’s characters are affected by their environment and the environment is influenced by the actions of the humans. Internal and external reflect one another. Morton defines environmentalism as “a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans’ relationships with their surroundings. Those responses could be scientific, activist, or artistic, or a mixture of all three” (9). Crisis will be captured in Shakespeare’s plays. We will see magical, manipulative, and clever responses to environmental and political crisis as we look closely at two of Shakespeare’s plays. As England began its expansion around the world, shipwreck became necessarily entangled with expansion (Mentz, Shipwreck xxiv). Globalization is full of shipwrecks and catastrophes. Following Mentz, I want to see narrative as the coded
response to catastrophe that plots human experience as an instance of enmeshed existence exposing the web of environmental forces at work around and within us. *The Tempest* and *Othello* are responses to expansion and shipwreck, and within both plays there are many individual responses to catastrophe. The sea is the setting of these catastrophes; both colonial catastrophes and environmental ones.

**Shakespearean Migrants**

Contrary to what I might like to think, my life is not guided by reason: it is ruled, rather, by the inertia of habitual motion. This is indeed the condition of the vast majority of human beings, which is why very few of us will be able to adapt to global warming if it is left to us, as individuals, to make the necessary changes; those who will uproot themselves and make the right preparations are precisely those obsessed monomaniacs who appear to be on the borderline of lunacy. (Ghosh 54)

Are not Shakespeare’s characters migrants? They are the same kinds of people seen as vagrants and ruffians during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Fumerton discusses. Perhaps we need to think more literally than this. The 1572 Poor Law famously identified “players” among the list of jugglers, sturdy beggars, and con men that consisted of the “catepillars of the commonwealth.” Shakespeare’s fellow actors were among the list of environmental refugees listed as vagrants in these laws. Technically, they were migrants *playing* migrants on the stage. When Hamlet greets the castaway players at the gates of Elsinore newly
come from London, the audience realizes a rogue actor is hugging his fellow vagabonds in an uncanny gesture of welcoming them back home. Shakespeare’s characters are often forced to leave their homes because political actions make them or the political actions create environmental problems which cause migration. And it is those same colonial and capitalist powers who will call the migrants “rogues,” “thugs,” or “crazy.” Responding to the changes in weather out of experience, not fear, these migrants know how the environment works and see where things are headed. Of course, moving before an environmental crisis happens is also a reaction to what has already been done politically to the people and their environment. Migration is both a response and a pre-emptive move, defense and offence. Where do we see these climate migrants who see ahead what is coming and move in preparation for it? “The posthuman ‘does not really mean the end of humanity’ as Katherine Hayles also maintains: ‘It's signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human’” (Oppermann 25). Hayles’s understanding of the flexible nature of the category of “human” is particularly helpful when thinking about refugees, migrants, and other postcolonial figures. We need to rethink what a human is and how they behave. This is especially beneficial when thinking about migrants because the human that humanism praises is not the refugee, migrant, or colonial figure, but the colonizer. Because we now have a chance to rethink the human, we have a chance to decide which humans are valued. As we bring other nonhuman actors into the frame and ascribe them participatory value, we can also rethink how we view displaced peoples.

Perhaps it would help to briefly consider other migrants in Shakespeare’s plays before considering more carefully how *The Tempest* and *Othello* lend themselves especially well to thinking about climate migrants and their environs. I wish to consider how other Shakespearean characters also capture this complicated climate and political figure. Feste in *Twelfth Night*
embodies the watery migrant as he plays multiple “parts” throughout the play. He is known to drink too much and sings liquid verse: “For the rain it raineth everyday.” Rosalind in *As You Like It* is politically displaced and moves to the forest for a new home. She and the people she interacts with are characters who would be considered “vagrants” by the Poor Law standards. The band of folks in the forest are all displaced and form a new community in their new environment. In *Henry IV, Part I*, Prince Hal hangs around men called rogues and rascals, but really they are migrant economic figures. Falstaff is the exemplar of this group. The way they are treated and interacted with reveals the opinions and actions of the powerful toward the unsettled.

Feste is the chief unsettled figure in *Twelfth Night*, even though Viola and Sebastian are displaced through physical shipwreck. Moving between the two houses of the play, Olivia and Orsino’s, without much hassle, Feste does not have a singular occupation but does what is desired in either place for a few pieces of gold. In a moment of frustration about his multidual, unsettled life, Feste states, “I am for all waters” (4.2.59). This declaration reveals his identification with water in all of its forms. Like water taking many shapes, Feste takes any shape needed for survival, even the shape of Sir Topas, which he seems to loathe. Lowell Duckert presents an incredible reading on Feste and his relationship to waterscapes in his book *For All Waters*. Reading Feste’s song at the end of the play, Duckert says it “reflects *Twelfth Night*'s environmental embeddedness, and in doing so, it invites us to see how rain allowed Shakespeare to explore the complex relationships between climate and culture, human and nonhuman, water and imagination” (153). Though the ocean influences Viola’s unsettledness, rain, in the end, captures the overarching fluid nature of life and society. Feste has had sustained exposure to the elements, not one catastrophic dowsing like Viola. The slow violence of vagrancy has impacted him for much longer than it has Viola and rain emcapcilates that
violence. Continuously falling and never giving relief to those who live in it, rain proves to be an unforgiving element. Viola and Sebastian are greatly influenced by their experience with water, thrust into new environments and new identities. In order to do what she can to save herself, Viola takes on a different gender identity. Both Viola and Sebastian befriend mariners, which makes sense not only because they would have been present after the wrecks, but they are men who understand the unsettled life the twins have entered into. Internal and external instability is present throughout the play as characters tell lies, play pranks, pretend to be who they are not, and seek stability in love. In the end, as Feste’s song reveals, “the rain it raineth every day” and the solidity of the earth is dowsed with flexible rain (5.1.378).

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind is a political refugee, forced to leave her home after her uncle’s takeover. Politically she is displaced from her social role, no longer allowed to live in a comfortable identity. After this she is physically removed from her home in the court and forced to find a new environment to live in. Pretending to be a man, much like Viola, she is displaced again in her gender identity. All of this unsettledness began with political upheaval. As discussed above, political catastrophe can also have environmental impact. As various members of the court move into the Forest of Arden, the landscape of the forest changes. Though Jaques is often laughed at by his friends, he sees the destruction of the natural habitat the humans are causing. A lord says of Jaques, “He pierceth through the body, country, city, court---yea, and of this our life--swearing that we are mere usurpers, tyrants, and what’s worse to fright the animals and to kill them up in their assigned and native dwelling place” (2.2.58-63). Jaques, though a dour fellow, sees the effect their living in the forest has on the natural environs. No wonder a snake and a lion

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Duckert says, “Rain says that we are always-already environmentally enmeshed---always in our element of water--and that there is both distress and delight to be had with the showering world. Across natural-cultural times and tales, rain, never still, relates this un/comfortable message clearly distilled: that exposure is our greatest risk and greatest potential at once” (169). As a form of water, rain reveals our constant exposure to an element world. Feste understands his complex enmeshed relationship with the human and nonhuman world. As an unsettled person, he does not just exist in the world but within the network of the world. And he knows it.
both attempt to attack Oliver; their home has been overrun by humans. There is a humor to the story that the forest seems to be more civilized than the court, but this civilizing process comes through a remodeling of the forest to meet the needs of the humans. Attempting to capture the itinerant life of every man and women, Jaques utters the famous line, “All the world’s a stage, and all men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being even ages” (2.7.139-42). Perhaps Jaques has, at other times, been something other than a courtier to the king; he may know how a man can shift continually and change to keep providing for a home or family. Out of all the characters, he remains unsettled, distanced from any kind of stabilization at the end of the play. Duke Senior, all his men, Rosalind, Celia, Orlando, Oliver, Adam, and others are unsettled yet many find some source of stability in the end. One moment in which the sea makes a brief appearance is when Rosalind says, “That thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded: my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the Bay of Portugal” (4.2.179-82). Even in the forest, the sea is the best way for Rosalind to communicate her love for Orlando. Like a sailor lost at sea, she cannot return back to home and cannot see the bottom of her love. The couples are as lost and ungrounded in love as they are physically displaced.

In King Henry IV, Part I, there are two layers of political unrest at work. On a smaller scale is the interpersonal relationship between King Henry and his son Prince Harry. On the larger scale is the rebellion led by the Percy family. These political problems erupt into civil war, wreaking havoc on the landscape. We learn in 1.2 that Prince Harry spends his time with a group of ruffians. These men, including Falstaff, can be read as unsettled men. In 1.2, we also hear Falstaff and Prince Hal talk about these men as being like the sea, living by the ebbs and flows of the moon (1.2.22-29). Manipulated by an outside source and flexing with it in order to survive,
these unsettled men are like the sea. Usually these men are referred to as thieves and rogues.

“Rogue” appears some twenty times in the play. Other words for unsettled people such as knaves, ruffians, and tinkers also appear. Whether they have land or not, it is clear these men are unsettled, at least financially, because they resort to thieving to get money. In the end, these men are called upon to fight in the civil war. The effect of war on the unsettled is clear. War, which is the fault of the wealthy and upper class, is paid for by the unsettled with their lives. Falstaff does not die, but it is unclear whether others from his group of ruffians survive. None of the characters need to describe the field of battle. In performance, audience members would see the ground covered in blood and bodies. Human conflict leads to an alteration in the landscape of the physical environment. Time also plays an interesting role here. Prince Hal says of the joke they will play on Falstaff, “It would be argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever” (1.2.83-85). Though a humorous catastrophe, Poins and Prince Hal lead Falstaff into a shipwreck. Though the outcome may have had some immediate impact on their merry crew, the story will be told for many years to come. Time and the effects of violence play a key part even before the play begins. Falstaff’s defense of his “hundred and fifty tattered prodigal” (4.2.31) soldiers is that they are “food for powder, food for powder. They’ll fill a pit as well as better” (4.2.59-60). Falstaff acknowledges humans as objects of war’s radically consumptive process. Mortimor’s traitorous acts followed by Hotspur’s denial of soldiers progressively complicate the political arena and war results. At the end of the play, there is still more violence to come as various soldiers are set off to battle in other regions of the kingdom. One event has bred more and more violence. The result and continued effect is human death and the destruction of the environment.
Chapter 1: Tempestuous Slow Violence

What seest thou else in the dark backward and abysm of time?

(Tmp. 1.2.49-50).

The Tempest begins with a catastrophe. On the seventeenth-century stage, this shipwreck certainly would have been considered a spectacle. While this visual shipwreck is only one of two featured in the play, the other is not quite as exciting and proves to move at a slower pace of violence than the physical shipwreck in 1.1. This second shipwreck is the political shipwreck Prospero experiences years before the play begins. We will return to the exciting visual storm and its role in the narrative shortly. Acknowledging the slow violence at work through political upheaval and colonization of the island must begin our analysis. Though it begins with a bang, The Tempest tells a story of colonial slow violence.

Shakespeare’s romance registers the evolution of time from the vantage point of Prospero’s long exile as a castaway on an island, looking back at the antecedent history of his violent usurpation as Duke of Milan. Can we interpret the sense of time in this play as Shakespeare’s version of the slow unfolding of a nearly invisible violence in the past unfolding in the present? Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight” and “the violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Prospero’s exile from Milan began with a violent act that has continued to wreak havoc for twelve years. While this initial act of treachery and political malice directly affects Prospero and Miranda, it also trickles through them and impacts Caliban, Ariel, and the environment of the island. Even the Neapolitans are affected in a circular way by this original violence. This is slow violence because the ramifications of the initial action have occurred out of sight for twelve years. Out of sight for the Neapolitans, but
also out of the audience’s sight. Those years are touched on in a scene that scoffs in the face of the old adage, “Show don’t tell.” Interestingly, the initial violence is portrayed in a slow, measured way by Prospero, not in a spectacular way like scene one’s storm. The audience is thrown into the immediacy of the storm at the beginning of act 1 when the Master calls, “Fall to’t yarely, or we run ourselves aground. Bestir, bestir!” (1.1.3-4). Danger is imminent as the tempest tosses them around. Shouting at the winds, the Boatswain’s cries “blow till thou burst” (1.1.7) and “what care these roarers” (1.1.15) actively illustrate the intensity of the storm through language. In performance, the actors and sets would assist in creating an active movement onstage as the ship crashes through the waves. Unlike the storm, which exhibits a vivid violence, Prospero’s recounting of his brother’s usurpation is not as visually violent. Beginning the story very slowly, Prospero alludes to time when he says, “the hour’s now come; the very minute bides thee ope thine ear” (1.2.36-37). He asks her to look back into “the dark backward and abysm of time” (1.2.50) to find if she remembers anything about their history. For Prospero, time is slow, abysmal, and backward. Everything in the past is affected by the many years between the inciting incident and the present. Prospero relies on environmental metaphor to convey what his brother did to him: “he was the ivy which had hid my princely trunk and sucked my verdure out on’t” (1.2.85-87). He says his brother was “dry” for “sway” over the King of Naples, evoking images of dry thirst and a maneuvering sea (1.2.112). Prospero describes the usurpation that “extirpate[s]” him from “out of the dukedom and confer fair Milan, with all the honors, on [Prospero’s] brother” (1.2.125-27). This coup, a coup that involved an army of the King of Naples, is evenly and reasonably delivered by Prospero. There is no “blow till thou burst” moment in his retelling. This inciting incident, which is the first violence of Prospero’s story,
continues to wreak damage throughout the play even though it is never shown and is described without fiery language.

The revenge plot unfolded later in act 1 is revealed to be a continuation of the initial violent usurpation. Prospero’s revenge plan itself is less visually violent than we may expect. Instead of a spectacle of blood, battle, and revealed identities, he weaves together a complex revenge, enacting a violence on them that is protracted and meticulous. It is violent, but psychologically and emotionally violent instead of physically violent. Notably, Prospero and Miranda’s trip to the island begins with an exile. Any excitement from this inciting incident is smothered by Prospero’s narration, which tells but does not show the action. Time is slowed down and isolated. Although there have been twelve years of slow violence before the play begins, the time it takes to perform the play is about the amount of time in the play. After years of slow violence, time speeds up just as the colonization and environmental destruction of the island comes to a head.

Nixon’s description of theater’s effects on a generation could apply to *The Tempest*:

“From a narrative perspective, such invisible, mutagenic theater is slow paced and open ended, eliding the tidy closure, the containment, imposed by the visual orthodoxies of victory and defeat” (Nixon 6). Even the end of *The Tempest* elides a tight ending. Though we have seen years of slow violence come to a potential end, there is not closure. Throwing his magic books and staff into the ocean is the symbolic act of the end of Prospero’s reign on the island. But this is all the closure we as readers and viewers get. Unfortunately, we merely have Prospero’s promise of smooth sailing back to Italy, a new marriage, and an easy retirement to end the play. We do not know if he actually leaves the island, if the Neapolitans make it home, or the fates of Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel. Prospero’s epilogue seems to say that he in fact will be bound to the
island if the audience does not clap for him. Instead of seeing this as merely the gimmick at the end of the show for applause, perhaps we can see this as Prospero’s own enslavement. He has not been freed from the slow, violent exile inflicted on him. As an exile and migrant, he has certain demons that must be exorcised. In order to leave the island, to complete the play, he must be set aright by the audience as much as he is by his revenge.

The shipwreck that begins the play is a spectacular form of violence. From the sailors’ perspective, this is an act of God and nature. But we find out that the shipwreck is due to a man, Prospero, manipulating the sea. How much control does he really have? “Here and elsewhere,” Mentz observes, “[Prospero’s] magical displays, including his masque, attempt to control the sea or leave it behind, rather than engaging its metamorphic power” (Ocean 13). Because Prospero sends Ariel in the form of fire to further disrupt the flagship, we could suspect the tempest is not strong enough to bring down the ship. Does Prospero create the tempest from nothing or does he harness a pre-existing storm? Revealing the limit of Prospero’s power, Ariel’s involvement in the “shipwreck” demonstrates Prospero does not have complete control over the ocean but merely conjures and manipulates bits and pieces of it.

**Mariners in a Gale**

The storm which begins *The Tempest* reveals a number of differences between the mariners and the courtly men. Mariners, as Patricia Fumerton tells us, know about the unsettled life. And what could be more unsettled than a seaman in a storm? Yet these “unsettled” men seem to be much more confident than the royal, landed men on board. In this environment, the ability to be flexible proves to be the way to weather a storm. This opening scene reveals the instability of the entire play and many of the characters. Representing political upheaval,
colonization, and physical displacement, the physical storm the mariner’s encounter in 1.1 is just one kind of tempest the sailors are familiar with.

The Boatswain shouts to the storm something like a curse when he says, “Blow till thou burst thy wind, if room enough!” (1.1.7). Acknowledging a level of agency in the storm, he both challenges and requests something of the storm. Gonzalo on the other hand believes in a higher power who could control the storm if He chose, praying, “The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death” (1.1.61). Importantly the storm only has limited agency for Gonzalo; he believes there is someone who can control it, unlike the mariners. Though Gonzalo may be more settled in his position, he has some flexibility with the storm. Antonio and Sebastian’s attitude toward the storm is different from both the Boatswain’s and Gonzalo’s. They are fixated on finding the king and then lash out at the Boatswain for telling them what to do. Even in the face of death, Antonio and Sebastian are stiff-necked, saying “We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art” (1.1.39). These two men are a usurper and a would be usurper, unsettled second sons. Perhaps their firmness comes not from stability but from being so comfortable with unsettled living that they do not understand why the Boatswain and the sailors can not manage their ship. Antonio and Sebastian are so used to stormy seas, they are angry for being told what to do while on one. They are less afraid to be drowned because they are used to this dire situations. Certainly Antonio and Sebastian are also men who are confident in human effort to overcome any obstacle. To them, the physical storm is nothing a human cannot control. Blaming their predicament on the sailors, men of a lower class, the courtly men cannot see the storm as having more agency than these humans do to determine their fate. Unlike Gonzalo, they also do not seem to have the faith to pray to a higher power. Pushing back against Alonzo and Sebastian’s verbal attacks, the Boatswain says, “You do assist the storm” (1.1.13) and “What cares these roarers for the name of
king” (1.1.15). In these retorts we can see the amount of agency the Boatswain gives to the storm and how he attempts to have these courtly men understand that humans only have so much power against such a forceful agent. The mariners recognize the agency and power of the storm. The word “roarers” for Shakespeare could mean, “a noisy, riotous reveler; a person who indulges in wild drunken behavior” (“Roarer,” n.2). Not only is the Boatswain referring to the wind, but he could also be referencing the mariners themselves. Being unsettled sea men, they are the kind of people who on land might be rounded up under the Poor Laws. Perhaps the Boatswain ironically uses the terms to apply to the mariners, knowing how the courtly men perceive them. He also suggests that at this moment none of the mariners care a bit about the state of the king because each man is trying to save himself. As unsettled men, the mariners have learned how to be flexible with the sea and acknowledge the agency in nonhuman actants. Just before the boat splits, the Mariners call out “To prayers, to prayers!” (1.1.45). When the boat splits, the mariners cry out, “Mercy on us!” (1.1.55). Who do they pray and cry mercy to? Providence, a higher power, or the storm itself? Yes. They are flexible, able to work with the storm, against it, pray to a higher power, and cry out to the storm itself. Not stuck in one mode of interacting with the storm like Gonzalo, Sebastian, or Alonzo, the Mariners flex even within this one scene interacting with the storm in different ways. Interestingly, like the invisible actants at work in a storm, the sailors are never heard from again, but are in the limbo of a “safe harbor” ready to fulfill their part in Prospero’s final act of transporting the cast back to Naples. The Mariners are useful to Prospero only in as much as he needs them to safely return home. Like the wind and the waves, these men are not awarded any special agency by Prospero, but they prove to be just as necessary to Prospero’s return as good weather.
Refugees Turned Invaders

Prospero and Miranda are both refugees, exiles left out on the sea. Miranda continues to be displaced, even once they reach the island, but Prospero claims a controlling role on the island. Immediately he seizes his opportunity to colonize the island and retake control of his transience. Instead of understanding the colonial condition he inflicts on Caliban and Ariel, Prospero sheds his migrant experience and harnesses it for his own power. This is paralleled in his harnessing of the ocean and of his magic books, staff, and robe. Just as he casts off the migrant garb and takes on that of the colonizer, he puts on magic robes and takes up magic books in order to control the sea and air. The environment around Prospero is subject to control just as the natural human inhabitants of the island are. Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda are under his control just as much as the ocean, fire, sky, and caves. Controlling the human characters with his words and the nonhumans through his magic, Prospero harnesses both through colonizing forces. Staff, books, and garment are like the manipulations of his rhetoric: there to enhance his control.

Prospero and Miranda saw that they could not dictate their path when first pushed out to sea; they were adrift in the ocean. Instead of fiercely fighting to control the ocean, they allowed it to lead them and they came to safe harbor. Miranda and Prospero were exiles, migrants across an ocean who submitted to the waves. The Neapolitans are not migrants; they are the leaders of a wealthy and independent nation-state. They and the sailors managing the boat do not submit to the waves, they fight against them. Even though, as discussed above, the mariners are more flexible than their rulers, all fight against the storm. It is clear which is the appropriate stance to take with the ocean; let it lead you and do not try to control it. But it seems one must have the

8 Mentz points out that in The Tempest, “those who struggle against the sea, like the sailors on the Neapolitan flagship, get wrecked (or nearly so), but those who submit to it, like Prospero and Miranda, get rescued” (Ocean 10). So even though the mariners are more flexible than the courtly men, they fight against the sea unlike Prospero and Miranda. The appropriate response for a human in the face of the ocean is to submit to its supremacy.
mindset of a migrant in such situations. To traverse the sea believing to be the commander or controller of it is to face the possibility of shipwreck. Entering the waters knowing her fate is not up to her, the migrant no longer controls her individual life and allows the environment to lead her. This is how Prospero and Miranda arrive safely on the island: they have allowed themselves to be controlled by the mighty ocean, acknowledging an agency they cannot control.

Miranda continues to be more flexible than Prospero, though she is somewhere between colonizer and migrant/colonized. She has lived most of her life on a island aware of magical happenings. When men show up, she does not first seek control but connection. Her love for Ferdinand can be seen as her watery flexibility in action. She has never seen anyone like him but she shapes her interests and desires to fit him. Instead of seeing this negatively as a simple execution of a literary trope (i.e., love at first sight) or a child’s naiveté, we should instead see Miranda’s amazing pliability. Able to adapt well to new situations, Miranda has had to learn how to be flexible in order to survive life on the island. We know that she and Caliban were once on different terms, more playmates and friends than master and servant because Prospero says, “I… lodged thee in my own cell till thou didst seek to violate the honor of my child” (1.2.346-47) and Miranda says, “I pitied thee, took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour one thing or another” (1.2.352-54). Miranda’s change in opinion toward Caliban came with her father’s judgment against him, again showing Miranda’s flexible view of the world. She is malleable. Instead of this being a negative trait, we can see her as a character who embodies a watery character. This is a characteristic of the migrant that continues in her throughout the play. Just as she was once swept along by the waves of the sea, she continues to be swept along in life, shifting with the tides. We see that she is capable of great love and great hate. When she encounters Ferdinand, she meets this strange new creature with warmth and openness: “I might
call him a thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble” (1.2.416-18). When she hears of Alonso’s death, she cries out for mercy (1.2.435). This warmth and pliancy is shown to be loveable and beautiful. However, this pliancy also makes her easily controllable by her father. As Prospero colonizes the inhabitants of the island, he must also control his own daughter so that she does what he wishes. Right after the storm, we get an example of the kind of language Prospero uses to manipulate Miranda. He tells her he has not harmed the people on the ship: “I have done nothing but in care of thee—of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter—who art ignorant of what thou art” (1.1.16-18). Claiming the act of violence he has just committed (whether anyone was hurt or not) was for her benefit is a manipulative tactic. His actions seem to show his love for her is deep and that he would do anything for her. How can she refuse to obey him if he is willing to do anything for her? Prospero’s statement causes her to feel guilty and controls her emotions. We also know she is indebted to him for saving her from Caliban attempting to rape her (1.2.347). Prospero harnesses her pliability for his own purposes, much like he does the tempest and other environmental agents.

Prospero’s turn from refugee to invader is an effect of the initial violence done to him. Does this mean we should see him as a helpless victim and allow his tyrannical reign? Certainly not. Although his imperial actions on the island spawn from the violence done to him politically, we must consider the flexibility of choice he still has. More than anyone, Prospero should understand the flexibility of life because he was rescued by the waves. Whereas Miranda learned from the flexibility and malleability of the waves which saved her, Prospero chooses to assert control over his surroundings. What we see at work is the continued impact of political upheaval. The slow violence instigated by Antonio continues long after the initial incident of Prospero’s usurpation. Part of this violence is the colonization process, which occurs on the island. Caliban
and Ariel’s enslavement are a result of Antonio’s actions. This is not to say Prospero is not culpable, but that there is an effect of compounded violence over the years which continues to affect agents outside the Italian state’s gaze. Violence continues until revenge comes around full circle to dethrone Antonio.

Interestingly, though Prospero is partially saved by a peaceful ocean and can harness the power of water, he remains distant from its actual character. Much like refusing his own political displacement and seeking control over others, Prospero cannot acknowledge the role of the ocean in his magic and survival, but continually distances himself from it. Prospero keeps the ocean and its malleability distant from him whereas Ariel is much more open to its flexibility. When Ariel unites with Prospero after the tempest, the spirit exclaims, “all hail, great master; grave sir hail! I come to answer thy best pleasure, be’t to fly, to swim, to dive into the fire, to ride on the curled clouds. To thy strong bidding task Ariel and all his quality” (1.2.189-93). To this incredibly flexible, open ended greeting, Prospero replies, “Hast thou, spirit, performed to point the tempest I bade thee” (1.2.193-94). Ariel has just revealed the extreme malleability of his identity. He can take many forms and perform many different tasks, yet Prospero remains fixed on one task. More than being pragmatic, Prospero’s response reveals his inflexibility. When he cannot quite imagine all of the forms Ariel can take and when faced with endless pliability, he turns to the one solid task he knows was supposed to be completed. Another scene that reveals Prospero’s attitude toward the environment of the island and its inhabitants is when Prospero threatens Ferdinand with water and natural elements of the island, telling him, “Sea-water shall thou drink; thy food shall be the fresh-brook mussels, withered roots, and husks wherein the acorn cradled” (1.2.461-63). Prospero views these environmental objects as horrible afflictions instead of viable elements of an ecosystem. Just before the masque, Prospero says to

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9 Remember that Morton says we must seek to interact with the substance and essence of the real ocean.
Ariel, “thou and thy meaner fellows your last service did worthily perform, and I must use you in such another trick” (4.1.35-36). Prospero recognizes the abilities of Ariel and the “lesser” spirits, but it seems he cannot quite grasp their entwined relationship with the elements. Like Ariel’s relationship with the sea, Prospero can only talk loftily about the spirit’s relationship with water and other elements; he cannot quite articulate what the magic is that the spirits perform. Though he calls the masque “vanity” of his art (4.1.41), it is clear his art is only half of the magic here. The spirits are really the ones with the magic at work in the masque. Unapproachable in its depth and complexity, the ocean and environment of the island are difficult for Prospero to acknowledge. The ocean presents the flexible way of living Prospero opts out of and the depth of the unknown he does not want to encounter.

Ariel asks for his liberty and Prospero says, “Before the time be out? No more” (1.2.246). Prospero then reminds Ariel of all he has done for him and emphasizes that the labor he has been forced to perform is not that bad. Throughout this scene, Prospero works on Ariel to make him feel regret and indebtedness. By reminding him how Prospero saved him from the tree, Prospero says to Ariel, “Thou shalt be as free as mountain winds; but then exactly do all points of my command” (1.2.497-99). He continuously promises freedom in order to control Ariel. Miranda is also controlled through guilt, which can be seen as Prospero asks her again and again whether she is listening to him in 1.2. Verbalizing her guilt, Miranda says, “Alack, what trouble was I then to you!” (1.2.151-52). Prospero’s response frees her of a past offense but continues to control her by inscribing her as “Thou wast that which did preserve me” (1.2.153). Carefully she listens and believes everything he says throughout the play. Even later in the play when she goes to see Ferdinand when she is not supposed to, she is actually doing exactly what her father wishes. Prospero encourages her desire for Ferdinand by manipulating her into feeling guilty
when she does not do what he tells her to. Prospero’s internal manipulation of Ferdinand concerning his father’s death is shown externally when Prospero causes him to lose all of his strength in 1.2. In these lines Prospero’s manipulations of Ferdinand’s emotions are clearly expressed through Ferdinand’s internalization of guilt: “My father’s loss, the weakness which I feel, the wreck of all my friends, nor this man’s threats… are but light to me” (1.2.485-87). Through his words and magic, Prospero works imaginary guilt into those around him in order to control them.

Prospero manipulates Ferdinand through Ariel, putting him in a reflective and sad state concerning his father. Causing Ferdinand to believe his father is dead, Ariel’s song also opens his eyes to see “sea-change” as something that can alter the human body and its materiality dramatically (1.2.399). When introduced to Miranda, Ferdinand assumes he has taken his father’s rank: “I am the best of them that speak this speech” (1.2.428). Though not guilty about his father’s death (as he did not cause it), Ferdinand is convinced his father is dead because of the song he has heard and shifts his view of himself accordingly. Prospero manipulates Ferdinand further in act 3 when he forces him to do labor for him. Ferdinand is doing Caliban’s work, and this somehow draws Ferdinand and Miranda closer together, which is exactly what Prospero wants. Manipulating both young people, Prospero creates desire through guilt in their banned interactions with one another. Through guilt, loyalty, and sadness, Prospero manipulates those around him. As we examine Caliban and Ariel in greater detail, we will see that Prospero’s colonizing through guilt will continue to be a key form of his control. Perhaps Shakespeare’s use of created guilt here is a reflection of drama’s power to control others.
Caliban, Shakespearean Colonial Figure

Paul Brown talks about Caliban as a colonial figure. He focuses on the role of language as a way Prospero controls Caliban. Teaching Caliban English is not only an act of colonization, but it is an act of slow violence as it continues to have harmful effects long after he learns Prospero’s language. In fact at first, learning to speak English did not probably appear violent at all. However, the language used to recall the time teaching Caliban to speak is full of violence: “Abhorred slave, which any print of goodness wilt not take, being capable of all ill” (1.2.350-52). It is no wonder that scholars have been unsure which character speaks this line: Prospero or Miranda. For Miranda to speak it, as the Norton complete works suggests, seems out of character and yet might reveal the impact her father’s attitude toward Caliban has worked on her. It is easier to imagine Prospero speaking these lines as he often speaks violently to Caliban. The violence these language lessons enslave Caliban. Because he knows the language, Caliban can be controlled through the language. Caliban only knows his servant position because he learns their language. He is a “non-native speaker,” which places him on a different societal level than Miranda and Prospero, even in their tiny social environment. The only benefit of learning their tongue, Caliban says, is he knows how to curse. “The red plague rid you for learning me your language,” shouts Caliban (1.2.363-64). Prospero uses language as a means to control Caliban, but Caliban’s curses are a way to fight back. As Brown states, Caliban also produces “his own narrative, in which Prospero himself is designated as usurping other to Caliban’s initial monarchy and hospitality” (61). Though Prospero controls through narrative, we see Caliban fighting back using the very language meant to bind him.

Caliban and Ariel are both displaced even while they remain in their physical environment. Nixon talks about the concept of being displaced in place, that even while an
individual or a community may not be forced to physically move, their home may change so much around them that they no longer recognize it: “Either the threatened community capitulates and is scattered (across refugee camps, placeless ‘relocation’ sites, desperate favelas, and unwelcoming foreign lands), or the community refuses to move but, as its world is undermined, effectively becomes a community of refugees in place” (19). This idea of “refugee in place” applies to the colonial subject before he or she begins to move, before becoming a climate migrant or transient refugee. While still living in the same location, Caliban and Ariel are displaced when Prospero comes on the scene. Explaining this more radical notion of displacement instead of as “referring solely to the movement of people from their places of belonging,” Nixon states it “refers rather to the loss of the land and the resources beneath them, a loss that leaves communities stranded in a place stripped of the very characteristics that made it inhabitable” (19). This is the slow violence of colonialism in action, a loss of the goods and land one has and lives on. Much like the fenlanders, Caliban loses his right to live on the island the way he always has. Although the island was not really his to begin with, he has more of a right to than Prospero. What was once a “fertile” island with “water with berries…fresh springs, brine-pits” is now a “hard rock” that “stys” (imprisons) Caliban (1.2.336-44). Meanwhile, Ariel is displaced from his space twice, first by Sycorax and Caliban and then by Prospero. Both are displaced while physically unmoved.

When he arrives to the island, Prospero sees the landscape as uninhabited by Caliban, Ariel, or Caliban’s mother. He says to Ariel concerning his arrival, “Then was this island---save for the son that she did litter here, a freckled whelp hag-born---not honour’d with a human shape” (1.2.281-84). Although Prospero acknowledges that one being of “human shape” was present when he arrived, he does not consider Caliban fully human, and he certainly does not consider
Ariel human. Prospero does not recognize any of the vernacular meaning of the landscape he has been dropped into.\(^{10}\) And this is important because how he treats and interacts with the island is how he treats and interacts with Caliban and Ariel. They are the native inhabitants of the island; Ariel even more so than Caliban.

We know that Caliban’s mother, Sycorax, came to the island as an exile much like Prospero and Miranda. In fact, there are many connections between Sycorax’s story and Prospero’s. Both are sent away because they were thought to be dabbling in the dark arts. In their origin stories, Sycorax is seen as a monster whereas Prospero is a duke who was ousted from his seat. Prospero’s Christian Imperialist perspective interprets Sycorax’s spiritualism as sinful: “This damned witch Sycorax, for mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible to enter human hearing, from Algier, thou know’st, was banished: for one thing she did they would not take her life” (1.2.263-67). Casting Sycorax as a monster in his retelling of Ariel’s story, Prospero portrays himself as a savior. Rightly angered by Sycroax’s treatment of Ariel, as viewers and readers, we can easily be ensnared by Prospero’s contrasting himself from Sycorax. However, Prospero’s treatment of Ariel is not much different. Prospero has more in common with Sycorax than he would care to admit. Shouldn’t his knowledge of Sycorax soften his interactions with Ariel and Caliban? Shouldn’t this affect his perspective on ruling the island? Throwing off his migrant identity, Prospero dissociates himself from Sycorax and represents her as Other, marking her as outcast and vile in order to justify his treatment of her.

Nixon says “ecologically dispossessed” communities “without being empowered via infrastructure, are ripe for revolt” (Nixon 42). Certainly we see this taking place in Caliban. The very land that he believed was his has been removed from him and continues to be unavailable to

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\(^{10}\) For “vernacular landscape,” see Nixon pg.17. Nixon contrasts the vernacular landscape of the native people with the “official” landscape of an imperial power. We see how Prospero takes over the vernacular landscape of the island and “legitimizes” it.
him. We see that Caliban is “ripe for revolt” and even does rebel by speaking harshly to
Prospero, refusing to bring wood back, and then by plotting to kill Prospero with Stefano and
Trinculo. “All the infections that the sun sucks up from bogs, fens, flats, on Prospero fall, and
make him by inchmeal a disease!” (2.2.1-3) Caliban shouts to the sky, cursing Prospero. Caliban
uses environmental language to call down his curses on Prospero. Perhaps he feels the landscape
would like to seek revenge just as much as he does. He sees how the island, which was once
sweet, has been poisoned by Prospero’s treatment. “Freedom, high-day; high-day, freedom,
freedom” (2.2.176) Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano sing as they walk off stage dreaming of
revolution. However, we also see Caliban’s inability to regain autonomy in any other way. This
act of revolt alerts us again to his status as a colonial figure. He has been driven to spectacular
violence by years of slow violence.

When the play begins, Caliban has already been colonized by Prospero. Though he is not
a yet-to-come colonial figure at the beginning of the play, we learn that Caliban was not always
Prospero’s slave. 11 This reveals that at some point Caliban was a pre-colonial subject. Caliban is
a constant sign to Ariel of what he will become if he does not obey Prospero. For though Ariel is
a servant to Prospero, he is not as enslaved as Caliban. Caliban is an important agent in the
network of the island’s economy. In an endeavor to see the nonhuman agents at work in the play,
we must also continue to see Caliban as a perceived nonhuman actant. Although he is human,
Prospero does not treat him as such. He calls Caliban, “A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
nurture can never stick” (4.1.188-89). Caliban speaks back to Prospero and challenges his
authority by offering up a mirror image of himself throughout the play. Bhabha discusses the role

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11 For more on pre-colonial figures, see Andrew Baldwin’s “Postcolonial Futures: Climate, Race, and the Yet-to-
Come.” Pre-colonial subjects are those who pose a threat to the colonizer and have the potential to be turned into a
colonial subject. They are not quite colonized yet, but are either a candidate to be colonized or in the process of
becoming one. Caliban at one point was a pre-colonial subject, as Miranda and Prospero taught him English and let
him stay with them. When he is kicked out of their home and made a slave his colonization is complete.
of mimicry in colonial discourse and says, “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha 126).

Caliban disrupts Prospero’s authority throughout the play, constantly using the language of the colonizer to question his actions. By mimicking—or performing—English identity, he recasts it from ontological difference to one of contingency and negotiation. The difference between Prospero and Caliban is not as dramatic as it may at first appear. Prospero refers to Caliban as a “thing” at the end of the play when he says, “This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-76). As Paul Brown eloquently points out, “Even as this powerfully designates the monster as his property, an object for his own utility, a darkness from which he may rescue self-knowledge, there is surely an ironic identification with the other here as both become interstitial” (68). Prospero recognizes some part of himself in Caliban, but this does not necessarily mean that Prospero sees Caliban as someone independent with his own agency.

**Ariel, Displaced in Place**

Ariel is a native inhabitant, one with the land, interconnected in a much more visible way than Caliban. From everything we can tell about Ariel, he is part of the island. His displacement from the island has taken place under two different regimes and the latter uses the violence of the former to enforce itself. Capable of being anywhere on the island he needs to be in mere moments, Ariel can take many different forms, especially air-related forms. He seems to embody fire in 1.1 to wreak additional havoc on the sailors. As a spirit, he is elemental, able to become fire, water, wind, and earth. When Prospero frees him at the end of the play he says, “then to the elements” (5.1.319). Prospero releases him back to the elements of which he is made. Interestingly, Ariel’s imprisonment in the tree reveals the interconnected nature of his body and
the island. More than just a natural inhabitant of the island, Ariel is part of the island, one with
the physical environment. He is not human, but a nonhuman-humanoid figure who is part of the
island’s environs. Ariel’s name reflects his airy nature as he is able to come and go in a “twink,”
as soon as Prospero calls and be anywhere on the island at a moment’s notice (4.1.43). Ariel is
capable of taking on multiple forms, which he describes to Prospero: “I come to answer thy best
pleasure, be’t to fly, to swim, to dive into the fire, to ride on the curled clouds. To thy strong
bidding task Ariel and all his quality” (1.2.189-93). As a spirit of air, he can fly and become
other objects made up of air. Part of his role in waylaying the Neapolitan ship in 1.1 was to
appear as fire. Describing the scene, Ariel says, “Now on the beak, now in the waist, the deck, in
every cabin, I flamed amazement” (1.2.196-98). But Ariel proves to not only be a spirit of the air
but of the sea as well. Prospero tells him to, “Make thyself like a nymph o’th’ sea... go take this
shape” (1.1.301-03). So though mainly an airy spirit, Ariel can take on other elemental figures.
Later he dons the image of a half human, half bird hybrid called a harpy. The 3.3 stage direction
reads: “Enter ARIEL, like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table.” Flesh, bone, and feathers are
other objects Ariel can embody. Elements of earth and air can mingle in his body. When he is
threatening Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian, Ariel gives a detailed picture of what these spirits
are capable of: “I and my fellows are ministers of fate. The elements of whom your swords are
tempered may as well wound the loud winds, or with bemocked-at stabs kill the still-closing
waters, as diminish one dowl that’s in my plume” (3.3.61-66). Ariel and his fellow spirits take
the shapes of harpies and birds, but they remain elemental spirits which cannot be hurt by the
swords of men. Powerfully, Ariel and his fellows reveal themselves to be human and animal
hybrids in this scene, presenting how complex, fluid, and strong they are as environmental
spirits.
Retelling the story of how Prospero released Ariel from the tree Sycorax confined him in, Prospero controls Ariel with his words (1.1.269-93). When Prospero threatens to imprison Ariel in a tree again saying, “If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak and peg thee in his knotty entrails till thou hast howled away twelve winters” (1.1.294-96), it is through the potential recreation of this scenario that Prospero retains control over Ariel. But Prospero’s control is not only through the threat of capture, but through the promise of freedom. Continually speaking the possibility of Ariel’s release from servitude, Prospero maintains Ariel’s obedience by offering what he truly wants: “Ariel is, paradoxically, bound in service by this constant reminder of Prospero’s gift of freedom to him, in releasing him from imprisonment in a tree” (Brown 60).

The first time he tells Ariel he will free him is in 1.2.419. Prospero controls Ariel through the yet-to-come, the potential enslavement he has experienced before and through the possibility of freedom. Seeking to control Ariel through a narrative of threat and promise for the future in order to keep him from acting on his endlessly potential future, Prospero uses Sycorax as an “other” regime to legitimize himself to Ariel. Although Prospero portrays himself as capable of the same magic as Sycorax, he also tries to paint himself as a more benevolent ruler. Ariel seems to have no choice but to obey. He must remain enslaved to retain the possibility of freedom.

Ariel does not fit nicely onto one side of the human/nonhuman divide. Prospero describes him as a spirit multiple times throughout the play, the first being in 1.2.193. He seems to be

12 Mimi Thi Nguyen talks about the gift of freedom in her book aptly named The Gift of Freedom. She explains the gift of freedom creates indebtedness. The one who receives freedom is indebted to him who frees him. Nguyen says, “the gift of freedom is normative, as a means of making other ways of being in the world appear to be insecure, illegible, inadequate, illegal, and illiberal, and it is also instrumental as a means of partitioning the world into spaces commensurate or incommensurate, comparable and incomparable” (15). Prospero’s gift of freedom to Ariel further binds him in debt and causes Ariel’s position in the environment to become more unstable.

13 See Baldwin pg. 296 for more on promissory nature of the yet-to-come climate migrant figure and how it is monstrous because of its unpredictability.

14 See Brown, “‘This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine’” (60). Prospero does not need to follow through on his threat to Ariel. He benefits from Sycorax’s treatment of Ariel because all he has to do is cast himself as a better master than her in order to keep Ariel under his control.
human in figure as he is played by a human actor, but he takes on the form of natural elements such as water and fire. At one with the natural environment of the island, he is both human and object. In this way, he is even more of a climate migrant than Caliban because he is integrated with the physical environment. Ariel reveals the lack of distance between the human and the nonhuman, containing the kind of network of objects and humans coexisting like Ian Bogost talks about in his book *Alien Phenomonology*.\(^\text{15}\) Ariel also shows that Prospero does not have as much power through his magical arts as he does through his colonizing narrative. Though Prospero seems to be able to control the elements of the island with his magic, it seems nature is just barely under his control. As a man, he cannot control Ariel with his books, staff, and robe. He has to control Ariel through language because his magic is not as powerful as the natural strength of Ariel. In this way, Ariel is like the other human subjects who Prospero controls with his words. Ariel is neither fully human nor fully object but somewhere in a liminal space in between these two things.

In the masque Prospero produces in celebration of his daughter’s engagement, we see Ariel being controlled by Prospero in a more obviously theatrical way. Ferdinand says, “May I be bold to think these spirits?” to which Prospero replies, “Spirits, which by mine art I have from their confines called to enact my present fancies” (4.1.118-22). Prospero nearly erases the agency of the spirits, claiming to Ferdinand he is using his art to make the spirits do what he wants. Amazingly, he claims to be freeing them at the same time he says he is controlling them! Ariel’s fellow spirits, who play the other characters in the masque, appear to be under Prospero’s control like Ariel is. The masque reveals the theatricality of Prospero’s language that has been occurring

\(^\text{15}\) Bogost talks about how “all things equally exist, yet they do not exist equally” (11). Humans, rocks, and sunsets all exist but their existences look different from one another. Ariel is a spirit, not quite human but not an object either. He captures the complex notion of existence and how we, as human thinkers, need to expand our definition of existence. Jane Bennett makes a point that is also relevant here, that humans are themselves made up of materials, just a “particularly rich and complex collection of materials” (11). The entire universe of materials then exist in a thriving network with one another. Ariel captures this complex network of existence in the play.
in the play all along. Prospero’s panegyric celebration of Nature’s fecundity is a classical allegory meant to consecrate his daughter’s offspring and, by implication, his own family dynasty with the King of Naples through his son-in-law Ferdinand. Prospero projects an image of fecundity onto the island. Iris hails Ceres as a “bounteous lady” and describes the kind of fertile land she produces. The lush locale Iris describes is nothing like the rocky reality of the island that we have seen. In this way, the masque presents an idealized version of the island, a fecund island Ferdinand was fortunate to land on. And Ferdinand seems to buy the fiction as he exclaims, “Let me live here ever! So rare a wondered father and wise makes this place paradise!” (4.1.122-24). Prospero’s control over Ferdinand and Miranda’s desires appears to be complete. Surprisingly, Prospero has his masque players point out the lover’s predicament of needing to wait to consummate their marriage until they are bound by “sanctimonious ceremonies” and “holy rite” (4.1.16-17). Iris seems to remind the couple to curb their desire for one another just when the masque might have been successfully distracting them from such desire.

Overall, the tale of the masque is closely entwined with the story of *The Tempest*. In the masque, Venus and Cupid betrayed Ceres offstage and long ago when they caused Dis to fall in love with Ceres’s daughter Persephone. Now Ceres is willing to bless Ferdinand and Miranda’s love as long as Venus and Cupid are not present. Similarly, Prospero is blessing the couple with two traitorous but key figures missing from the scene, Alonso and Antonio. Without the presence of Venus/Antonio and Cupid/Alonso, Ceres/Ariel and Juno/Prospero bless the young couple in spite of all that has come between them. Bounty and fecund land will cover up what betrayal had destroyed. There is a genre mash-up occurring as the masque is being performed in the romance play of *The Tempest*. When referring to *King Lear* and *As You Like It*, Steve Mentz says of genre, “These generic frames together comprise a continuum between perfectly intelligible and
harmonious nature (the ‘green world’) and an indifferent and hostile environment (the ‘wasteland’)” (“Tongues” 168). This continuum can also be seen in the performance of the masque. The play within the play presents an idealized, perfectly functioning agricultural environment in which natural forces are portrayed by human figures, while the “real world” (the play outside of the play) is full of complicated human and nonhuman characters who do not always take perfect human form or exert their nonhuman agency against humans. This fantasy of Nature’s bounty ultimately assumes the rather realistic image of the dancing “sunburned sicklemen,” agrarian laborers, the island’s own fenlanders, who remind Prospero of his own real slave, Caliban, whose “foul conspiracy” cracks the glass of this ideal image (4.1.134 & 139).

Suddenly, even the idealized versions of the absent Venus/Antonio and Cupid/Alonso are undone by the present threat of Caliban. All of Prospero’s colonizing narratives and environmentally devastating theatrics used to control the island and everyone around him are at stake. The theatricality of the masque highlights Prospero’s production of narrative throughout the entire play.

**Stefano and Trinculo, Migrant Seamen**

Stefano and Trinculo are migrants from the storm who are also bent on colonizing the island for their own benefit. They are poor and dispossessed from their rightful space. These men become vagrants and drunkards. Discussing “masterless men,” Brown describes Stefano and Trinculo as men under noone’s control, “whose alliance with the savage Caliban provides an antitype of order, issuing in a revolt requiring chastisement and ridicule” (Brown 53). Stefano and Trinculo are chaotic mirrors of Prospero. They have the same desire to control and colonize, but do not operate out of order but chaos. Stefano and Trinculo’s treatment of Caliban and their
eagerness to become kings of the island, provide a grotesque mirror of Prospero’s “civilized” colonial mission. Prospero’s colonization process presented him as a beneficiary and caretaker of the island, but we see Stefano and Trinculo as tyrants who seize power as soon as they can. As readers we may see no comparison between Prospero and these men and view the two castaways as crude men bent on merely seeking their fortune. But if one thinks back to Prospero’s arrival and how he was in the same state as these men when he arrived, one can begin to see the similarities become apparent. Perhaps Prospero was not as brash as they are in the colonizing process, but he must have begun a process of control quickly that became more and more deeply ingrained in the order of the island as time passed. Though Prospero did not subjugate Caliban and require pledges of servitude at first, he eventually does enslave him. Stefano and Trinculo were not as smart as Prospero, perhaps, in developing a long-term plan to colonize the island, but they are quick to seize a friendship that will help them, much like how Prospero did. Prospero used the “gift” of language to control Caliban and the gift of freedom to control Ariel. Stefano and Trinculo give the gift of liquor and a promise of freedom from another’s tyranny to Caliban. In both cases, gifts from “stronger” men to “weaker” are used to gain control and allegiance. It is surprising that Caliban is so quick to ask Stefano to be his god after twelve years of slavery to another man (2.2.140)

In 2.2, Trinculo hiding under Caliban’s gaberdine presents to us the very essence of an unsettled man:

> Here's neither bush nor shrub, to bear off any weather at all, and another storm brewing; I hear it sing i’ the wind: yond same black cloud, yond huge one, looks like a foul bombard that would shed his liquor. If it should thunder as it did
before, I know not where to hide my head: yond same cloud cannot choose but fall by pailfuls. What have we here? A man or a fish? Dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish- like smell; a kind of not of the newest poor-John. 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; any strange beast there makes a man: when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lazy out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man and his fins like arms! Warm o' my troth! I do now let loose my opinion; hold it no longer: this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt. Alas, the storm is come again! My best way is to creep under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter hereabouts. Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows. I will here shroud till the dregs of the storm be past.

(2.2.18-38)

Left in a barren landscape with nothing for cover, he sees in the weather a very present danger. Roofless, he must make do with whatever is close at hand. We should recall here Feste’s unhoused condition. Trinculo’s statement “I know not where to lie my head” presents his current unsettled position, one which Caliban and Feste would be familiar with. Though Trinculo sees Caliban as a foul-smelling companion, he is his only option. The rain which begins to fall drives the unsettled man to the only cover he can find.

According to a footnote in the Norton collection of Shakespeare’s complete works, a “poor-John” is a kind of dried fish that was a staple food item for poor people (3238). Trinculo’s familiarity with the smell of this fish should be another sign of his unsettled identity. He is not
like the courtly Neapolitans crashed on the shore who usually only smell freshly caught and cooked fish; he knows a poor-John when he smells it. Caliban, too, is identified not as being someone or something of note, but a common, poor type of fish. At first Trinculo sees Caliban as nonhuman. Trinculo’s thoughts jump to what kind of money he might fetch in England with such a novelty as this. There is something of the colonizer in this perspective. He does not see Caliban as human or as something or someone to communicate with but as a curiosity that could be financially beneficial to him. Not only is Trinculo very much unsettled on this island, he seems to know something about men back in England who “will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar” but “will lay out ten to see a dead Indian” (2.2.30-31). Trinculo’s exclamation, “Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows,” is a common cry of the unsettled. Only the unsettled and migratory know how flexible one must be toward one’s sleeping arrangements. In this moment Trinculo is an unsettled migrant, but his clever quip reveals he may be familiar with this kind of unsettledness. Perhaps his job as a jester is only the most recent in a string of occupations.

The ending of the play appears to not only restore everyone and everything back to normal but to leave everything and everyone better off than they were before. Just like the Neapolitans clothes in act 2 which appear amazingly cleansed and seem “rather new-dyed than stained with salt water” (2.1.61), so too the reckoning and forgiveness at the end of the play seem to present Prospero and the other Neapolitans as good as new. The restoration from corrupt environs and governments appears to have washed away. But can the violence inflicted on all involved really disappear? The violence done to Prospero, Miranda, Ferdinand, Ariel, Caliban, Antonio, Alonzo, Sebastian, Gonzalo, Trinculo, Stefano, the island spirits, and the mariners cannot simply be washed away. Perhaps on the surface governmental positions and environmental ownership can return to the “natural” rulers, but internally every character’s
identity will remain influenced by the “ooze of the salt deep” (1.2.252-53). Prospero attempts to remove the memory of the ocean and the island, but he ultimately cannot, which is revealed in one of his final lines when he calls the island “bare” (Epilogue 8). How can Caliban or Ariel return to a life before Prospero? Even if Caliban rules over the island after Prospero leaves, which he has been desiring for so long, how can the violence done to him by Prospero disappear as easily as the man? Prospero attempts to smooth over the effects of slow violence on the island. He supposedly drowns his book in the sea, frees Ariel “to the elements-” (5.1.319), and seems to acknowledge some level of ownership for the “thing of darkness” he has turned Caliban into (5.1.278). Although the ending might at first seem to be one of reconciliation, we see Prospero still believes he is the one in control of nature as he tells Alonso, “I’ll deliver all, and promise you calm seas, auspicious gales, and sail so expeditious that shall catch your royal fleet far” (5.1.315-18). Performing a scene of forgiveness does not mean reconciliation has occurred. Instead, we see simply a masque in which Prospero continues to cast himself as a god ruling over his environmental subjects.
Chapter 2: False as Water- Iago & Othello as a Dispossessed Migrants

Someone was drowning, someone dying was
calling out for you. Long ago and, yesterday.
You have saved houses from fire, you have carried off
houses and tree, forests and towns alike.

Wsława Szymborska, “Water”

*Iago* is a play of unsettled migrants in watery spaces. Opening in Venice, with much of the action occurring in Cyprus, this play takes place on the water. Not only is the physical environment of this play wet, but much of the language and characteristics of the characters are watery. By watery I mean permeable, everywhere, and all pervasive. “Permeable” captures the essence of Othello’s waywardness; a sense of drowning in his life. His love and jealousy for Desdemona work to drown him. He loses control and power over himself. Tragically, Othello desires a less watery life even as his emotions swell and take on more of the quality of water. Embracing the life of a flexible figure, Iago imitates pervasive water. Both Othello and Iago can be seen as climate and political refugees who have been affected by ecological slow violence and war.

Drowning is the ultimate state of permeability. Water overwhelms every bodily system and prevails over a human’s control. Shakespeare often utilizes the Petrarchan trope of drowning as a metaphor when characters are so strongly moved by tears or lose control and power because of love. In *Hamlet*, Ophelia drowns herself after losing Hamlet’s love and her father. She loses complete control of her own mental sanity and drowns herself. In *Titus Andronicus*, a Roman Lord cannot express his sadness at the death of Lucius: “Nor can I utter all our bitter grief, but floods of tears will drown my oratory” (5.3.87-88). His emotions and tears are so strong it is like
he is being drowned. In *Pericles*, Pericles is overcome by joy and feels he may drown from the flood of emotion: “Put me to present pain lest this great sea of joys rushing upon me o’erbear the shores of my mortality, and drown me with their sweetness (5.1.181-83). Joy is not often the emotion which causes one to think one may drown from one’s tears. In *Othello*, instead of drowning in tears, Roderigo says he will “incontinently drown” himself because he cannot have Desdemona (1.3.300). Though not from tears, his love for Desdemona has caused him to be so out of control he considers killing himself. Too much of a strong emotion is captured by the metaphor of drowning oneself; it exhibits a sense of having lost control. Throughout *Othello*, we will watch the main character slowly lose control and drown. Though he does not literally drown from too many tears, the permeability of his watery migrant state will prove too much for him to overcome.

When Othello relates his tale of woe to the Duke and Brabanzio in 1.3, describing to them just what he used to tell Desdemona, he clearly articulates a watery and migratory beginning:

Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field
Of hair-breadth scapes i’ the imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence
And portance in my travels' history:
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heaven (1.3.134-41)
“Accidents” of both “flood and field” lay the scene for the beginning of his life. Floodwaters, uncontrollable and unknown, form his personal history. These environmental catastrophes are quickly followed by political catastrophe, perhaps a war, which leads to his enslavement. Already in Shakespeare’s play we see an interaction between environmental and political devastation. Othello says this slavery was only part of his story, but we see that the foundation of his history is unsettled. Whether it is environmental ruptures or disruptions in place, Othello has not lived a settled life. When he meets Desdemona, she devours his story, and he finds a sense of stability. Later in the same monologue he says,

That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intentively: I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears, (1.3. 153-56)

Water returns to his narrative as a source of salvation and stability. It is in Desdemona’s watery reception of his story Othello finds a landing place. Here, with Desdemona and in Venice, he may be able to quit his “pilgrimage.”

This return to Desdemona is echoed in act 2, which begins with an invisible storm that takes place out of view. I will examine how Iago and Cassio respond to this storm shortly, but at hand is Othello’s response to Desdemona. While the storm represents the instability and awe of the ocean, Othello cannot perceive the unfathomable ocean:
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death!
And let the labouring bark climb hills of seas
Olympus-high and duck again as low
As hell's from heaven! If it were now to die,
'Twere now to be most happy; for, I fear,
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate. (2.1.177-84)

Blindly, Othello does not reflect on the incredible nature of their arrival or how lucky they were to have survived the storm. He turns away from the water toward the land and Desdemona, from “tempest” to “calms” and from near death and high waves to a perfectly comfortable and content soul. Othello has had plenty of maritime experience, but it is clear he desires a life of constancy, not the upheaval of the ocean (Mentz, Ocean 27). By looking away from the storm, Othello looks away from the unstable and unpredictable aspects of his life. Because he looks away from the sea, he also cannot see the instability of the people around him. The solution Othello should seek, but refuses, would be to allow more flexibility, more watery instability into his life. Allowing a little malleability into his character would allow Othello to roll with the waves and changes of life. Instead, he is firm in his opinions and character, firmly denying any internal instability.\(^{16}\) He could fashion an identity of partial stability, but instead he moves further inland, away from the sea.

\(^{16}\) See Mentz, Ocean pg. 22 where he uses Charles Olson’s poetry to think about fluidity and opening up to unknowable things.
Othello’s nickname, “Moor,” which he is referred to as some 60 times in the play, suggests more than just someone of African descent. The word means, “a native or inhabitant of ancient Mauretania, a region of North Africa corresponding to parts of present-day Morocco and Algeria. Later usually: a member of a Muslim people of mixed Berber and Arab descent inhabiting north-western Africa (now mainly present-day Mauritania), who in the 8th cent. conquered Spain” (“Moor,” n.2). In an environmental context it also means, “a marsh; marshland, fen (“Moor,” n.1). But “moor” is also a homonym for anchoring to one’s original point of departure, to fix oneself at one’s “destination” as in one’s home port (“Moor,” n.3).

Othello’s life is full of the torrents and ebbs of the sea as a mercenary soldier, but he chooses the settled life Desdemona symbolizes to him. Though the third use doesn’t come till the eighteenth century, the verb “mooring” for a ship would have been in use in Shakespeare’s day. These three definitions reveal how complicated Othello’s character is. His national and cultural heritage define him, but he is also categorized by environmental features. Throughout the play, he is unmoored, lost as sea, yet the name “moor” suggests he is safely in port. Enmeshed in his nickname are the different factors of his life.

By the end of the play, when Othello says Desdemona was “false as water,” he has jumped fully into a watery existence, one so far from shore he will never return there (5.2.131). He has been corrupted by resisting the floodwaters, shipwrecked and drowned. How? Only a master seaman could bring about the destruction of so great a naval soldier. As we will see, Iago embraces a liquid identity which enables him to catch Othello in his undertow. There is much liquid in the language Iago uses around Othello as well as being physically surrounded by water on the island. Othello attempts to create a stable life by marrying Desdemona, but this landed and dry life fails as Iago paints Desdemona as a watery and unknowable character. As Mentz says,
“Once water does its work- dew rusts him, puddles muddy him, the sea disorients him- Othello loses himself” (*Ocean* 28). Othello does not want to give into the instability of water, but he cannot overcome it. The handkerchief, which becomes so central to Othello’s fears about Desdemona, “Is, at a basic level, a tool for sopping up excess liquid” (Mentz, *Ocean* 28). The object which Iago’s lie rests on is an object which soaks up liquid. More than just the talisman of his love, this is an object of Othello’s watery past that he wishes to leave behind him. His desire now is for the constancy the handkerchief’s magic buys him:

That handkerchief
Did an Egyptian to my mother give:
She was a charmer, and could almost read
The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
Entirely to her love; but if she lost it,
Or made gift of it, my father's eye
Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
After new fancies. (3.4.52-60)

Though this story maybe be untrue, it reveals Othello’s desire for stability. This item, which is designed to soak up water, Othello needs to be dry in order to affirm Desdemona’s grounded and unwavering love for him.

While Othello seeks stability, Iago embraces a life on shifting meaning. The words Iago uses plays a key part in seeing him as a watery character. “Iago’s maritime vocabulary,” Mentz
says, “underlines his opacity and his ability to reshape himself at every moment” (Ocean 25). Much like Fumerton’s examination of the mariner as a key example of the unsettled subject in sixteenth century England, Iago is an unsettled man who can reshape himself at any given moment. From Fumerton’s work we see that the unsettled subject would frequently change his or her position in order to survive. We see Iago making similar changes. He “improvises” as Iqbal Khan, director of a 2015 production of Othello, says, shifting with every kind of wave that comes his way (Commentary). Iago has learned how to be flexible and malleable by a series of violent storms in his life which he has weathered. When Iago says, “Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago: In following him, I follow but myself” (1.1.55-56), we see the kind of shifting character Iago is: constantly changing and not entirely unknowable.

Iago’s final silence resembles the sea. It may appear that he has been caught red-handed and his plot known, but just at this moment of capture he retreats into silence and is not actually attainable. Like the sea, Iago is “at our mercy but finally untouchable” (Mentz, Ocean 32).

Othello presents two different watery migrant figures, Othello and Iago, who respond differently to their unstable environs. While seeking stability, Othello is ultimately drowned by instability whereas Iago relishes the permeable nature of water and uses is to manipulate Othello. In performance, these watery aspects of the play could be easily overlooked. In the following section, I will give close attention to a unique production of Othello which moves the internal watery aspects of the characters to the external landscape of the stage.

Khan’s Production of Othello

Iqbal Khan’s 2015 Royal Shakespeare Company production of Othello performed in Stratford, England, made bold casting choices, created intricate scenic elements, and integrated
contemporary allusions which brought new subtexts to Shakespeare’s classic work. One of the intriguing casting choices was casting Lucian Msamati, a black actor, as Iago. More than just being novel, this choice brings a new dimension to Othello and Iago’s relationship and fresh ideas for why Iago hates Othello so much. In this version of Othello, a racial brotherhood bond has been broken when Othello promotes Cassio over Iago. Perhaps Othello slept with Emilia, but the greater act of betrayal done by Othello toward Iago was not promoting Iago. The casting choices of this production complicate black Othello’s choosing white Cassio over black Iago. Iago’s opening comment that he hates “the Moor” take on a new meaning. Playing the part which will gain him Roderigo’s trust, Iago uses racist language as a way to manipulate Roderigo. Because Othello chooses Cassio, a white man, over his long-time friend and brother Iago, a deeper hurt than merely passing someone over for a promotion occurs. Iago perceives Othello’s choice as a betrayal to brotherhood and shared experience. This ambiguity within the play is given a new rich context by Khan’s vision of the play.

What I find most interesting about Khan’s production is the way he seizes upon the water imagery in the play, specifically, the way water becomes the symbol of unsettled identity, a mirrored nature of rhetorical manipulation, and the idea of unsettled or wayward identity. The role of water in Khan’s production captures the importance of water’s role in Shakespeare’s original text. Water provides a visual, physical metaphor for the instability and tumultuous interiority of Othello, Iago, and the political and physical environment. Appearing as uncontrollable, the sea itself is outside the scope of the play; it is not as easily as portrayed as other kinds of water. Khan grasps the integral nature of the sea to Othello and Iago’s story. In an e-mail interview with Khan, he said, “Water is evocative of the elliptical, the oblique, the subjective and the psychological. It can be the transport across the liminal to the unknown, the
undiscovered shore; it can be a repository of secrets or the abominable pool, the stagnant secret that runs beneath all… or the sacred bath” (Interview). Khan understands the instability and flexibility of water. Physically brought center stage in the production, the ocean enforces certain key attitudes and shifts in the characters. While the scenic design’s incorporation of water captures the interplay between environment and internal man, the water also reflects and creates an environ for what is happening to the characters. The stage’s continual changes keep it an active member of the cast. Set center stage, the water comes, goes, and shifts in purpose, all the while central to the action. Importantly, the setting and scenic art do not simply vanish into the background, but actively participate in the action and internal experiences of the characters. The water reveals Othello’s violence to us, gives insight into the unstable nature of Venetian politics, establishes Iago as a liminal figure who is unstable and displaced, and purifies Desdemona.

Figure 1 “Were I the Moor” (Pattison, Lucien)
In the opening scene, Khan uses a gondola in a canal-like pool of water center stage, seen in Figure 1, to establish Iago as an unstable character and the centrality of water in the play’s environment. Iago and Roderigo talk about their plans and opinions of “the Moor” in their quivering boat floating between two solid shores. From the beginning, Iago is not to be trusted; he is a man as unsteady as the boat rocking in the water. Iago’s shiftiness and rhetorical adaptability as a character is reflected in the mirrored surface of the canal’s water. As the boat sways, Iago says, “Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago” (1.1.55). Iago’s very fluid, liquid lines are represented by the water. This pool also beautifully reveals the essence of the city of Venice. It is a watery place, Europe’s most famous water-city made up of beautiful canals. It is also the first victim of climate change as sea levels inevitably rise. Seeing this scene played in the water puts us in touch with the geography and environment of the city Iago lives in. Roderigo is cast out of the boat, forced on land, and into a solid position in the narrative as he calls out to Brabanzio. Though Roderigo seems to waver in taking the step to wake Brabanzio, Iago forces him to take a stand while he remains in the boat. Even as Roderigo reveals who he is to Brabanzio and has his identity exposed, Iago wraps himself in a black garment on the boat. Identities here are established and defined by their relationship to the water. Iago remains flexible and unknowable, much like the depths of the sea, while Roderigo is forced to stand his ground and be defined with a certain type of character. Wrapped in a dark cloak and still in the boat on the water, Iago changes his voice in order to not be known, further solidifying his relationship to shifting waters. He exits at the end of the scene still on the boat, setting his own course offstage.

In 1.3, Khan places the Duke’s war table in a single pool of water. Unlike the canal, which may be considered moving water, this pool seems to be isolated and static. As only one
third of the pool available onstage is used, it gives one the sense of standing water. This is what breeds foul smells and insects. Because the pool is static and in an interior space, it could also be seen as smelly or perhaps frog-infested. The war plans of the Venetians seem to be as fluid, static, and smelly as the pool. This pool can also breed moral or physical disease, which perhaps it does as the leaders of Venice prepare to send hired men to battle for them.\footnote{See Gail Kern Paster’s chapter “Roasted in Wrath and Fire” in \textit{Humoring the Body} for more on internal liquids, disease, and morality. Paster spends time thinking about internal liquids, how they were understood to influence someone’s personality, and how Shakespeare communicated internal liquidity. Her study of internal liquids is similar to my study of external liquids. What she analyses happening with water internally, I see being mirrored externally.} They struggle to understand the status of the enemy, and the shifting seas. Because the war room of the Venetians is steeped in years of complicit war mongering, they heavily rely on mercenary armies like Othello’s to do their dirty work for them. Khan says,

The idea of a mercenary force that fights the imperials power’s wars remotely, not only reflects the truth of the historical situation for a state like Venice but also reflects how a number of significant campaigns are conducted now. Either through funding/arming oppositional forces (the most blatant example being the creation of the Mujahideen) or using commercial forces, non-state aligned, hired to conduct dark ops, etc.” (Interview)

In this moment the environmental of the play and the political and imperial location convene. Smelly and fetid like a standing pool, the Venetian war room is a weak and corrupt thing, relying on others to do its dirty work. The table could also be seen as a foreshadowing of the ships that will go out from Venice in between acts one and two. For a long time ships have been equated to social stability or instability (Mentz, \textit{Shipwreck 7}). This war room with the table standing in water is a literalization of this metaphor. Out on the open seas, as it were, the Venetian state
attempts to make decisions based on only a little intel about their enemy. In fact, their hubbub should remind us a bit of the first scene of the *The Tempest* in which the men of the boat are fighting hard against the storm. Though the pool can be read as standing water, we also know all water is uncontrollable. Even this pool could be flooded by rain and prove destructive. The table of government may seem firmly established in the pool, but it rests in a fluid location. Anything could happen and the government could fall, especially in this scene when the threat of an invasion is so unclear. The murky waters of their information system do not allow the Duke and his cabinet members to clearly see the course they should take. We see in this scene as well how Othello is different from the leaders of the state. He seems to be a hired gun, sent to battle whenever needed. Though not seemingly displaced, there is a distance between the Venetian leaders and Othello. Khan mentioned this relationship in his e-mail:

> The interesting thing about this is the problematic sense of allegiance to the state one conducts these campaigns for. The effectiveness of these attachments are provisional and results based. To have two black men who lead on these operations was a rich opportunity to tell the story of the different kinds of experience of Others. The assimilated and non-assimilated man trade on different vocabularies of belonging. Iago, the assimilated person of colour, has the “privilege” to use and respond to racial language to both encourage/legitimate racial unrest/distrust or to intimidate the white man when he is complacent. In our present age there is a very complex agency that is given the Other in policing the vocabulary of the host. While Othello, the superstar Other, celebrated for his difference, confident in the agency his discreet (in the mathematical sense)
qualities give him. He has a glamour that they (the host executive) find in those
that will win the race for them, make extraordinary music (& money) for them, so
long as they control the contract. (Interview)

The state treats both Iago and Othello as other; they do not fully bring them into their company.
Though they honor and respect Othello, it is always within the context of him being an
exceptional black man, the supreme Other. The duke tells them where to go and what action to
take; Othello does not have agency to make his own choices. Interestingly, Othello must rely on
Desdemona to make her entreaty to the duke in order to go with Othello on this mission. In this
setting, a white, wealthy woman has more sway than her black, highly respected husband.
Othello remains on the outside, told by those standing around the pool and those who paddle it,
what he is to do. Like the water in these scenes, Othello is controlled by the state.

Figure 2 “Welcome to Cyprus” (Bagnall)
Khan does not use the pool at the beginning of act 2 as the Venetians come into port in Cyprus but instead uses a backdrop to capture the immensity of the ocean. Beginning with an upstage background painted to look like the ocean and sky meeting, the backdrop, which can be seen in Figure 2, in 2.2 is almost solid blue with a few thin clouds at the top. Though real water has been seen onstage, this projected water is a huge mass of blue on stage as opposed to the slight blue of the physical pool. While less “real,” this projection captures the immensity of the ocean the sailors have just returned from. The little pool on stage pales in comparison to the depths of the ocean; the depths represented here are both freeing and dangerous. The other pools are at least manageable to some extent as they are manipulated onstage. Unlike smaller pools, the ocean itself is an uncontrollable, unrepresentable mass. Because the ocean has acted outside of the control of any human being (by wiping out a whole army in one of its storms), the backdrop tries to capture the immensity of the ocean and its uncontainable nature. Though the main characters of the play arrive safely to shore, it is clear they have passed through a storm that only providence could save them from. It is certainly lucky that Othello’s men arrive safely while the complete Turkish army is drowned. I say “lucky” on purpose because the weather does not distinguish between foes and friends and neither does the ocean. Is it providence or just plain luck that they make it to shore? The backdrop captures this unknowable nature of the ocean. The words and actions of the characters reveal that they were not sure if they would make it to shore. Cassio is greatly concerned about the arrival of Othello, considering it very possible he could have been lost in the storm. Similarly, when Othello arrives, he kisses the ground in Khan’s production. The sailors know that they have just lived through something beyond their knowledge or control. Aware of their luck, they celebrate but also seem to be aware of the gravity of what has occurred. The Venetians are free from their foe, the Turks, who were
drowned in a tempest, but the blue ocean continues to be an immersive physical and emotional backdrop for the rest of the scene.

A scene of celebration, loss, and brawling is played out before the ocean’s depths after this initial arrival of the fleet. Iago plunges deeper, plotting against Cassio and Othello, and pulling Roderigo down with him. Framing the fragility of human experience against the backdrop of this vertigo image of the sea’s mass, the little lives of the people are felt in comparison with the hugeness of the ocean behind them. A dance circle and celebration erupts for Othello and Desdemona’s nuptials and tension from the storm is released. All celebrate, wildly dancing around the stage. After Othello and Desdemona leave, there is a lull in the celebration and talking between Roderigo and Iago. Then Iago breaks into a song a cappella. His song is a Zimbabwean call and response song called “Musandicheme,” which he performs simply in a traditional Shona arrangement (Mhangami-Ruwende). Speaking of homelessness, war, and death, the lyrics of the song have been translated below from Shona to English by Barbara Mhangami-Ruwende:

Musandicheme Kana dafa muhondo
Ndini ndakazvida kufira vapenyu avo ne avo
Mai na Baba musandicheme
Ndini ndakazvida kufira vapenyu avo ne avo.
Do not mourn me if/when I did in war/battle
I chose to die for the living, one and all
If/when I die in war/battle
I chose to die for the living, one and all.
Mhangami-Ruwende says of this song that it sounds like “an old liberation song that was sung during the war of independence where the comrades would hold night vigils in the villages and so the leader would through [sic] out the call and the young men and women (potential recruits) would respond” (Interview). This song is about death and giving one’s life for war, but also about leaving home in order to do so. In the wake of a storm which has killed their enemy, Iago is aware of how close they all were to death. He reminds everyone that they have agreed to leave home, responding to their leader Othello, and agree to die for the living. Khan says the song, “Also rooted Iago in real trauma, an inaccessible history of pain” (Interview). Contained in this song is Iago’s own kind of death, a separation from home, history, and brotherhood. Iago has experienced the call to war. Perhaps now, though, his vow to die for those living could be read as ironic. Instead of dying for the living, he plans to put others to shame and death.

A subtext to Iago and Othello’s lives in Khan’s version is the contemporary issue of child soldiers in Africa. Many children in Africa have been forcibly taken from their homes and conscripted to participate in war. As these children were separated from their natural environments and forced to kill, they become more and more violent. Ishmael Beah’s 2008 memoir, Long Way Gone, brought the issue of child soldiers in Africa into the public consciousness. His account, along with U.N. responses to these abuses of children, influenced Iqbal Khan’s storytelling and music choices. Othello and Iago seem to be the end result of those children, the examples of what happens to child soldiers after they have grown up in an environment of war. Othello and Iago were removed from their native, political, and physical environments, which has produced unsettled and violent men. A subtext of these horrific experiences also creates a bond between Othello and Iago and why we sense a bond of trust has
been broken at the beginning of the play. It is a bond of brotherhood through survival and shared horror. It is for this cultural and environmental death that Iago mourns when he sings “Musandacheme,” as well as for the near-death experience they all have just encountered.

Iago’s song is his way of narrating the shipwreck that has just taken place as well as the shipwreck of his life. He grieves for his own disasters. He will not let the other forget the shipwreck they have just survived.\(^1\) Iago acknowledges the immense power of the ocean. When Cassio takes over the singing, he is not only racist and cruel to Iago, but denies the impact of the shipwreck. By diverting the singing to a racial rap debate, Cassio re-narrates the shipwreck by erasing it. Cassio does not want to reflect on something providential that was out of his control. And yet, he will experience another shipwreck in the coming moments when he is sunk by an outside force. Iago embodies both aspects of the God-driven vision of shipwreck Mentz describes, by being both the cause of the wreck and the seeming savior out of it (Shipwreck 5). Iago plays Cassio from both sides of shipwreck. Knowing Othello loves stability, Iago creates a scene of chaos and instability in order to cast Cassio as an unsettled man. Othello turns away from shipwrecks, so when he witnesses Cassio’s, he rejects him. Iago narrates shipwrecks after they occur and can create shipwrecks through his narration.

By reflecting on the shipwreck longer in this version, Khan situates the rest of the play in the context of shipwreck. Iago is leading Othello toward his own shipwreck and personal destruction. Iago is aligned with water from the beginning, not only in Khan’s production because he is floating in water, but because of his language. Iago leads Othello toward shipwreck; there is no doubt in his mind what he is trying to accomplish. Though he improvises with the resources he is given, he knows the goal is to ruin Othello. Iago is the water and Othello

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\(^1\) See Mentz, *Shipwreck* xxvi for more on narrating shipwreck. Retelling a shipwreck tale is an attempt to understand and question providence, justice, and the extent of human aptitude.
the man on the sinking ship who does not like to swim. Iago’s vengeance will be all the sweeter if Othello dies a watery death, not by physical drowning, but by losing his place of stability. Perhaps this is why at the end of Khan’s version Iago laughs. He takes pleasure in the instability he has created and how wretchedly Othello ends. Not only was he submerged in watery doubt when he killed Desdemona, but the evidence that comes to light after her death infuses one last gasp of fresh air before he drowns. Othello says Desdemona was “false as water” (5.2.131). Does this not point to the depths Othello has plunged? His life has become so watery he can no longer surface for air. Othello’s death is the perfect shipwreck for Iago---a shipwreck that parallels the shipwreck of the Ottomans. There is some sense of the divine in the storm which destroyed the Ottoman fleet, like something other than chance caused it to come about, and yet there is a deep fear that it was just a serendipitous storm. Othello’s shipwreck was not a chance occurrence but orchestrated and planned.

Figure 3 “Chaos is come” (Pattison, Cast)

At the beginning of act 3, Khan uses the pool again to reveal a deep, dark violence in Othello that has not yet been seen. Khan adds a controversial scene in which Othello oversees his soldiers torture an enemy by almost drowning him in the pool center stage. Figure 3 shows the
pool along with the men torturing the enemy. Because this creative scene introduces Othello’s tolerance of violence before Desdemona’s infidelity is hinted at, it suggests Othello has a more complicated relationship with violence than other versions of the play present. In the traditional performance of *Othello*, the trope of the jealous black man becomes the way to understand Othello’s change in character. Here we see that it is through years of being surrounded by violence that he is able to become violent toward Desdemona. Water in this scene is a means to an end. Othello’s relationship with it is casual because he has become so used to this kind of violence. Harnessed and used by the torturers, Othello ignores the water as he sees it only as something for him to use, not as something a part of his identity. Though there is no water in 3.3, Othello returns to Iago after Iago has told Othello to watch his wife and zip-ties Iago to a chair. Taking a hammer to his collarbone, Othello cuts Iago with the backside of the hammer. This scene, performed in a much more violent way than the text suggests, establishes Othello as a man who is aggressive because he has been forced to be violent over many years. His identity has been altered through years of being a torturer and mercenary soldier for the Venetian state. Though he ignores the water in the beginning of the act, it becomes clear that the torturous water is much more a part of him than he would care to believe. Through years of violence being forced on him, in his final days of tolerating it, Othello becomes bloated with it.
Khan stages 4.1 in a way that plunges Othello into the instability of water and reveals how deeply unsettled he has become. When Iago has Othello hide to “overhear” Iago’s conversation with Cassio, three steps appear on stage from the grills over the water, as pictured in Figure 4. Othello, forced under the highest step farthest downstage into a long pool of water, listens to Iago’s conversation with Cassio. The lights are dim, and Othello can only be seen as the lights shine through the grates above him. He stands in a pool of water, soaked through, we are sure, to the skin as he listens. Khan’s production removes Othello’s asides in this scene but captures the essence of them by placing him in the pool. Othello’s comments throughout this scene exhibit his sinking further and further into Iago’s charade: “Do ye triumph, Roman” (4.1.114) he says of Cassio, believing he is gloating over a victory; “So, so, so, so. They laugh that wins” (4.1.117), interpreting laughter the way Iago wants Othello to. Othello begins to narrate the scene, ventriloquizing what Cassio and Desdemona have said and done, “Crying, ‘O dear Cassio!’, as it were: his gesture imports it” (4.1.129-130) and “Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber. Oh, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw to it”
(4.1.133-35). Othello’s first statement to Iago when he returns to solid ground is, “How shall I murder him, Iago” (4.1.159). Returning to land when Cassio leaves, Othello remains immersed in the watery environment of the charade. Believing everything Iago wished him to believe from the scene with Cassio, Othello has been fully immersed in Iago’s manipulative waters. This moment captures the permeable nature of Iago’s rhetoric and theatricality. Deadly and completely encompassing, Iago’s lies are like water, they soak Othello to the core. Othello has become completely unstable, no longer able to ground his identity in anything firm. Because he is immersed in the tale Iago tells just as he is immersed in the water, Othello believes every word he hears. Water drips off of Othello as he leans on the grate, calling for the death of Cassio and Desdemona. This immersion has gone deeper than Iago imagines, which is clearly communicated in Khan’s production. Seemingly in too deep, Iago did not imagine this charade would go so far as to cause Othello to want to kill Desdemona. Iago says not to kill Desdemona, just Cassio. But Othello’s face is set, even as he still wavers and wants proof. Iago may be like water, but even he does not realize the depths to which he has submerged his friend.

Figure 5 “Sing Willow” (Lewis, Joanna)
In act 5, Khan uses the pool in a completely different way, as a pool of purification and domesticity. Figure 5 shows this last transformation of the pool, a bath of sorts, located in Othello and Desdemona’s bedroom center stage. Though a pool, it has the feeling of flowing water, as Desdemona dips her feet in and splashes around. Khan calls this the “reflecting pool” in his commentary. Here Desdemona has a chance to think about what has happened and wonder what to do next. Singing a song her mother’s maid sang which is rather watery, Desdemona trills, “The fresh streams ran by her and murmured her moans: sing willow, willow, willow. Her salt tears fell from her and softened the stones: sing willow, willow, willow” (4.3.42-44). This song moves Desdemona nearly to tears, she says, “Mine eyes do itch. Doth that bode weeping” (4.3.54-55). Water in Desdemona’s song manifests as the salt tears of sorrow as well as a source of respite and nourishment. Likewise, she feels sad and may cry even while being cleansed and refreshed in the pool. The song does not waylay her fears for long. In Khan’s version, Desdemona cries out when she thinks she hears a knock. Song and pool may nourish, but they cannot keep reality at bay. This watery scene presents a different relationship between Emilia and Desdemona. In this malleable setting of water and song, the two women can cross class boundaries and interact with one another. Desdemona brings Emilia further into her confidence when she says, “Oh, these men, these men! Dost thou in conscience think—tell me, Emilia—that there be women do abuse their husbands in such gross kind” (4.3.56-59). Though the nourishing pool does not finally drive out fear, the permeable nature of the watery environment does open discourse and mutual respect between the two women. It also sanctifies Desdemona for her final moments. Whereas Othello has been steeped in muddy waters, this purifying pool reflects the purity of Desdemona’s internal nature.
Class & Slow Violence

Emilia does not say much until act 5. Khan’s version of Othello captures the integral nature of Emilia’s character and the reason why she is silenced through so much for the play. As a member of a lower class than Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, Emilia is often left to stand in the background. In nearly every scene Desdemona is in, Emilia is there somewhere far behind her. In Khan’s version, Desdemona and Cassio very obviously ignore her because she is a “waiting woman”—a servant of the household, in a lower class than them, something Khan indicates in the DVD commentary was done purposefully: “Cassio and Desdemona belong to the same social class. Emilia was invisible to them. And only used when it was useful” (Commentary). What is interesting is how she relates to Bianca when Iago blames the prostitute for Cassio’s injury. Emilia turns on Bianca and unloads invective on her for her occupation: “Oh, fie upon thee, strumpet!” Bianca retorts, “I am no strumpet, but of life as honest as you that abuse me.” This response enflames Emilia more and she cries, “As I? Fie upon thee!” (5.1.119-121). In Khan’s production, Emilia attacks Bianca. Enraged by the death of Cassio, Emilia is spurned on to violence because her own position as a waiting woman is insulted by someone she deems lower than herself. And even though Emilia has just permeated a class boundary and reached Desdemona’s confidence in the previous scene, she has no mercy for Bianca.

Emilia is subjected to a slow violence inflicted on her by Iago. From before the beginning of the play, he has set her on to get Desdemona’s handkerchief. Though the fruition of this destruction does not come until later, it begins long before the play does. Throughout the course of the play, we see how Emilia has been and continues to be subjected to her husband’s violence. Mostly this is verbal violence, as can be seen in 2.1 when Emilia, Desdemona, and Iago disembark from their ship. When the repartee between Desdemona and Iago leaves Emilia
voiceless and seemingly weak, we see that the violence being inflicted here comes from Iago Desdemona. They do not allow Emilia to speak. There are other scenes in the play that we know Emilia to be present in but she never speaks. Khan’s production captures this silencing of Emilia. Khan says he sees it as a class difference between Desdemona and Cassio and Emilia. “Even now Emilia is completely invisible to them,” Khan comments during 3.4 while Cassio and Desdemona have tea (Commentary). Even though she is present with them, they do not see her because she is not useful to them. They purposefully leave her out of their drama because they do not see her. This is one kind of slow violence, done to her because of her class.

The other slow violence played out against her is because of her sex, and this mainly comes from Iago. In Khan’s version, Iago is not only verbally violent, he is physically violent. In 3.3 when Emilia gives Iago the handkerchief, she says she will take it back if he does not need it. Violently, Iago twists her arm in response to her threat and holds her close. The unseen violence he has been inflicting on her suddenly becomes very physical. In the final scene this violence comes to a head as he cuts her throat. Though we see the spectacular, visceral end of Emilia’s story, we know there has been a slow build up to this moment. Interestingly, it is her voice that comes alive toward the end. As Desdemona makes space for her, Emilia’s voice begins to arise. It is her confession, the call to heaven, hell, and all the creatures on earth that pushes Iago over the edge into physical violence toward her (5.2.215-16). The death of Emilia connects us again to the water center stage. Khan says of Emilia’s death, “Ultimately, as the blood of a murdered Emilia leaks through the grates into this water, which continues to run, I hope we get some sense of either the water as being a repository of all memories or, more disturbingly, the washing clean, the erasing of these horrors…” (Interview). The slow violence done to Emilia throughout
the play is either memorialized in the water or washed away by it. At the moment of Emilia’s
death, water continues to play a key role in reflecting the activity of the play and its characters.

What we see in Othello is the visually dynamic end of a long period of slow violence. Othello has been subject to a psychologically destructive process because of his race, background, and occupation. His work as a soldier for hire in Khan’s version works a slow violence on him. Though he is a gentle man in many ways in the first two acts, it is clear his years of torturing and working as a soldier have inflicted on him a kind of inner psychological violence.

Desdemona’s class also plays a role here. She is subject to the demands of the class she is a part of. As she has married and left one place in society, she is now subject to another kind of class violence. Khan says he sees in her willingness to help Cassio not so much her goodness as a desire to see how much power she has over Othello. While she feels she has very little sway over her husband, Desdemona maintains certain characteristics of her class because she knows no other way to live. Even when Othello hits her, she obeys when he calls her back. Because she is subjected to the rules and cultural mores of her class, she allows herself again and again to be treated poorly. Though this violence is not as slow as that perpetrated against Emilia, the ingredients have been in place for a long time. Perhaps these are the rules that propel her into Othello’s arms in the first place, setting her on the trail toward destruction.

“Amid the chaos the human experience,” Mentz explains, “of saltwater globalization seems less rupture than explosive fragmentation, after which spectators and survivors struggle to assemble coherent visions from debris on the beach” (Shipwreck 10). Does not this describe the end of Othello? Everything seems to have exploded into fragments. Lodovico says he will attempt to tell the story back in Venice, but this is merely a drying out of the immersive
shipwreck that has occurred in Cyprus. The shipwreck of the Ottomans was a wet foreshadowing that Othello, Cassio, and others (but not Iago) dried out in order to seek stability. The end of Othello is a wet affair, drenched with water and with blood:

> Wet narratives emphasize disorder, disorientation, and rupture; they narrate experiences in which the usual ways of doing things get broken or fragmented. In these moments, all forms and fancies of human order dissolve. But narrative cannot bear absolute immersion for long, and nearly all shipwreck stories also contain a dry counter-movement that attempts to make sense and meaning out of disaster. (Mentz, Shipwreck 11)

Othello is drenched with the saltwater of shipwreck.

Emilia’s identity and position in society has been unsettled much like Othello and Iago’s. At the end of the play, Othello, Emilia, and Desdemona are dead, and Iago is left to live a life drowned in silence. Lodovico growls to Iago that he is “more fell than anguish, hunger, or the sea” (5.2.355-56). Acknowledging Iago’s agency, Lodovico recognizes his nature is like the ocean: able to destroy those sailing along with him. However, by placing all the blame on Iago, Lodovico overlooks the role of the storm before act 2, the Venetian state, and Roderigo as agents of change in the play. He would have no way of knowing Roderigo played a part, but nonetheless all the blame is firmly placed on Iago. A slow violence worked against Iago throughout his life comes to its end. Just as he controlled others through speech, Iago now promises to be silent “from this time forth” in order to wreak his own slow violence against himself and the state (5.2.297).
Conclusion

In our modern world of millions of people migrating and seeking refuge from war, environmental devastation, and difficult economic situations, seeking to understand the migrant and the migrant’s environment could not be more timely and necessary. Slow violence is inflicted by powerful nations on weaker nations. Migrants who move or those who are displaced in place are heavily impacted by slow violence. Through Shakespeare’s plays, we see that the migrant is not a new figure. For hundreds of years, unsettled people have sailed windswept seas of identity, searching for stability. Often the unsettled persons who approach happiness or peace are those who accept the multividual, flexible, and watery life of a migrant. These precolonial migrant figures live by reflecting the environment as it is and working with its unstable nature. Those who seek to control the sea or gain stability, often end up shipwrecked and drowned.

In The Tempest, Prospero rejects the role of migrant and assumes one of colonizer. He controls the natives of the island and uses them for his own purposes. Though different in a number of ways, Ariel and Caliban have in common their subjugation to Prospero. As precolonial and colonial figures, they are climate and political migrants who have not moved but have been displaced. The masque reveals Prospero’s illusory presentation of the island’s environment and the horrific reality that disrupts it. In the end, the play is not one of redemption but of slow violence.

Through Iqbal Khan’s production of Othello, water actively reflects the internal psychology of Othello and other characters. The sea also breaks out of merely reflecting experience and takes an active role in the narrative, shifting the direction of the story. Iago’s watery nature continues to unsettle Othello and finally pushes him over the edge. Emilia presents a slow violence against class. Unsettled because of her place in society, Emilia struggles to be
seen and heard throughout the play. She finally is heard, as everything comes crashing down at the play’s end. Like The Tempest, Othello is also a play about how slow, deeply enmeshed war and environmental violence affects individuals.

We must become unsettled, willing to flex with our environments like the fenlanders. To hold fast to dry ground and stability is to allow shipwreck to utterly destroy us. To be open to the storms and rains of life allows magic and sea-change. Shakespeare presents his unsettled characters not as rogues and vagabonds who should be locked up, but deeply complex characters who have learned to move with their environment. We can learn from these characters, even if we do not model ourselves after their lives. Iago, Ariel, Rosalind, and Feste’s flexibility is something to desire. As we allow ourselves to be a bit less settled, we will be more open to the unsettled peoples we encounter.
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