“WHAT COUNTRY (FRIENDS) IS THIS?” asks the shipwrecked Viola as she comes ashore to Illyria in Twelfth Night. That question is neither raised, nor answered, in the play-text of The Tempest, although it has been asked by centuries of theatergoers, readers, and scholars determined to identify The Tempest’s island. Compounding this geographical challenge is the fact that the music and sounds audible in The Tempest offer confusing—if not downright contradictory—clues about the location of its island. Because its sounds ring uncannily familiar and foreign at once, this play calls into question its own geographic location as constructed through sonic phenomena. The Tempest layers sounds suggestive of points from around the globe in the performance space of the theater, both by experimenting with the creation of sounds of cultural otherness, and by attempting to “sound,” or explore, the depths of otherness.

As a counterpoint to the critical interpretation that The Tempest is a play primarily about the New World, I argue for its significant Eastern and classical resonances. Among these are oblique references at several moments in the play to Virgil’s Aeneid, Prospero’s soliloquy in act 5, scene 1, that recapitulates lines spoken by the Eastern witch Medea in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and Ariel’s music that echoes passages from Christopher Marlowe’s epyllion Hero and Leander. This paper will describe the Near East resonances of The Tempest in the first two examples of what Caliban calls the island’s “sweet aires” (TLN 1493). These scored musical pieces, “Come Unto These Yellow Sands” and “Full Fathom Five,” loudly echo Hero and Leander. Marlowe’s poem is set in and around the Hellespont that flows between Sestos, located on the Greco-Turkish shore, and Abydos, on the Asiatic coast. The Hellespont, much like
the island in *The Tempest*, marks the intersection of Europe and Asia, West and East.

It is a counterintuitive claim to suggest that the island of *The Tempest* has Eastern characteristics, and the doubtful nature of this statement is compounded by our twenty-first-century sense of definite geography. Logically, the island should be somewhere in the Mediterranean between Tunis and Italy, and near enough to where Prospero and Miranda might have landed after their exile from Milan. While the Italian nobles who are shipwrecked in the opening scene have been travelling across the Mediterranean from Claribel’s marriage in Tunis back home to Naples, the tempest reroutes their ship to the remote island on which Prospero and Miranda arrived years earlier. Here, the audience is aligned with Ferdinand when the invisible Ariel’s singing begins; like Ferdinand, we are unsure where this tempest has brought us. The music Ariel sings suggests that the Italian ship was blown eastward on its return voyage, especially if the audience members at Blackfriars were familiar with Marlowe’s popular *Hero and Leander*, first published in 1598 and later available in several other posthumous editions. Recognition of the Marlovian echoes could have prompted the audience to conclude that the tempest had redirected the characters toward the East, if not to the Hellespont itself.

The lyrics of “Come Unto These Yellow Sands” are imperative, drawing the shipwrecked Ferdinand onto the island:

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Come vnto these yellow sands,
and then take hands:
Curtysied when you haue, and kist
the wilde waues whist:
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(TLN 520–23)

The “yellow sands” to which Ferdinand is invited have several connections to the East. They might have subliminally evoked the exotic East Indian setting of Titania’s love idyll with her votaress in act 2, scene 1 of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; she terms this setting—perhaps in another Marlovian resonance—“Neptunes yellow sands” (TLN 502). Elisabetta Tarantino also recognizes echoes of Virgil’s *Aeneid* and of Arthur Golding’s translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in these “yellow sands,” a phrase found twice in Golding’s version (4.410, 575). Yet another echo may be heard between these opening lines of the musical air and lines from Mar-
lowe’s *Hero and Leander*. Hero describes her seaside tower as “Far from the towne[,] where all is whist and still, / Saue that the sea playing on yellow sand, / Sends forth a ratling murmure to the land” (C2v). The “sea” Hero describes is the Hellespont, a multivalent and multitemporal space, and one that features in Book 1 of the *Argonautika*. Hero’s tower is located at Sestos, an ancient Greek town on the modern Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, on the European side of the Hellespont. Abydos, on the Asiatic mainland, is across the Hellespont from Sestos and is where Leander resides. A liminal space between Europe and Asia, the Hellespont shares characteristics with the island in *The Tempest*, an island that also occupies an intermediate space among Europe, Asia, the Mediterranean, and perhaps even the New World.

Spatial location becomes even more disoriented in Ariel’s next song “Full Fathom Five.” The alleged death of Ferdinand’s father, Alonso, is described in poetic detail:

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Full fathom five thy Father lies,
Of his bones are Coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a Sea-change
Into something rich, & strange [.]  
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(TLN 539–44)

These lyrics offer an image of global metamorphosis through the sea’s transformation of Alonso’s Italian “bones” into tropical coral. But the Mediterranean seas also touch an Eastern shore, as Alonso’s optic pearls indicate. The “rich and strange” transformed pearl is suggestive of the opulent “orient pearl.” The *OED* defines this as “a pearl from the seas around India, as distinguished from those of less beauty found in European mussels; (hence, more generally) a brilliant or precious pearl.” “Pearles” may have also signaled the New World, for they appear in William Strachey’s *A True Reportory*, a well-known source linking the play to Bermuda. However, the pearl is featured most often in Shakespearean representations of eastward spaces; for example, “Her bed is India,” Troilus says of Cressida, and “there she lies, a Pearle,” in another play set near the convergent Hellespont (TLN 134). The melodic waters create in Alonso’s fictionalized body a “Sea-change” that incorporates skeletal coral and multidirectional pearls.

Echoes of Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* are audible in this air as
well: in describing the deep fathoms to which Neptune has pulled Leander, we find that

the ground

Was strewd with pearle, and in low corroll groues,
Sweet singing Meremaids, sported with their loues
On heapes of heauie gold, and tooke great pleasure,
To spurne in carelesse sort, the shipwracke treasure.

(D5v)

Shakespeare utilizes this same combination of “pearle” and “corroll” found at the bottom of Marlowe’s Hellespont to create the fabricated version of Alonso’s “shipwrecked,” drowned, and metamorphosed body submerged five fathoms under the sea. The echoes of Marlowe’s epyllion demonstrate a further uncanny effect of these airs in *The Tempest*: auditors who recognized Marlowe’s poem through Shakespeare’s “yellow sands,” “corall,” and “pearle” would have heard these words sung by Ariel in yet another reverberating echo of Marlowe’s poem. Ariel’s singing refashions Marlowe’s written poetry—read silently or aloud—into music that makes familiar text sound different when the lyrics are set to musical tones and rhythms. Ariel’s water-nymph consort of “spirits” enacts Marlowe’s “Sweet singing Meremaids” when they vocalize the bell-refrain to conclude “Full Fathom Five.” Moreover, the air ostensibly memorializing Alonso more accurately pays tribute to Christopher Marlowe as the ghost-like presence in this passage: it is not Alonso, after all, who suffers this sea-change. Rather Marlowe’s writing, which has not “faded,” is likewise transformed when Shakespeare echoes his poetry through Ariel’s songs.

Ariel’s two airs demonstrate that—like the construction of space in *The Tempest*—sound is also uncanny through its blending of familiar and foreign elements. Michel Serres recognizes the implicit connection between sound and space, and theorizes that sound has “a universal reach” through the vibrating soundwave. He argues for what he calls “global listening” because “the soundwave has immediate access to totality” through its wide-ranging, or “global” compass. I would like to propose that Serres’s apt phrase might be expanded to include listening to sounds that resonate from points around the worldly globe, as well as to soundwaves washing over audience members in spaces like the Globe Theatre. While the Globe may or may not have been a venue for *The Tem-
pest, its nomenclature echoes the fact that the Globe Theatre worked to perform the earthly globe. It did so, not only by presenting global locations (including Denmark, Italy, Illyria, Cyprus) and characters (like African Moors and Egyptian Queens), but also by importing real and imagined sounds of otherness to the domestic theater.

“Come Unto These Yellow Sands” and “Full Fathom Five” offer a “rich and strange” uncanny echo of Marlowe’s poem about the intermediary space of the Hellespont. The sung word “strange” further insists on the exotic location of the island. The lutenist Robert Johnson calls attention to the word “strange” by making it the musical climax of the piece in what is an early, if not the original, musical setting of “Full Fathom Five.” Strange is defined by the OED as indicative of foreignness: “Of persons, language, customs, etc.: Of or belonging to another country; foreign, alien” (1a), and “Situated outside one’s own land” (1b). The Tempest is both “rich,” due to its incorporation of passages from other possibly familiar texts, such as Marlowe’s Hero and Leander, and “strange,” as these citations are from texts about various and varied foreign lands. The Tempest suggests that each encounter in a contact zone space—whether in a strange land or in the theater itself—is an uncanny experience.

The Globe, like any other theater, is simultaneously a sonic laboratory in which strange and alien cultures are staged, while it is also a completely familiar, domestic playhouse, as when Prospero reminds us “Our Reuels now are ended” (TLN 1819). While this doubleness is uncanny, we move away from sounding otherness to something safer and more familiar in the task of returning home. And yet, the theater takes travelers on sonic journeys. Whether it creates an experience of Calibanesque “delight” (TLN 1493) or the Boatswain’s exasperation at hearing a “diuersitie of sounds, all horrible” (TLN 2223), the noise of the theater affects its audience. The Tempest uses sonic disorientation as the basis for its pervasive geographic disorientations because sound is at once internal and external to a body. Sound’s uncanny vibratory force moves bodies in directions, even directions we still attempt to navigate today. This experience simulates the experience of otherness in foreign locations, while exploring ways otherness might be sounded in the homely space of the London theater. The “noyses, / Sounds, and sweet aires” Caliban describes are orchestrated into “something rich and strange” indeed—both sonically and spatially—in The Tempest (TLN 1492–93).
Notes


2. The second edition of the poem, also published in 1598, was completed by George Chapman, who lengthened Marlowe’s original considerably. Three subsequent editions of the Marlowe-Chapman version followed (1600, 1606, and 1609) that predated The Tempest’s performance. The language of Marlowe’s poem—and not the Chapman additions—is echoed in Shakespeare’s play.


4. Citations from Marlowe’s Hero and Leander are from the 1598 version that does not contain Chapman’s additions. Christopher Marlowe, Hero and Leander (London: 1598). STC 17413. Accessed through the Folger LUNA collection. It is notable that the word “whist,” defined by the OED as “Silent, quiet, still, hushed; making no sound; free from noise or disturbance” (adj. 1a), appears in conjunction with “yellow sands” in both Marlowe’s and Shakespeare’s texts. The line from “Come Unto These Yellow Sands” that includes “whist” (TLN 523) is cited in the OED entry.

5. This is the definition for “pearl of orient n.,” listed under “orient, n. and adj.,” A. 1. b. “Pearl” was also used to refer to the pupil or lens of the eye; see OED “pearl,” n.1 A.1.1. a. Miriam Jacobson is also interested in the significance of orient pearls to Marlowe’s Hero and Leander; see Barbarous Antiquity: Reorienting the Past in the Poetry of Early Modern England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), especially 149–87.


7. Given the difference in posthumous publication dates of the two texts—
Marlowe’s in 1598 and Shakespeare’s in 1623—it is remarkable that the spellings of both “corrall” and “pearle” are identical in these passages. Although Edward Blount published Hero and Leander and was one of the publishers of the First Folio, this lexical uniformity between texts is unusual.

8. I am grateful to Diana Henderson for sharing this observation.


10. In “The Tempest’s Tempest at Blackfriars,” Andrew Gurr writes “The Tempest was the first play Shakespeare unquestionably wrote for the Blackfriars rather than the Globe”; see Shakespeare Survey Volume 41: Shakespearian Stages and Staging, ed. Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 92. It is well known that The Tempest was performed at the Blackfriars Theater, for an audience who may have been more familiar with Marlowe’s poetry than attendees of the public theater. The audience members experiencing this play likely had something of a similar response as the characters of the play: each perceives different aspects of the island.

11. The extant manuscript copy of “Full Fathom Five” was written by John Wilson, who attributes the tune to the well-known court lutenist Robert Johnson. This manuscript dates from 1660, nearly half a century after the play was initially staged. Folger MS V.a.411, fol. 11r, from the Folger LUNA collection.