

Onoma 53
Journal of the International Council of Onomastic Sciences

ISSN: 0078-463X; e-ISSN: 1783-1644
Journal homepage: https://onomajournal.org/

Naming as art in Shakespeare's *Tempest*

DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/7

Grant W. Smith

Department of English
Eastern Washington University
Patterson Hall 229i
Cheney, WA 99004-2430
USA
gsmith@ewu.edu

To cite this article: Smith, Grant W. 2018. Naming as art in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. *Onoma* 53, 93–106. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/7

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/7

© *Onoma* and the author.

Naming as art in Shakespeare's *Tempest*

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1) to argue the potentiality of *symbolic* meaning in all names, and 2) to show how Shakespeare's names had *symbolic* meanings that were generally accessible to the audiences of his time. The specific subject of this analysis is *The Tempest* (hereafter *Tmp*). It was placed first within the First Folio collection of Shakespeare's plays to represent his artistic vision, and its names and references illustrate that vision. They are more varied in type than usual in Shakespeare's plays and are summative of his career. I shall distinguish six general (and sometimes overlapping) types: generic references, topical references, figurative epithets and sobriquets, references to classical mythology, etymological (and phonetically suggestive) references, and names repeated from earlier plays. This last type reverses the themes with which the names were previously associated, and the reversal of themes illustrates the irony typical of Shakespeare's artistic vision.

Keywords: Signs, reference, symbolism.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

La denomination en tant qu'art dans *Tempest* (*Tempête*) de Shakespeare

Résumé : L'objectif de cet article est double : 1) arguer que tout nom est potentiellement porteur de valeur *symbolique*, et 2) démontrer que les noms chez Shakespeare étaient porteurs de valeurs *symboliques*, de manière générale, accessibles aux spectateurs de son époque. L'objet précis de cette analyse est *The Tempest* (*La Tempête*) (ci-après *Tmp*). Elle a figuré, tout d'abord, dans l'édition First Folio (Premier Folio) du recueil des pièces de Shakespeare avec pour dessein de représenter sa vision artistique, et les noms et références présents illustrent bien cette vision. Ils proviennent de catégories plus diverses qu'à l'ordinaire dans les pièces de Shakespeare et récapitulent sa carrière. Je distinguerai six catégories générales (et parfois superposées) : les références génériques, les références thématiques, les épithètes et les sobriquets figuratifs, les références à la mythologie classique, les références étymologiques (et phonétiquement suggestives) et les noms repris de pièces antérieures. Cette dernière catégorie renverse les thèmes auxquels les noms étaient auparavant associés, et ce revers de thèmes illustre bien l'ironie caractéristique de la vision artistique de Shakespeare.

Mots-clés : Signes, référence, symbolisme.

Namensgebung als Kunstform in Shakespeares *Tempest*

Zusammenfassung: Dieser Artikel hat zweierlei Absichten: 1) dafür zu argumentieren, dass alle Namen *symbolische* Bedeutung tragen können, sowie 2) zu zeigen, inwiefern die von Shakespeare gewählten Namen symbolische Bedeutungen hatten, die für das Publikum seiner Zeit generell verständlich gewesen sind. Meine Analyse bezieht sich spezifisch auf *The Tempest* (in Folge *Tmp*). Das Stück wurde zunächst stellvertretend für Shakespeares poetische Kunst in die Ausgabe des First Folio aufgenommen, und die im Stück verwendeten Namen und Bezüge zeugen für diese Kunst. Sie sind vielfältiger in ihrer Art als an anderer Stelle in Shakespeares Werk und als ein Resümee seiner literarischen Laufbahn zu lesen. Ich unterscheide hier sechs allgemeine (teilweise überlappende) Typen: generelle Bezüge, topische Bezüge, bildliche Bei- und Spitznamen, Bezüge auf die Mythologie der Antike, etymologische (und phonetisch motivierte) Bezüge, sowie Namen, die aus früheren seiner Stücke wiederholt werden. Dieser letzte Typus dreht die Themen, mit denen die Namen zuvor in Verbindung gebracht wurden, in deren Gegenteil um, und diese Umkehrung ist ein Beispiel für jene Ironie, die Shakespeares poetische Kunst auszeichnet.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Zeichen, Bezug, Symbol.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

Onoma 53 (2018), 93–106. DOI: 10.34158/ONOMA.53/2018/7

Naming as art in Shakespeare's *Tempest*

GRANT W. SMITH

1. Introduction

I presented this paper at the annual meeting of the American Name Society, January 3–6, 2019. It is one in a series of analyses of all of Shakespeare's comedies that I hope to offer in book form. I focus here on his last play, *The Tempest* (hereafter *Tmp*, with references to the *Riverside* edition), as my example.

The purpose of this paper is 1) to restate views I've previously expressed on the potentiality of *symbolic* meaning in all names, and 2) to show specifically how Shakespeare's names usually carried *symbolic* meanings. Two corollaries will also be pursued: 1) that his meanings should not be assumed to have been private or esoteric but generally accessible to the audiences of his time, and 2) that scholars should pursue the simplest and most obvious interpretations possible.

This last play illustrates most mechanisms of meaning in Shakespeare's names, and I shall try to distinguish six basic (sometimes overlapping) types of reference and name meaning – i.e., 1) generic references, 2) topical references, 3) tag names, epithets, and sobriquets, 4) references to classical mythology, 5) names from the literature of his time, especially those repeated from his earlier plays, and 6) etymological (and phonetically suggestive) coinages. The types of naming that we see in this last play are varied but more literary than we see in his earlier plays. Nonetheless, in the range of types, *Tmp* is onomastically summative of his career.

2. A brief sketch of *symbolic* meaning

Among philosophers, names are commonly discussed as fixed, *indexical* designations of individual referents (e.g., J. S. Mill 1843 and S. Kripke 1980). However, our use of language is fundamentally *symbolic*; an act of reference is the quintessential use of language; and the *symbolic* meanings of names can be most clearly seen in the figurative language of imaginative literature, especially in Shakespeare.

In terms of semiotic theory (à la C. S. Peirce 1897 & 1910), *symbolic* meaning arises when a *sign* evokes two or more *indexical* referents in the

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

mind of an interpreter. For example, we may hypothesize that Stephano's epithet for Caliban, "moon-calf," is a *sign* that evokes at least two images in our minds: 1) a specific character on stage, and 2) a newborn calf driven by its bestial (sublunary) interests. The meaning is complex and *symbolic* insofar as the epithet evokes attributes/qualities that are presumably shared by Caliban and a newborn calf, and his ancillary subservience to Stephano as the "Man i' th' Moon" and presumed source of nourishment, i.e., the wine.

Of course, the *symbolic* sharing of attributes is only partial and differs at least a little in the mind of each and every member of the audience. It is primarily the attributes of the *secondary referent* (the "moon-calf") that are partially carried over to our interpretation of the character on stage, which I like to call the *immediate referent*. This transfer of meaning is very similar to Max Black's description of how meaning works in a metaphor, i.e., how attributes of the *vehicle* are partially carried over to the *tenor* (1962: 38–47). The association of attributes and the sharing of attributes/qualities may be illustrated in a simplistic diagram of *symbolic* discourse:

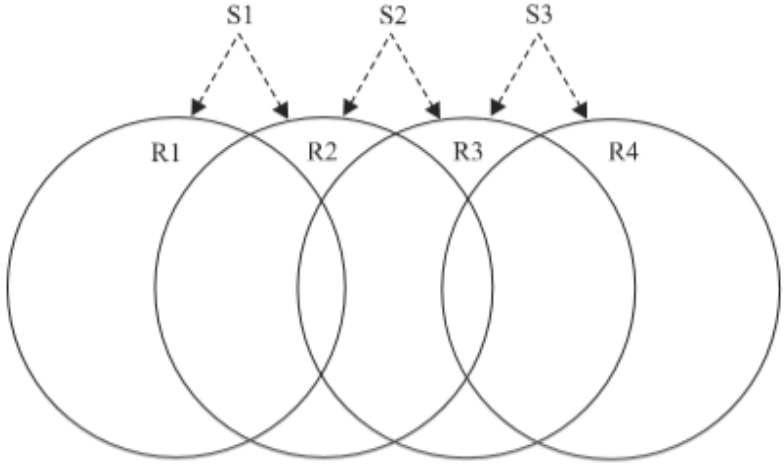


Figure 1: A simplistic diagram of *symbolic* discourse

Hypothetically, names, nouns, epithets, and most words are *signs*, e.g., S1, S2, and S3, that are linked to one another by the grammar of language, and each *sign* can be understood, hypothetically, to refer to two or more referents. The circles represent a variable range of attributes (semantic domains) of the referents R1, R2, R3, and R4. The referents are thereby understood in terms of one another, and the combined meaning of the *signs* is *relational*, and thereby *symbolic*, rather than a chain of single, *indexical* references.

That is to say, our minds accumulate images throughout our lives that can be evoked by *signs* (*iconic*, *indexical*, and/or *symbolic*), and language, by its grammar, links the *signs* and their images together as sets of relationships.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

The relationships can be described in terms of figurative language – metaphor, metonymy, irony, and allegory – but I shall not pursue such descriptions in this analysis.

In all forms of discourse, the grammatical links between the *signs* are stronger and more controlling of meaning than any *indexical* references these *signs* might have to specific denotata or any presumed reality.

Unlike *indexical* linkage, *symbolic* linkage (and its *relational* meaning) has unlimited variety because anything can be related to anything else within the structural limits of language, especially in the poetic use of language. Names, or their parts, always have prior uses, which might, and often are, understood as *secondary references*. Our main job as onomasts is to trace the variety of attributes that might be suggested by such other uses in addition to their *immediate reference* at hand. And we do it a lot.

In short, meaning is a product of the imagination, and language makes all people "such stuff / As dreams are made on" (4.1.156–157). What I hope to show now are the types of references Shakespeare makes to characters and places, how most of these basic types evoke symbolic meaning in addition to their act of designation, and why such meaning was usually very clear to the audiences of his time.

3. Generic references

Shakespeare refers to many characters simply in terms that describe their generic functions, e.g., as "messengers" or "servingmen." These characters are usually essential in forwarding the action in small ways, but initial references to them generally describe their functions in appellative form, without *secondary references* or relational meanings beyond the definition of the function.

However, Shakespeare often adds a name to a generic character after an initial reference, and then develops the character. Dogberry, for example, in *Ado*, is referred to as "Constable" many times but only once as *Dogberry*, which was almost certainly a scatological reference to common experience ("topical" in type, as described below) and meant as ridicule.

Tmp has relatively few generic references in total number, and in no case does Shakespeare give them given additional names, as with *Dogberry*. In fact, the paucity of generic references enhances the preponderance of mythological references, word play, and the literary context of the play.

However, a few generic characters do in fact contribute to this play's thematic development. In the opening scene we see a "Ship-Master," a "Boatswain," and "Mariners" struggling to guide their ship amidst a storm. These generic characters have no secondary references, but they reflect an obvious criticism of the snobbish nobles. The "Boatswain" challenges

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

Gonzalo to calm the raging storm: "You are a councilor; if you can command these elements to silence […] we will not hand a rope more. Use your authority" (1.1.20–22). His words poke fun at political power, which usually delights any audience.

4. Topical references

Topical references, as in the example of *Dogberry*, are essentially associative. They transfer partial meaning from action or phenomena that is external to the action of the play itself and is assumed to be common knowledge. By common knowledge I mean to include the types of information accessible to Shakespeare's general audience, which was minimally literate. I will discuss literary references below.

For example, the name *Stephano* might be a reference to John Florio's Italian-English dictionary first published in 1598 (*A Worlde of Wordes*), in which the word *stefano* is defined as a jocular reference to a man's belly. However, few in the contemporary audience would know Florio's dictionary. The name alludes more obviously to a popular song.

As Stephano begins to don the finery laid out by Ariel, Trinculo cries out, "O King Stephano! O peer! O worthy Stephano" (4.1.222), paraphrasing a ballad satirizing kingly pride. The ballad is sung by Iago in *Ot* and begins, "King Stephen was and-a worthy peer" (2.3.89 ff). Shakespeare obviously knew the song well, and his mockery of pretentiousness is clear in all his plays, as well as here. Although idolized by Caliban, this king is an absurdity, which is illustrated by the *secondary reference* to the popular song.

Other topical references include Ariel's reference to the "dew" of "the still-vex'd Bermoothes" (1.2.229). The *secondary reference* would be the recently reported shipwreck of the *Sea Adventure*, and the surprising survival of its entire crew. The story was described in many first-hand reports, but was also widely known. In this play, Ariel has prevented any harm to Alonso's ship and its crew, and the analogy to current events affirms Ariel's magical powers and the comedic promise of a happy ending.

Similarly, the name *Milan* is both a place name and a part of Prospero's title, *Duke of Milan*. However, the city had long been viewed as the most powerful duchy in Italy, renowned as well for its "liberal arts" (1.2.73). Thus, Shakespeare's use of the name evokes the cultural symbolism known to his general audience, and Miranda is properly awed when Prospero explains his true status in the world.

Even the dog names refer to common experience; i.e., Elizabethan dog names commonly described their size, color, or behavioral pattern. Thus, when Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban pilfer Prospero's wardrobe, Ariel sends spirits in shapes of dogs named *Mountain*, *Silver*, *Fury*, and *Tyrant* to

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

chase them away (4.1.257).

Shakespeare also uses common names to refer to members of the commoner class. In his drinking song, Stephano tells how, as sailors, they all "Lov'd Mall, Meg, and Marian, and Margery" (48). These four names were typical of the commoner class. Also, *Mall* might be an allusion to a well-known case of Mall Fowler, who along with her lover was convicted of trying to frame her husband for treason. Theater goers would also know *Moll Cut-Purse*, a nickname made famous by Dekker & Middleton in *The Roaring Girl* (1607–1610).

5. Tag names, epithets and sobriquets

The *symbolic* meanings of tag names (*redende Namen*), epithets, and fanciful sobriquets are evoked by descriptions of well-known phenomena. The descriptions are stated in simple, lexical terms, and the phenomena function as *secondary references*. Such names resemble topical references but are essentially descriptive rather than associative.

However, just as topical references do not draw exact equations, the literal meanings of these descriptions are not the exact meanings either intended or conveyed. Instead, only some attributes of these descriptions are applied to the *immediate referent*. The actual meaning is, in fact, partial and *relational*, and thereby *symbolic*.

Shakespeare coins many tag names for his minor characters, but relatively few in *Tmp*. The best example is the name *Trinculo*. The name can be traced to the Italian word *trincáre*, which meant "to drinke, to quaffe, to bib or tipple merily and healthes" (Florio 1611). However, the Italian word was borrowed from the German word *trinken*, which is obviously related to the English word *drink*.

Thus, it seems likely that Shakespeare's audience would infer the literal description of the name meaning 'one who drinks' based simply on language sounds. Of course, the character would also act drunk. When answering Alonso about his inebriation, Trinculo refers to his drunkenness as "will never out of my bones" (5.1.283). In *Ado*, the name *Borachio* means 'drunkard' in Spanish, and the character tells his buddy Conrade that he is "a true drunkard" (3.3.104). Thus, his name, words, and action reinforce the same meaning.

Epithets work in a similarly descriptive way. Caliban is repeatedly called "Monster" and "Moon-Calf," as noted above. Prospero also addresses Caliban as "Hag-seed" (1.2.365). *Hag* was a common synonym for *witch* (e.g., *1H6* 3.2.52 and *Rom* 1.4.92), and so Caliban is described as a seed left by the witch, Sycorax.

The epithet describes Caliban as fundamentally bestial, i.e., non-human,

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

and thereby shows Prospero's feeling that he is beyond redemption, "on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188–189). However, Caliban appears repentant in his last speech, unlike Antonio or Sebastian, which reinforces the complexity and irony of Prospero's epithet and of epithets in general.

6. References to classical mythology

None of the primary characters in *Tmp* have names drawn from classical mythology, but the characters themselves use many such references to give symbolic meaning to what they say. Also, Prospero calls forth an array of classical spirits to display his art. The great number of such references not only enhance the literary tone of the play, but also display themes that are clearly moralistic.

In his description of an ideal government, Gonzalo, whom Prospero refers to as "good" and "Holy," is ridiculed by Antonio for referring to Dido as "widow Dido" (2.1.77), and Sebastian jumps in to add that Gonzalo might as well have "said 'widower Aeneas' too" (80). Antonio and Sebastian then extend their mockery by repeating (and thereby referring to) the salacious puns used by Dekker & Middleton in the popular play, *The Roaring Girl* (3.2.69 ff), especially with the words "die" and "do."

The mockery pursued by Antonio and Sebastian refers is Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Dido and Aeneas become illicit lovers in spite of Dido's vow of chastity. Antonio belittles Gonzalo as a prude, but Gonzalo's remarks refer instead to a Renaissance view of Dido that emerged in contrast to Virgil's account.

According to Renaissance writers (e.g., Petrarch and Boccaccio) who made the effort to research Virgil's original sources, Dido never met Aeneas, was in fact a model of chastity, an exemplary ruler, and, with the given name *Elissa*, later became seen as an analogue for Queen Elizabeth. Thus, the references in this passage show a complex vision typical of Shakespeare. Gonzalo's perspective is positive and moralistic, while the perspective of Sebastian and Antonio is actually less informed, more cynical, and amoral.

The moralistic use of classical references is also reflected in the names *Ceres*, *Dis*, *Hymen*, *Iris*, *Juno*, the *Naiades*, *Phoebus*, *Venus*, and *Paphos*. Prospero admonishes Ferdinand not to indulge his lust for Miranda before their "full and holy rite be minist'red" (17), or "discord shall bestrew / The union of your bed" (20–21).

"Hymen's lamps" will supposedly burn clear for marriages that will be happy, or smoky to predict unhappiness. Ferdinand swears restraint: "Phoebus' steeds" will become lame before he will despoil his wedding day (4.1.30). The mythological references contrast moral fortitude with the well-known sexual pursuits of the sun god.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

Prospero then invokes a masque to celebrate the betrothal of Miranda and Ferdinand. First Iris and then Juno, the protector of wives and marriage, ask Ceres, goddess of the grain harvest and the generative power of nature, to appear and give her blessing. Ceres agrees, provided only that Venus and Cupid do not attend.

Iris assures her that Venus will not attend and that "*no bed-right shall be paid* / *Till Hymen's torch be lighted*" (4.1.96–97). Only then does Ceres promise, "*Scarcity and want shall shun you;* / *Ceres' blessing so is on you*" (116–117). Thus, mythological references evoke a simple moral lesson, that prosperity, symbolized by Ceres, requires sexual restraint.

References to Neptune and Jove also assert the power of art over nature. Ariel, for example, boasts of out-doing nature; the conjured storm was greater than "the most mighty Neptune / Seem to besiege" the ship (1.2.204–205) and is more frightening than "Jove's lightning" (1.2.201).

Later, Prospero claims that his art controls nature. He orders the spirits to "Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple / Some vanity of mine art" (4.1.40–41). By his art, he has commanded the elements, and "rifted Jove's stout oak / With his own bolt" (5.1.44–45).

Neptune and Jove are the most powerful of the gods, but references to them show that the power of art, powered by the imagination, transcends nature. The classical gods are just artistic personifications. It is their evocation by the artist that gives meaning to nature.

7. Literary references and names repeated from earlier plays

Tmp has a literary tone in part because most of the names are traceable to the literature of Shakespeare's own time, and importantly to his own earlier plays. Scholars have noted many possible sources for his names, but it is important to recognize that symbolic meaning depends on clear thematic relevance, even though inexact and figurative.

Many names appearing in *Tmp* can be found in the contemporary literature of exploration. It is often noted, for example, that *Alonso*, *Ferdinand*, *Sebastian*, *Anthonio*, *Gonzalo*, and *Setebos* all appear in Richard Eden's *History of Travaile* (1577), but these and other *Tmp* names can also be found in examples of preceding literature, such as in Eden's earlier chronicle of Magellan's voyage (*The Decades of the Newe World of West India*, 1555), in the detailed journal of Francis Fletcher, the chaplain aboard Drake's circumnavigation (1577–1580), and in numerous similar works in French and Italian (such as Pigafetta's narration of Magellan's voyage, noted by C. Frey 1979).

There are many striking coincidences of names in some of the contemporary literature, but most fail to add thematic meaning to the play.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

For example, the historical narrative of Philippe de Comines, *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XI et de Charles VIII* (available in Thomas Danett's English version of 1601) was widely read. It briefly describes a King of Naples named *Alphonso* (often spelled *Alonso*), whose son named *Ferdinand* gave support to a Duke of Genoa named *Prosper Adorno*. Although the names seem to coincide, the attributes of the referents are not shared in a way that is thematically consistent with this play.

At the same time, a name might acquire attributes from general use. For example, the name *Ferdinand* would have seemed an appropriate name for any promising young prince in any play simply because it was, in fact, the most frequently used name for European kings, 23 in all. Thus, many *secondary references* were possible, and Shakespeare may have used this name without any specific analogue, but simply because of its common association with royalty. In this sense, it is a particular that evokes the generality, the *signifier* of an idea, as Saussure might say.

The most obvious literary references in *Tmp* are to Shakespeare's earlier plays, especially the names *Antonio* and *Sebastian*. *Antonio* (spelled *Anthonio* throughout the First Folio) appears more frequently than any other name for different characters in all of Shakespeare's plays (*TGV*, *MV*, *Ado*, *TN*, *Tmp*, *JC* and *Ant*, plus references in *Shr* and *AWW*), and in all cases the name is associated with themes of friendship and brotherly love.

This consistent association suggests that the name has an earlier *secondary reference* in the literature of his time, and the most likely source would have been "The Life of Antony," a short biography by the most famous of "Church Fathers," St. Athanasius (297–373 CE), bishop of Alexandria, the leading opponent of Arianism at the Council of Nicea, "doctor of the Church," and much revered "Father of Orthodoxy" (White 1998: 24). "The Life of Antony" was by far the most widely read writing of Athanasius throughout the middle ages. It praises St. Antony (251–356 CE) as a friend, a counselor to his fellow Christians, and wherever Antony went, people "welcomed him as a son, others as a brother" (Athanasius 196.4).

Athanasius explicitly associates the name *Antony* with the very idea of Christian brotherhood, and in Shakespeare's earlier plays, this thematic association seems clear, especially in *MV* and *TN*. *TN* is illustrative because a character named *Antonio* is paired with another named *Sebastian* as an example of friendship. Antonio rescues Sebastian from a shipwreck and loans him money, a gesture of friendship that we also see in *MV*.

In *Tmp* the same two names are again associated with friendship and brotherly love, but the relationship of the two characters and their thematic meanings are totally reversed. In *TN*, Sebastian is the dominant character, but in *Tmp*, Antonio is dominant. In *TN*, both are virtuous, but in *Tmp*, both are malicious. Antonio has overthrown his brother Prospero and now convinces

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

Sebastian to murder his brother and usurp the crown of Naples.

Of course, they fail because of Ariel's magic and Prospero's forgiveness, but their actions and attitudes show exactly what friendship and brotherly love should *not* be. Antonio has "Expell'd remorse and nature" (5.1.76), and Prospero tells Miranda, "mark me, that a brother should / Be so perfidious! – he whom next thyself / Of all the world I lov'd" (1.2.67–69).

Thus, Shakespeare has used his earlier writing as a *secondary reference* of names in this last play in order to show the ironic perversion/obversion of friendship and brotherly love. The names represent a tour de force of figurative language and symbolic meaning, and are a clear example of Shakespeare's artistic vision.

8. Etymological (and phonetically suggestive) coinages

Of course, the meanings of names are most *symbolic* when they are most figurative, most complex, and thereby most evocative of potential references. Shakespeare often plays with languages to evoke a *symbolic* idea from unusual words or word parts.

An obvious example is the name *Miranda*. *Tmp* is a play about art and ideas, and Miranda is a deliberately crafted idealization of physical beauty and moral sentiment. Shakespeare emphasizes the role of art throughout the play, and Miranda's name points directly to her thematic significance (much like the names of central heroines in Shakespeare's other late romances, e.g., *Marina* and *Perdita*).

It is derived rather obviously from the Latin *mirandus*, meaning 'to be wondered at,' and to make the derivation (and sense of artifice) clear to an undereducated audience, Ferdinand addresses her first not with a name but with the phrase, "O you wonder!" (1.2.427). When she finally tells him her name, Ferdinand immediately emphasizes the etymology, "Admir'd Miranda, / Indeed the top of admiration! worth / What's dearest to the world" (3.1.37–39).

Thus, the name is an etymological coinage pointing specifically to the idealization of the character and to the necessity of art in ordering or comprehending the natural world. The name itself is an artistic creation.

Similarly, there are many possible sources for the name *Prospero*, but the clearest and best reflection of the play's themes can be found in the etymology of Prospero's name. The Latin adjective *prosperus* means 'fortunate,' 'favorable,' 'lucky,' or 'prosperous;' the word *prospero* means quite simply 'I cause to succeed;' and Prospero is certainly the character who causes things to succeed.

Prospero, in addition to being the rightful duke of Milan, is a scholar of divinity and practitioner of white magic. Unlike black magic, which conjures nature for wicked ends, as Sycorax did, white magic could presumably use

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

occult knowledge for doing Good in the world, seeking spiritual as well as material ends. This distinction was a familiar part of Neo-Platonic philosophy, and Prospero's magic is clearly an "*Art*" as the Neo-Platonists would have referred to the mastery of occult sciences in the early 17th century. Prospero's books, robe, and staff say as much.

However, in a more meaningful sense Prospero's art is the mastery of theater and the creation of illusion. On three specific occasions, Prospero creates theatrical presentations to further his ultimate goals of forgiveness and reconciliation. The storm itself with which this play begins is also an illusion. Even though "The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch" (3), Prospero assures Miranda, "There's no harm done" (1.2.15).

In the end, Prospero has resisted his own lust for revenge, led Alonso to repentance, matched the lovers, united rival kingdoms, and released his servants. Paradoxically, this success is partial, tentative, and potentially illusory. Antonio remains impassive, suggesting the continuing presence of evil and the essential ambiguity of the illusion.

Interestingly, Shakespeare is most playful with language and most evocative with the dark side of life, i.e., with the uncivilized and mysterious, which we can see most clearly in his coinages of *Caliban* and *Sycorax*.

A common argument is that *Caliban* is an anagram for the word *cannibal* because Gonzalo's idealistic phrasing (2.1.143 ff) parallels Montaigne's in the essay, "Of Cannibals." It is often added that the word *cannibal* is itself derived from *Caribe*, the name of a fierce Caribbean tribe, and from which the toponym *Caribbean* is derived (as noted by Davis & Frankforter 2004: 75).

However, if Shakespeare intended a Caribbean association, it is not reflected elsewhere in the thematic structure of this play. Caliban's island is clearly in the Mediterranean, somewhere between Naples and the northern coast of Africa, from which Alonso and his party are returning, and from which Sycorax was banished when pregnant with Caliban.

Thus, the plot clearly assumes a Mediterranean association and/or classical analogues. We might speculate that Caliban's name is an echo of *Calibia*, a district on the Africa coast and a town near Tunis, or of *Calabria*, a province on the toe of Italy. However, these geographical associations would have conjured little thematic meaning for Shakespeare's general audience.

Caliban is thematically important insofar as he represents the bestial aspects of human nature in a drama about the relative merits of Art and Nature. Prospero insists that Caliban is not fully human. He was "got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam" (1.2.321–322) and is repeatedly referred to as a "monster." His presumed deficit is moral, specifically lacking Prospero's "nobler reason" (5.1.26). As an amoral "savage," Caliban resembles other examples in Western literature (e.g., the "salvuage man" in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*).

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

Shakespeare never hints at any cannibalism in Caliban's behavior, but the poetic sounds of his name, nonetheless, seem to evoke vague associations with the idea—but not just from the New World. That is to say, Shakespeare seems to have been much more in tune with the Old World, but may have sought complex phonetic allusions to heighten the feeling that Caliban is a symbolic representative of raw nature, embodying the elements of earth and water, and little improved by civil law or art.

Shakespeare's coinage of *Sycorax* emphasizes his thematic focus on traditional culture. The character never appears on stage but is described much like other witches in Western literature. Like Circe, Sycorax was banished to a Mediterranean island, and like both Circe and Medea, Sycorax came from Colchis on the Black Sea, a presumed center for witchcraft and the region of the Chalybeates (accused of cannibalism by Virgil and Pliny) and from the Coraxi tribe. Also, Prospero's description of Sycorax resembles Ovid's description of Medea (e.g., compare, *Met.* 7.2 and *Tmp* 5.1.270).

The name itself has no specific *secondary references* that are unmistakably clear in previous literature, but it seems to suggest mythological references and/or imaginative word-play. The last two syllables of the name might easily associate the character with the ruthless Coraxi tribe on the Black Sea, and the first syllable might associate her with Scylla, the she-monster who terrorized the straits of Messina.

Such references would have conveyed little meaning to Shakespeare's general audience. It seems more likely to me that he simply stretched his limited grasp of Greek for sounds and references with exotic and occult associations. The Greek word for 'sow' was *sys*, and the word for 'raven' was *corax*. Both animals were associated with black magic (in contrast to Prospero's white magic), and all the syllables sound alien. Thus, as with the name *Caliban*, Shakespeare may have avoided any specific equivalency but to have sought raspy syllables to associate this name with negative attributes.

9. Conclusion

I have tried here to illustrate the general way in which *signs* can function symbolically by evoking multiple referents at the same time. Names are a type of *sign*, and their symbolic potentiality can be seen most clearly in literature, especially in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's names often refer to multiple referents in his plays, in the common experiences of his audience, and in previous literature. I have tried to distinguish six types of reference in his last play, *Tmp*. Although this play does not include examples of all types, its names illustrate his rapport with his audience, the range of his imagination, and the importance of symbolic meaning.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)

References

Athanasius St. 1998. *Life of Antony* 3. Trans. by C. White. London: Penguin Books.

Black, Max. 1962. *Models and metaphors: Studies in language and philosophy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

Davis, J. Madison. & Frankforter, Daniel A. 2004. *The Shakespeare name dictionary*. New York: Routledge.

Dekker, Thomas & Middleton, T. 2011. *The Roaring Girl* (1611). New York: W. W. Norton. (Norton Critical Edition, ed. by Jennifer Panek.)

John Florio's Italian-English dictionary of 1611 (*A Worlde of Wordes*). (http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/florio/) (Accessed 2011-09-21.)

Frey, Charles. 1979. *The Tempest* and the New World. *SQ* 30(1), 29–41.

Kripke, Saul. 1980. *Naming and necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Mill, John S. 1973. *A system of logic.* In Robson, J.M. (ed.), *Collected works of John Stuart Mill*, *Vol. VII*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Peirce, C. S. 1955. Logic as semiotic: The Theory of Signs. In Buchler, J. (ed.), *The philosophical writings of Peirce (1897, 1903)*, 98–119. New York: Dover Books.

Shakespeare, William. 1997. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, second edition. Edited by G. B. Evans, Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

BDD-A31180 © 2018 International Council of Onomastic Sciences
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:44:44 UTC)