

Prof. John Watkins, University of Minnesota

Marriage Diplomacy on an Island Somewhere between Naples, Tunis, and Peru

Tuesday, May 2nd, 2023

12.15-1.45 pm

On Zoom

(link will be send closer to the event)

Abstract: Scholars have often noted the confused geography of Prospero's island. Although presumably situated somewhere between Naples and Tunis, the island owes as much to voyagers' accounts of the "still-vex'd Bermoothes" as it does to any Mediterranean source. This paper examines *The Tempest* as a response to yet another set of geographical coordinates, the world configured by centuries of interdynastic marriages that wove the nobility of Europe into a vast, often dysfunctional, family. The backstory of Antonio's treachery against his brother Prospero engages the history of some of Europe's most fractious marital alliances, those linking the Milanese Sforzas to the Aragonese kings of Naples.

Ferdinand's courtship of Miranda offers a fantasy alternative to those marriages, but one that drains interdynastic marriage of its diplomatic function. At the same time, the story of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda engages an emerging debate in sixteenth-century diplomatic theory: the question of whether traditional diplomatic strategies such as arranged marriages might work in a transoceanic context with the indigenous peoples of the Americas.



Bio: John Watkins is a distinguished McKnight University Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, where he holds affiliate appointments in History, Medieval Studies, and Italian Studies. With Kay Reyerson and Patricia Lorcin, he co-founded the Minnesota Research Collaborative on the Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa. Watkins is the author of several books and numerous articles dealing with problems of historiography; cultural, political and economic exchanges between premodern England and the Mediterranean; diplomacy; and the classical and medieval underpinnings of modernity: *The Specter of Dido: Spenser and Virgilian Epic* (Yale, 1995); *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England* (Cambridge, 2002); *After Lavinia: A Literary History of Premodern Marriage Diplomacy* (Cornell, 2017), and with historian Carole Levin, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds: National and Transnational Identity in the Elizabethan Age* (2009). He has held fellowships from the American Philosophical Society, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.