The Weitz Center for Creativity’s inaugural production of William Shakespeare’s The Tempest will take place 400 years to the week from the play’s first performance in November of 1611. Shakespeare and his company, the King’s Men, had only recently gained access to the indoor Blackfriars theatre in London, and were themselves exploring the possibilities of a new performance space.

Favorite Themes of Shakespeare’s, including family, revenge, redemption, art, magic, and theatre itself vie for dominance in The Tempest, which almost uniquely in the canon has a plot entirely of his own devising. The play also explores ideas about discovery, conquest, colonialism, and government, drawing on a variety of classical and contemporary sources, including Erasmus’ Naufragium (“The Shipwreck”); Ovid’s Metamorphoses; William Strachey’s eyewitness account of the Sea Venture shipwreck; and Montaigne’s essay “On Cannibals.”

Like the Vallard Atlas displayed here, The Tempest survives on the one hand as a piece of history, a fixed window into a time when magic was as relevant as science. However, like the images of Caliban on the walls around you, The Tempest has also evolved as our culture has: As both colonization and an awareness of its consequences became more widespread, the play’s portrayal of native/colonist relations emerged as ever more relevant. Just as the space race was beginning, The Tempest’s themes of journey and discovery resonated with a curious and apprehensive population, as exemplified by the 1956 film Forbidden Planet. In the 1970s, when Carleton students were staging the college’s only previous Tempest production, the charged political climate of that decade found expression in the play’s treatment of government and politics.

Throughout the Play’s History Shakespeare’s words have continued to resonate; stretches of them are so familiar that we barely remember their origin, finding them as we do in television, music, book titles, and even everyday items such as bookends. The artifacts displayed in this exhibition allow a glimpse of that remarkable evolutionary history and their breadth and variety reflect the diversity of the creative responses that Shakespeare’s work has inspired.

At the End of The Tempest, Miranda, seeing arrayed before her a range of people the likes of which she has never encountered – all strange, different, beautiful, and flawed – shouts, with joy and wonder, “Oh brave new world, that has such people in’t!” And so, as Carleton embarks on new journeys of discovery, as students, professors, and the wider community venture into the college’s new pedagogic and creative spaces, it is entirely fitting that Shakespeare’s final masterpiece is our starting point as we set off into the brave new world of the Weitz Center for Creativity.