The Tempest is far more closely tied to the New World than any other Shakespeare play. Some modern scholars see the story of Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel as a metaphor for the strained relationships between English colonists and peoples of other races, including local inhabitants and imported slaves.

But The Tempest most likely has another connection to American history, too. Most researchers believe that Shakespeare was inspired to write this story of a violent storm and subsequent shipwreck by accounts of a real tempest—a savage storm that struck an English fleet sailing for Jamestown in 1609. The passengers and crew of the fleet’s flagship, the Sea Venture, were stranded for months on a deserted island in the Bermudas, during which time they were believed to be lost at sea. Although The Tempest is above all a work of the imagination, Shakespeare weaves through it many details from accounts of this storm and the castaways’ life on the island, as well as reports from Jamestown and the earlier English colony at Roanoke.


A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (1588)
Thomas Hariot - From “Of the nature and manners of the People”

IT resteth I speake a word or two of the naturall inhabitants, their natures and maners, leaving large discourse thereof untill time more convenient hereafter: nowe only so farre forth, as that you may know, how that they in respect of troubling our inhabiting and planting, are not to be feared; but that they shall have cause both to feare and love vs, that shall inhabite wth them.

They are a people clothed with loose mantles made of Deere skins, & aprons of the same rounde about their middles; all els naked; of such a difference of statures only as wee in England; having no edge tooles or weapons of yron or steele to offend vs withall, neither know they how to make any: those weapons they have, are onlie bowes made of Witch hazle, & arrowes of reeds; flat edged truncheons also of wood about a yard long, neither have they any thing to defend themselues but targets made of barks; and some armours made of stickes wickered together with thread.

Their townes are but small, & neere the sea coast but few, some containing but 10 or 12.houses: some 20. the greatest that we have seene have bene but of 30 houses: if they be walled it is only done with barks of trees made fast to stakes, or els with poles onely fixed upright and close one by another.

Their houses are made of small poles made fast at the tops in rounde forme after the maner as is vsed in many arbories in our gardens of England, in most townes couered with barkes, and in some with artificiall mattes made of long rushes; from the
In some places of the countrey one onely towne belongeth to the government of a Wiróans or chiefe Lorde; in other some two or three, in some sixe, eight, & more; the greatest Wiróans that yet we had dealing with had but eighteene townes in his government, and able to make not aboue seven or eight hundred fighting men at the most: The language of every government is different from any other, and the farther they are distant the greater is the difference.

Their maner of warres amongst themselves is either by sudden surprising one an other most comonly about the dawning of the day, or moone light; or els by ambushes, or some sultte devises: Set battels are very rare, except it fall out where there are many trees, where eyther part may have some hope of defence, after the deliverie of every arrow, in leaping behind some or other.

If there fall out any warres between us & them, what their fight is likely to bee, we having advantages against them so many maner of waies, as by our discipline, our strange weapons and devises els; especially by ordinance great and small, it may be easily imagined; by the experience we have had in some places, the turning up of their heeles against us in running away was their best defence.

In respect of us they are a people poore, and for want of skill and judgement in the knowledge and use of our things, doe esteeme our trifles before things of greater value: Notwithstanding in their proper manner considering the want of such meanes as we have, they seeme very ingenious; For although they have no such tooles, nor any such craftes, sciences and artes as wee; yet in those things they doe, they shewe excellencie of wit. And by howe much they upon due consideration shall finde our manner of knowledges and craftes to exceede theirs in perfection, and speed for doing or execution, by so much the more is it probable that they shoulde desire our friendships & love, and have the greater respect for pleasing and obeying vs. Whereby may bee hoped if meanes of good government bee used, that they may in short time be brought to civilitie, and the imbracing of true religion.

Some religion they have alreadie, which although it be farre from the truth, yet byeng as it is, there is hope it may bee the easier and sooner reformed.

They beleev that there are many Gods which they call Montóac, but of different sortes and degrees; one onely chiefe and great God, which hath bene from all eternitie. Who as they affirme when hee purposed to make the worlde, made first other goddes of a principall order to bee as meanes and instruments to bee used in the creation and government to follow; and after the Sunne, Moone, and Starres, as petitie goddess and the instruments of the other order more principall. First they say were made waters, out of which by the Sunne, Moone, and Starres, as pettie goddess and the instruments of the o

For mankind they say a woman was made first, which by the woorking of one of the goddes, conceived and brought forth children: And in such sort they say they had their beginning.

But how manie yeeres or ages have passed since, they say they can make no relation, having no letters nor other such meanes as we to keepe records of the particularities of times past, but onelie tradition from father to sonne.

They thinke that all the gods are of humane shape, & therfore they represent them by images in the forms of men, which they call Kewasówok one alone is called Kewas; Them they place in houses appropriate or temples which they call Machicómuck; Where they worship, praie, sing, and make manie times offerungs unto them. In some Machicómuck we have seene but one Kewas, in some two, and in other some three; The common sort thinke them to be also gods.

They beleve also the immortalitie of the soule, that after this life as soone as the soule is departed from the bodie according to the workes it hath done, it is eyther carried to heaven the habitatcle of gods, there to enioy perpetuall blisse and happynesse, or els to a great pitte or hole, which they thinke to bee in the furthest partes of their part of the worlde towaerde the sunne set,there to burne continually: the place they call Popogusso.

For the confirmation of this opinion, they tolde mee two stories of two men that had been lately dead and revived againe, the one happened but few yeres before our comming into the countrey of a wicked man which having beeene dead and buried, the next day the earth of the grave beeing seene to move, was taken up againe; Who made declaration where his soule
had beene, that is to saie very neere entring into Popogusso, had not one of the gods saved him & gave him leave to returne againe, and teach his friends what they should doe to avoid that terrible place of torment.

The other happened in the same yeere wee were there, but in a towne that was threescore miles from vs, and it was tolde mee for straunge newes that one being dead, buried and taken up againe as the first, shewed that although his bodie had lien dead in the grave, yet his soule was alive, and had travailed farre in a long broade waie, on both sides whereof grewe most delicate and pleasaunt trees, bearing more rare and excellent fruytes then ever hee had seene before or was able to expresse, and at length came to most brave and faire houses, neere which hee met his father, that had beene dead before, who gave him great charge to goe backe againe and shew his friendes what good they were to doe to enjoy the pleasures of that place, which when he had done he should after come againe.

What subtily soever be in the Wiroances and Priestes, this opinion worketh so much in manie of the common and simple sort of people that it maketh them have great respect to their Governours, and also great care what they do, to avoid torment after death, and to enjoy blisse; although notwithstanding there is punishment ordained for malefactours, as stealers, whoremongers, and other sortes of wicked doers; some punished with death, some with forfeitures, some with beating, according to the greatness of the factes.

And this is the summe of their religion, which I learned by having special familiarity with some of their priestes. Wherein they were not so sure grounded, nor gave such credite to their traditions and stories but through conversing with us they were brought into great doubts of their owne, and no small admiration of ours, with earnest desire in many, to learne more than we had meanes for want of perfect utterance in their language to expresse.

Most thinges they sawe with us, as Mathematicall instruments, sea compasses, the vertue of the loadstone in drawing yron, a perspectiue glasse whereby was shewed manie strange sightes, burning glasses, wildefire woorkes, gunnes, bookes, writing and reading, spring clocks that seeme to goe of themselues, and manie other things that wee had, were so straunge vnto them, and so farre exceeded their capacities to comprehend the reason and meanes how they should be made and done, that they thought they were rather the works of gods then of men, or at the leauestwise they had bin given and taught us of the gods. Which made manie of them to have such opinion of vs, as that if they knew not the trueth of god and religion already, it was rather to be had from us, whom God so specially loved then from a people that were so simple, as they found themselues to be in comparison of us. Whereupon greater credite was given unto that we spake of concerning such matters.

Manie times and in every towne where I came, according as I was able, I made declaration of the contentes of the Bible; that therein was set foorth the true and onelie GOD, and his mightie woorkes, that therein was contained the true doctrine of salvation through Christ, with manie particularities of Miracles and chiefe poyntes of religion, as I was able then to utter, and thought fitte for the time. And although I told them the booke materially & of itself was not of anie such vertue, as I thought they did conceive, but onely the doctrine therein contained; yet would many be glad to touch it, to embrace it, to kisse it, to hold it to their brests and heades, and stroke over all their bodie with it; to shewe their hungrie desire of that knowledge which was spoken of.

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"Shakespeare's Tempest"


The great and striking peculiarity of this play is that its action lies wholly in the ideal world. It differs, therefore, from every other work of Shakespeare in the character of its mediation. Our poet, in most of his dramas, portrays the real world, and exhibits man as acting from clear conscious motives, and not from supernatural influences. But here he completely reverses his procedure; from beginning to end the chief instrumentalities of the poem are external; its conflicts and solutions are brought about by powers seemingly beyond human might and intelligence.

It should, however, be classified with "As You Like it" and "Midsummer Night's Dream," in both of which the ideal world is the grand mediating principle. But in these two plays the real world is also present, and there is in the coarse of the action a transition from one to the other. Hence, too, there follows a change of place and time, and the so-called unities must be violated. But the "Tempest" has not this double element: with the first scene we are in the magic realm of the island and its influences, which do not cease till the last line of the play. Hence it is more unique, more homogeneous, than the two dramas before mentioned; the unities of time and place can be observed, and the action lies wholly in the ideal world.

It is now the duty of the interpreter to translate these poetic forms and mediations into Thought. Thus he gives the same meaning, the same content, which is found in the play; but he addresses the Reason and Understanding instead of the Imagination. What Shakespeare expresses in poetry he must express in prose, and moreover must supply the logical nexus which the imaginative form cannot give. Hence, above all things, let him not fall into the error of merely substituting one poetical shape for another, whereby nothing is explained and only confusion is increased. If Prospero is called Shakespeare, or by any other name, what is gained by the change? The same difficulties remain for Thought as before. The task is not easy, nor is it likely to give satisfaction at first to the reader; for these beautiful ideal shapes must perish before our eyes and be transformed into the dry, abstract forms of prose. The contrast is striking, perhaps repulsive; but, if we wish to comprehend and not merely to enjoy Shakespeare, there is no alternative.

Let us bring before our minds the leading elements of the play. First, Alonso and his company represent the real world; but they have arrived at a magic isle where they are under the sway of unknown external agencies. Within certain limits they still can act through themselves, but their chief movements are determined from without by the ideal world, Ariel and his spirits, who constitute the second element. Thus the fact is indicated that the ideal, supernatural world is master of the real, natural world. Thirdly, there is Prospero, a being who commands both, yet partakes of both these principles, the real and the ideal, the natural and the supernatural: he is connected by nationality and even by family with those in the ship, but is at the same time lord of Ariel and of the spirit-world, who fulfil his behests with implicit obedience.

Here appears the two-fold nature of Prospero, which is the pivotal point of the drama, and hence its comprehension must be our first object. He controls the elements, he is gifted with foresight, he possesses absolute power; yet he has been expelled from his throne and country. To be sure, there is the difference of time between his expulsion and his present greatness, but this cannot adequately account for the change. Let us try to explain these two elements of his character, as they have been elaborated fully by the poet in the course of the drama. In the first place, Prospero must manifest the finite side of his nature. As an individual, he comes in contact with other individuals and things; in general, with the realm of finitude in which he himself is finite.

Limitation begets struggle; thus arise the collisions of life. Many men, it seems, have been his superiors in these struggles; his brother is a much more practical man — has dethroned him and driven him off. Such is Prospero the individual, and as such he collides with various forms of finite existence. He has been hitherto defeated in these conflicts. This is the one element. But Prospero also possesses the side of universality; he is spirit, intelligence, which comprehends, solves, and portrays all the collisions of the finite world. It is only through long discipline and devoted study that he has attained this power. His pursuit of knowledge, moreover, cost him his dukedom, and hence was the source of his chief conflict — that with his brother.

He thus stands for spirit in its highest potence, the Universal, but he is at the same time individual, and hence is exposed to the realm of finite relation and struggle, which, however, his reason must bring into a harmonious unity.

But his spiritual activity is mostly confined to a special form of intelligence, that form which embodies its content in pictures and symbols, namely, the creative Imagination. Prospero does not employ pure thought, but poetic shapes and images. He must therefore be the Poet, who has within him the world in ideal forms, and hence possesses over it an absolute power. He calls up
from the vastly deep whatever shapes he wishes in order to execute his purposes and perform his mediations. Thus he solves all the contradictions in which he as an individual is involved, and subdues all the influences which come within his magic circle. For he is this universal power, and in the sphere of ideality, in the realm of spirit, nothing can resist him. The revenge of Prospero is therefore ideal, for certainly our poet would never have taken such instrumentalities to portray a real revenge. Moreover, the play must end in reconciliation, the harmony of the Individual with the Universal; for spirit possesses just this power over the conflicts of finite existence: it must show itself to be master.

In this way we can account for the commanding position of Prospero in the drama. He is the grand central figure, the absolute power who controls ultimately the movements of every person and from whom all the action proceeds. The form of mediation is therefore external; but, truly considered, Prospero is no deus ex machina, no merely external divinity brought in to cut the knot that cannot be untied. The interpretation must always exhibit him inside of the action; the clew is his double nature. As an individual, he is engaged in conflict; but then he steps back, beholds and portrays that conflict, and solves it through spirit in the form of Imagination. He is therefore the mediator of his own collisions; thus externality falls away. The solution is hence not external, which would be the case if the absolute power simply stood outside of the action, and commanded everything to take place. It is the special duty of the critic to explain these external mediations, of which the play is full, into a clear, spiritual signification.

Prospero is, therefore, the mighty spirit standing behind and portraying the collisions of his own individual life and of finite existence generally. But this is not enough to account for his activity. He could easily put his experiences and struggles in a drama without invoking the aid of the supernatural' world. The necessity of this element must be seen. If he would give a complete picture of his own activity, he must not only portray the above-mentioned conflicts, but also portray himself as portraying them. In other words, he must depict himself as Poet, as Universal; he must give an account of his own process, and that account must also be in a poetic form. This will push the Imagination to the very verge of its powers, for thus it must do what abstract thought alone can usually do: namely, it must comprehend and portray itself. Hence comes the external form representing it as the absolute master over its materials.

The Drama thus attempts to account for itself in a drama, in its own form. Having swept over the whole field of life, and portrayed every species of collision, it now comes to grasp itself, its own process. Thus it becomes truly universal, a complete totality; for it takes in the world and itself too. This play is often considered Shakespeare's last, and it may be regarded as a final summing up of his activity, or, indeed, that of any great poet. In his other works he has portrayed the manifold variety of collisions, but now he portrays them being portrayed. Here he reaches, if he does not transgress, the limit of dramatic representation; he can only use strange symbolical shapes to indicate his meaning.

It is now time to see the poem springing from the two-fold nature of Prospero. As individual, we must expect to behold him involved in some of the ordinary dramatic collisions. An analysis will reveal three of them all in regular gradation of importance.

**First, there arises the collision in the Family** — Prospero the father, on the one hand, against the lovers Ferdinand and Miranda, on the other. The old conflict is depicted: the choice of the daughter is opposed by the will of the parent. **Secondly, there is portrayed the collision in the State:** Prospero, the rightful ruler of Milan, against the usurper Antonio, supported by the king of Naples, both of whom with followers are on board the newly-arrived ship. **Thirdly, there is the more general collision which may be stated to be between rationality and sensuality,** the former represented by Prospero and Ariel, the latter by Caliban with Trinculo and Stephano. The Sensual rises up against the Rational in all its forms, in institutions and even in Art, as well as in Intelligence.

Such is the material for Imagination to work upon. But the other side must not be forgotten. The Imagination, at the same time, portrays itself elaborating this content. The Poet is not only going to make the drama, but is going to show himself making it. This gives the ideal element, representing Prospero as having the absolute power of mediating all the collisions of his individual existence.

Such are the threads which must be carefully kept before the mind in order to comprehend the organization of the play. Next, the entire movement of the action must be considered. It is three-fold. In the first place, there is the expulsion of Prospero by the rulers in the ship, who have now come into his power; this is the wrong done to Prospero, and constitutes the pre-supposition of the drama. Next follows the punishment of this wrong in the island, the realm of Prospero, through his spirit-powers. Lastly, the reconciliation of the two sides by the repentance of the guilty and forgiveness of the injured, when we have the final harmony resulting from the conflict. It, therefore, is connected with that class of Shakespeare's plays in which wrong is atoned for by
Let us now take the poem in hand and see whether these things, with a reasonable interpretation, can be found in it, or whether they are the absurd subtleties of the critic's fancy. First comes the tempest, from which the drama takes its name, the effect of which is to divide the ship's company into three parts, corresponding to the three threads above mentioned, and to scatter them into different portions of the island. But the peculiarity of this tempest is, as we learn in the next scene, that Prospero has brought it about through Ariel; it is, therefore, not a tempest which has taken place through natural causes, but through spiritual causes: it is, evidently, a poetical tempest. For certainly Shakespeare would not have us believe that storms are produced by spirits ordinarily; but this one certainly is. What, then, does the author mean? for his conduct here assuredly needs explanation. I, think he tells us, in saying that Ariel, by command of Prospero, caused the tempest and dispersed the company, that tempests are called up by the Poet — that they are a poetical instrument employed to bring about a separation of parties, and to scatter them into different places as here.

We are, therefore, led to inquire whether Shakespeare himself has ever employed this means in any of his dramas. Accordingly, we find the same instrumentality in "Twelfth Night" and "Comedy of Errors" used for the same purpose. It is an artifice of the Poet for scattering, or possibly uniting, his characters in an external manner. Here then, in the very first scene, the Poet is portraying his own process.

The second scene of the First Act, which now follows, is the most important one in the play, for it gives the key to the action. A careful analysis of all its elements will therefore be necessary. First appears before us the Family, the primary relation of man — here that of father and daughter, the latter of whom speaks in the first line of her parent's art, which she herself, being purely individual, does not possess, but still knows of. The relation is a natural one, not spiritual, between parent and child. She is excited by sympathy for the sufferers, when the father assures her that no one has perished — in fact, no one can perish — in the vessel.

Again we ask the question, why this confidence of Prospero that all will be saved? The prevision in his art, which he speaks of, is that of the Poet, who ordains beforehand, by the strictest necessity, the course of the action and the fate of the characters, and knows what kind of a drama he is going to write. He lays down his magic mantle — that is, he assumes the individual relation to his daughter — and then begins to give an account of his life and conflicts as an individual. Here, then, he relates his first collision: a brother, with the aid of a foreign king, has driven him from his dukedom.

Nor does Prospero conceal the cause of his banishment. He neglected the Practical for the Theoretical; he handed over the administration of his government to others, and devoted his time to his books, his study, his art. The logic of this transition is evident. He cuts loose from the real world, and the real word retorts by cutting loose from him — drives him off. Where, now, is he? Having severed all his individual relations, he is manifestly left just in his ideal realm. But there is one tie which he cannot break; he is a father: this bond still unites him to finite existence; or, if he must depart for the ideal world, the daughter must go along. The two therefore, are put in a vessel together, and reach the magic island. Prospero intimates that it was this relation which saved him, otherwise he would have given that final stroke which dissolves all individual relations:

Mir. Alack, what trouble was I then to you!  
Pro. O, a cherubim  
Thou wast, that didst preserve me. Thou didst smile  
Infused with a fortitude from heaven.

The nature of the transition of Prospero from the real to the ideal world is thus made manifest. It differs, therefore, from "As You Like it," where there is a similar transition, based, however, upon the flight from the World of Wrong.

It also differs from "Midsummer Night's Dream," where there is likewise a similar transition, based, however, upon the flight from the world of Institutions or of Right. But in the "Tempest" this transition is based upon the flight from the whole finite world of conflict, of individual relation, of practical activity; and hence necessarily lands Prospero in the magic island, in an ideal world.

It is furthermore to be noticed that both parties have their just and their unjust element. Prospero is wronged; he is dispossessed of his recognized rights by violence. Yet he himself is not without guilt; the real world has a claim upon him as ruler, which claim he has totally ignored. Hence the play must result in reconciliation and not in the death of the wrong-doers. Prospero as Poet must see both sides and represent them in their truth, and cannot avenge himself as an individual. This drama, therefore, will not have a tragic termination; it must, as previously stated, end in the repentance of the one party and forgiveness of the other.
Prospero thus brings the story of his life down to the tempest, embracing the conflicts of his individual existence. His enemies, wrecked in the ship, are now scattered over the island and in his power. Here begins the action proper of the drama. But behold! Miranda sleeps in the presence of the spirit-world; she is mortal, individual merely — she possesses not the vision and faculty divine. It is no wonder that she cannot choose but sleep in the invisible world, for eyes cannot help her. But who appears here in this spirit-realm? An airy being called Ariel, who seems not to be restrained by any bonds of Space and Time, who flies abroad and performs on land and sea the behests of his master. He was the cause of the shipwreck we now learn, and he gives a vivid account of his feats in that work. Again an explanation is demanded, and we feel compelled to say that Ariel is that element of Prospero before designated as Imagination, which thus gives an account to itself of its own deeds in a poetic form. For Ariel controls the elements, is sovereign over the powers of Nature, and directs them for the accomplishment of his master's purposes.

In general, he seems to perform every essential mediation in the entire poem. What possesses this power but Imagination? Yet Me must not press this meaning too closely, for Shakespeare does not allegorize, but always individualizes; he fills out his characters, whether they be natural or supernatural, to their sensuous completeness. We shall observe that there are many sides given which are necessary to the image, but not necessary to the thought even when the thought preponderates. Therefore these Shakespearean creations cannot be interpreted as allegories, in which each particular stroke has its separate signification, but rather the purport of the whole should be seized and its general movement.

But this dainty spirit Ariel is not wholly satisfied with his lot; he has that absolute aspiration of intelligence — nay, of Nature herself — namely, the aspiration for freedom. What is meant here by freedom? merely to get rid of labor and then be idle? We think not; it is rather to accomplish the work in hand — to embody itself in some grand result: this is the toil of Spirit, of the Imagination. The freedom is the realization of its end, when the Imagination has clothed itself in an adequate form, which process, it may be added, can only be completed at the close of the poem; then Ariel is dismissed to the elements. But he never could have been free unless he realized aspiration in an objective form. It will thus be seen that Ariel quite corresponds to that element of Prospero's character which was called Spirit, Intelligence, or the Universal as opposed to the Individual.

But the Poet Prospero proceeds further; he gives a history of Ariel. Once he was the slave of the hag Sycorax, who imprisoned him in a cloven pine because he would not perform her earthy and abhorred commands. Here is presented the conflict which is as old as man, spirit against flesh. Reason against Appetite. Moreover, we see its earliest form: spirit is overcome and is subordinate to flesh, to sense. Hence the groans of Ariel from his prison-house, till at length Prospero comes to the island and frees him. Now he is the servant of Prospero, and transforms himself into every kind of shape which Prospero commands, in order to perform the various mediations of the play. He is at once sent off on an errand, the nature of which will soon be seen.

But what is this other shape which now rises upon our view — a monster, half man, half beast? He is the slave of Prospero, compelled to perform all the menial duties; in other words, his is the service of sense. His origin is not left in doubt; he is the son of Sycorax, and the heir of her character. Now we behold the opposite of Ariel in every way: Caliban is sense in all its forms, sensuality included. The peculiarity of their names, too, has been noticed by critics: with a slight transposition of letters, aerial becomes Ariel and cannibal becomes Caliban. But at present, under the rule of Prospero, sense is subordinated, is made to serve. Caliban is therefore the natural man whom Prospero has tried to educate, yet without altering his nature — who cannot be anything else but a slave. His knowledge is just sufficient to contest with Prospero's supremacy of the island. The rise of mankind from a state of nature, through language and education, is here indicated. The claim of Caliban to the sovereignty of the island by right of birth, against the right of intelligence, is a rather severe satire upon the principle of legitimacy, which may or may not have been intended by Shakespeare. This antithesis between Prospero and Caliban should be observed, for it will constitute hereafter one of the collisions of the play.

There can hardly be a doubt concerning the main signification of these two figures of the drama. They are not portrayed as human in form, but as unnatural, or, if you please, supernatural; they exhibit one side, one element of man in its excess: Ariel is spirit without sense, Caliban is sense without spirit. They are therefore not human, for man includes both of them. Or, to revert to our abstract terms, we behold the two principles of Prospero's character, the Individual and Universal, objectified into independent forms by the Imagination of the Poet. Moreover, the inherent antithesis and hostility — in other words, the collision between these two principles — is also indicated. Prospero has, so to speak, separated himself into the two contradictory elements of his character and given to each an adequate poetic form, and has also stated their contradiction. But he remains still master over both; they, though opposites, are still his servants, are still the instruments of the Poet, who stands behind and directs their acts. Such is their fundamental representation in the play.
Another relation has been indicated in the poem with distinctness, namely, the relation of the race of Caliban to Art. The foul witch Sycorax is the representative of the Ugly; she has even lost the human form, "with age and envy grown into a hoop." She came from Argier, a land beyond the pale of culture, where spirit is still enslaved in the bonds of sense. But even there she could not live on account of her negative character. She is put on the island, which remains a wild, untamed jungle till the arrival of Prospero. The fate of Ariel has been mentioned as well as his enfranchisement; but at present, under the rule of Prospero, nature is the servant of mind, and is the bearer of its forms; Art is therefore possible since the Sensuous is now controlled by the Spiritual. For Art is spirit expressed in a sensuous form.

So much is introductory. The Poet has elaborated all his instrumentalities, has brought the story of his life down to the time of the action, and is now ready to portray the collisions of the play. Our Ariel brings to the fair maiden a lover — the Poet never fails to do so. By his mysterious music, Ferdinand, one of the ship's company, is led to Miranda. Both fall in love at first sight; the natural unity of sex, which calls forth the Family, asserts itself on the spot. What else could happen? Ferdinand is alone in the world, Miranda is almost so — only her father is known to her. If man and woman belong together, certainly these two must feel their inseparableness, for there is nobody else to whom they can belong. It is the old climax: admiration, sympathy, love. "They are both in either's powers"; each one finds his or her existence in the other. But now appears the obstacle, for the course of true love can never run smooth — at least, in a drama. The collision so frequently portrayed by Shakespeare again arises for a new treatment, that between the will of the parent and the choice of the daughter. Prospero opposes the match, charges Ferdinand with being a traitor and spy, and lays upon him the menial task of removing "some thousands of logs." But Miranda is present with consolation and even offers to assist in the labor; the young prince bravely stands the trial — he is willing to undergo any toil for love's sake. The mutual declaration is made; then follows the mutual promise the unity of feeling is complete. It is the essence of all love-stories.

The next time we meet with the father in this connection, he has yielded his objections and sealed their pledge with his consent. But all along we have been aware that his opposition was feigned, that he intended from the start to acquiesce in their marriage. In fact, he was the very person that brought it about. For his conduct he has adduced an external motive: "lest too light winning make the prize light." Still deeper is the design which he cherishes of not only restoring his daughter to his own possessions, but also of making her queen of Naples. But the true internal necessity for his opposition being feigned lies in his double nature. The Poet, who is none other than Prospero himself, interposes an obstacle — the refusal of the parent — which parent, also, is none other than Prospero himself. As father he stands in an individual relation to his daughter and comes into conflict with her; but as Poet he has brought about this conflict, and must solve it by giving validity to the right of choice.

Such is the solution demanded by reason, and the one which Shakespeare universally gives to such a collision. Prospero knows, therefore, from the beginning that his daughter will triumph — in fact, that he must make her triumph. The key to his conduct is that the father or individual and the Poet or Universal are one and the same man.

The right of choice is therefore victorious over the will of the parent, a right which, though generally conceded at the present time, was once stoutly contested. Their love has been portrayed through its successive stages: the first predilection, the mutual declaration, the secret plight of troth, the consent of the father. But one thing more remains to be done: the ceremony with full and holy rite must be ministered. Upon this point Prospero lays the greatest stress; he speaks of it no less than three times in different places. Without the formal solemnization of marriage their union cannot be ethical; it can only bring forth the most baleful weeds — hate, disdain, and discord. Lust is not love; indeed it is the destruction of genuine love: a Caliban cannot truly enter the marriage relation.

Moreover, the ceremony gives reality to the Family, which hitherto existed only in the subjective emotions of the parties. Religion (or the State in our time) comes in with its sanction and objectifies their union — makes it an institution in the world.

The marriage rite is therefore not a meaningless and unnecessary formality. Yet the origin and primal basis of the Family is love, which the Poet has here portrayed in all its fervor. But by itself simply, and ungoverned, it degenerates into lust. Our author would teach the lesson, if we understand him, that the ethical element and the emotional element must both be present in true affection; for it is destroyed by the Ethical alone, which is the case when the daughter is wholly obedient, and simply follows the will of the parent, and lets him choose for her. She thus cannot have much intensity in her love, and hence Miranda insists upon her affection, and the father at last yields.

On the other hand, passion alone without any ethical restraint is even more fatal to love. Now both these elements in their one-
sidedness are represented by Shakespeare as antagonistic to the unity of marriage. The truth is, the Emotional must be regulated, restrained, and made permanent, by the Ethical; and the Ethical, which now takes the form of devotion to husband or wife instead of obedience to parent, must be tilled, vivified, and intensified, by the Emotional.

Next comes the masque, whose connection with the rest of the play must be carefully studied, for it reveals more than anything else in the work the special character of Prospero as Poet. He calls up Ariel, who, it will be noticed, always appears when some important mediation of the drama is about to be performed. For what purpose is he now invoked? Mark the language of Prospero:

I must
Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple
Some vanity
of mine art; it is my promise
And they expect it from me.

At once there rise up before us the goddesses of the ancient Greek world, the poetical forms of all ages. These, then, are the spirits over which Prospero has power through his minister Ariel; this, too, is his art, which has brought forth all the other wonderful shapes of the poem. They are the beautiful forms of the Imagination, over which the Poet alone has control.

But let us notice the content of this little interlude: what will be its theme? Nothing else but what has already taken place, only in a new form for the lovers, who thus behold a representation of their own unity. The main-spring of the action is Juno, the spouse of the king of Gods and Men; therefore both the type and guardian of wifehood, of chastity, of domestic life. She sends Iris, her many-colored messenger, for Ceres —

A contract of true love to celebrate.
And some donation freely to estate
On the blest lovers.

Such is the object of the visit of the two goddesses, which is still more precisely expressed by each in their songs: Juno particularly confers marriage-blessing and honor — Ceres, physical comfort and prosperity. But mark that Venus and her blind boy are invited to stay away. They represent unholy lust; they plotted the means whereby dusky Dis, or devilish sensuality, carried off the innocent Proserpine, the daughter of Ceres, to the infernal regions. Thus the ethical element is again emphasized.

The relation of Prospero as parent, as individual, has now been portrayed, as well as the collision resulting therefrom and its solution. But he is also Poet, and hence must shadow forth the whole subject in the objective forms of poetry. It has already been pointed out that his feigning an objection to the love-match resulted from his poetical prevision, and hence that such an objection must finally be abandoned.

Thus he has manifested in himself, and also depicted in the drama, the collision in the Family. But now, when consent has been given, and the hindrances smoothed over, a second time he appears as Poet, as if to leave no doubt of his nature in the mind of the reader or hearer. He steps back and reproduces in a new poetical dress the substance of the whole story before the lovers. This little play within the play thus has the effect of a double reflection of the action.

New beings appear in order to celebrate the contract of true love; Naiads whose crown is chastity, and the sun-burnt sicklemen whose trait is industry, join in a dance. But, while Prospero is busy calling up these beautiful shapes from the ideal realm, he suddenly thinks of the conspiracy of Caliban. A new collision against himself as an individual has arisen which demands immediate attention, the real world rushes in upon him, and at once the poetical world vanishes. He is thus reminded that there are other things to be done, other struggles to pass through, and finally other collisions to be portrayed. But he is highly vexed at the interruption, and in his anger he utters the doom of the whole finite world, which sounds like the Last Judgment.

It is the most sublime passage of its length to be found in Shakespeare:

And like the baseless fabric of this vision
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself.
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

It is just this finite world which is so full of conflict and has caused him so much trouble. No wonder, then, that he almost curses it, and announces its utter perishability. **But though the life and works of man, and also the physical globe, are transitory, he is far from saying that mind, the Universal, will thus pass away. On the contrary, he now invokes the latter against destruction, for it is the master over finitude, over the negative powers of the world.** Again our Ariel must appear: "Come with a thought."

Why? Only because he is thought. He answers, "Thy thoughts I cleave to." Why again? Because he cannot be separated from them. Thus Prospero and Ariel prepare for the conflict with Caliban, the account of which will be taken up in its proper connection.

Such is the first thread; **the second is the collision in the State. This is the central movement of the play.** Prospero as rightful duke comes into conflict with a usurper, his own brother, who is supported by the king of Naples. Again we see that Prospero, in his individual relation, falls into strife, and is overthrown. The history of his expulsion has already been given, and it must be noticed also that he relates the occurrence as something long antecedent to the play, and not embraced in its action, though its necessary presupposition.

Such has been the wrong done to him. But now the Universal element appears; his enemies are completely in his power; their punishment is to follow. The tempest has conveniently scattered the ship's company into groups, in one of which are to be found all the offenders. But first there arises a conflict among themselves. **There are three good characters — that is, those without guilt — Gonzalo, Adrian, and Francisco; opposed to these are the three wicked ones — Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian.** The two latter show their hatred, especially of the honest Gonzalo, by bitter ridicule, while Alonso is beginning to feel repentance for his deeds through the loss of his son. Yet a deeper retribution appears to be impending over him: he has aided in dethroning a brother; a brother now threatens to dethrone him. The same man whom he assisted seems about to punish him. But his repentance will save him from final overthrow.

So much for Alonso; Antonio is a much worse man. His conduct is consistent; he cannot stop in his negative career; he must continue dispossessing and assailing the rights of others, for that is the logical necessity of his character. Having wrongfully expelled his nearest relative, he very naturally begins to plot against his greatest benefactor, the king of Naples. But the poetical mediator Ariel is again on hand to prevent the consummation of the plan; the Poet cannot let the matter end in that way.

The main poetical mediation is next to be accomplished, of course through Ariel. It is reconciliation by repentance. Repentance means that man has the power to make his wicked deed undone, as far as its influence upon his own mind is concerned. He can free himself from remorse, from the consequence of his own negative act. But the repentance must be complete; it includes the confession of the wrong, contrition adequate to its magnitude, and an entire restoration of its advantages. Spirit thus becomes again at peace with itself, and is relieved from its own destructive gnawings. This reconciliation is therefore a spiritual process, and hence must be accomplished by the representative of spirit, Ariel.

The three criminals are in the presence of Prospero, who is invisible to them; they are hence in the presence of their own wrong; retribution is at hand. Again we urge upon the reader to **keep in mind the double nature of Prospero: as individual he has suffered these injuries, but as universal he is the Poet who mediates and portrays them. He therefore puts into operation his spirit-world, whose main object is now to excite conscience, to rouse remorse.** They are hungry; a banquet is spread before them by several strange shapes. When the king and the rest begin eating, the banquet vanishes. Thus it is indicated to them that a power beyond their consciousness is at work in the isle. Here he is — Ariel — who now drops his invisible form and appears to them like a harpy, the symbol of vengeance. He calls himself Destiny, or a minister of Fate; his function is retribution. He comes to avenge the wrong done to Prospero,

for which foul deed
The powers, delaying, not forgetting, have
Incensed the seas and shores, yea, all creatures.
Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
Lingering perdition — worse than any death
So far it resembles that external power which the Greeks called Fate, and which even controlled Jupiter himself. But is there no salvation from the wicked deed? Hear Ariel again:

. . . whose [the powers'] wraths to guard you from—
Which here in this most desolate isle else falls
Upon your heads — is nothing but heart's sorrow,
And a clear life ensuing.

"What a wonderful change! Ariel is no longer the representative of Grecian Fate, but is a preacher of Christian Gospel, whose doctrine is repentance — "heart's sorrow and a clear life ensuing." Man can now avoid the retribution of ancient Destiny. Though Ariel has assumed this shape to the wicked three, yet the reader has all along known that it was merely a poetical form; that Ariel, in reality, is not a minister of Fate, but of Prospero, of spirit, of self-determination.

Thus the three "men of sin" are brought to a consciousness of their crimes; they wax desperate at their guilt, which now reacts negatively upon their minds — "like poison, 'gins to bite the spirits." The innocent three weep over them, "brimful of sorrow and dismay." When the guilty have sufficiently atoned for the wrongs which they have committed, Prospero is ready to grant forgiveness; he declares that their repentance is "the sole drift of his purpose." The frenzy begins to subside after they enter his charmed circle; gradually reason returns, and Prospero, though invisible, tells to their innermost conscience the nature of their crimes and the consequent punishment. All is now plain to them subjectively. But, to remove the last doubt, Prospero presents himself to their eyes looking just as when lie was Duke of Milan, and confirms his previous utterances. Alonso, in particular, repents in the most heartfelt manner, surrenders the advantages of his wrong, and asks pardon; he makes his deed undone as far as lies in his power. Therefore his son is restored to him: the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda receives blessing; thus it is ethically complete, having received the sanction of both parents.

It is evident that the ability which the mind possesses of healing its own wounds, of cancelling its own negative deeds, is here portrayed. Spirit alone can reconcile itself with itself and come to inner harmony. For if it is truly universal, it must have the power to mediate all its conflicts. Therefore the play cannot have a tragic termination, as was before stated. It must end in reconciliation, mediation. Prospero himself, in his highest potency, represents this absolute might of spirit, which cannot succumb 'to any struggle, but must overcome every conflict. Though Shakespeare has to a certain extent employed the heathen form of Fate, he has truly expressed the Christian doctrine of Repentance.

We are now ready to take up the third thread, the collision between Prospero and Caliban. The character and origin of the latter have already been noticed; it was stated that he represented the natural man — man still immersed in his senses and not yet elevated to a rational existence. He therefore must collide with the world of spirit represented by Prospero, for the reason that it necessarily subordinates him and even reduces him to a slave. Such is the function of the senses — they are the pack-horses of intelligence; and the physical man, even if he constitute the whole man, must follow the same law. Caliban is therefore a menial of the lowest type, and is set to performing the most degrading services for Prospero. His ignorance and utter slavishness to the External are manifest from the fact that he cannot comprehend either the mediations of Spirit or of Nature; he regards them as ghosts and goblins sent to torment him. ....

The next thing, therefore, is the appearance of the representatives of this element, Trinculo and Stephano. They, too, have been separated from the ship's company by the tempest, and from a natural attraction of character have been brought together with Caliban. Here we see the sensual trio made up from the ship and the island. The two strangers bear the stamp of reality, are men of flesh and blood, belong therefore to prosaic life and speak in prose; while Caliban, since he is a native of the island, is strictly a poetical being and speaks in verse. There is also a distinction between Trinculo and Stephano, the former being not so much jester as coward, craven in spirit, with the fear of the External always before his eyes; the latter being a drunkard, the slave of appetite. Caliban represents both persons, for it is mortally afraid of the imaginary spirits and he swallows with the wildest ecstasy the contents of Stephano's wine-bottle.

Caliban's religion now appears also; he deifies the man who has gratified his appetite. Yet he himself remains a slave and performs the same servile duties; he will kiss the foot of the new deity, dig pig-nuts for him, and carry all his wood — a task which is so irksome to do for Prospero. But he thinks he has obtained freedom, which to him means the reign of sensuality. The mob seems to have broken loose from the strong hand of Prospero, lust and violence hope now to rule triumphant, and the ominous shout of drunken bestiality falls upon the ear: "Freedom, hey-day, hey-day, freedom! freedom, hey-day, freedom!" It is curious that Shakespeare has endowed two beings so completely opposite as Ariel and Caliban with the same aspiration for freedom.
He has thus indicated the two great definitions of that word which have always divided mankind. The one means unrestrained lust and anarchy, the other means liberty through institutions; the one is the realization of sensuality, the other is the realization of reason.

But the political side is still further developed. Such beings must have some conflict among themselves, which Ariel, our poetical mediator, does not fail to bring about. It only ends, however, in a beating given to the coward Trinculo, who is innocent. But they have a common enemy, the present lord of the island, against whom they now conspire. It is King Stephano against King Prospero, the Sensual trying to dethrone the Rational. Stephano is not without his worshippers to-day. He represents the demagogue in the political world, who rules the rabble by gratifying their passions, himself being the incarnation of those passions. He thus unites the worst elements of society in a crusade against all established order and right. It will be noticed, also, that not the least attraction for their "freedom" is the fair Miranda; both Family and State are to be subjected to unbridled lust.

But their very nature is turned against them; their innate tendency to theft leads them aside from their purpose, and they are caught in their own toils. Still they cannot reach Prospero; he is spirit, knows of their schemes, and sends upon them retribution in the shape of dogs and hounds — turns against them their own passions. He is thus victorious in this final collision — all his enemies are now in his power — he has mastered the conflicts of his individual existence. Nay, farther, he has not merely punished, but even reconciled, all his enemies. Caliban himself submits, manifests hearty repentance, and is cured of his delusive worship.

Sense thus yields to reason. Such is the truly positive function of spirit: to bring all into harmony with itself, to make all reflect its own image. It may crush out with its power; but that is a negative result, and really no solution of a conflict. The highest attainment of intelligence may be expressed by just this word — reconciliation. The colliding individuals of the play are now united in Spirit, and the harmony is perfect. They all have come to see the nature of their deeds; this is their common insight, and therefore' their common concord: furthermore, they hasten to make their deed undone. Hence, when the criminals arrive at this island, their destiny is to rise above their hitherto selfish, individual existence, and become reconciled with the Rational, the Universal.

Thus Prospero has changed all his enemies into an image of himself, and has made them participate, to a certain extent at least, in his own double character. Each person through repentance reflects Prospero, and places himself in unity with him. Nor must his double nature be Considered anything strange or unknown. It is found more or less developed in every soul. As a moral, and particularly as a thinking being, man must solve the conflicts of his individual existence. Indeed, the sum of all conflicts, and the greatest of all contradictions, is the one above mentioned which in abstract language was called that between the Individual and Universal. Nay, the mightiest of men — for he was a man — whose spirit, however, raised him to be a divinity — Christ himself — was he not the embodiment of this contradiction?

A celebrated sarcasm was once uttered concerning him: "Yes, Christ was able to save the whole world, but couldn't save himself." True, and his chief merit. Christ as individual was necessarily involved in the struggles of the world and perished; but as spirit he created it anew, and made it, so to speak, a different world, for its history since his time is the history of Christianity. So, too, Prospero as an individual is overwhelmed with the collisions of life, but as spirit he has mastered and portrayed them, and even converted his enemies into his own image.

Prospero's career is now at an end, his work is done when the reconciliation is completed. He calls up once more the world of spirits who have been his faithful instrumentalities, in order to bid them farewell forever. He abjures his rough magic, his art; and soon he will break his staff, bury it in the earth, and drown his book. For the present Ariel is retained, who brings together the entire company, and restores even the ship. "Then to the elements," the play ends, his poetical activity ceases.

The relation of the play to Shakespeare himself has frequently been discussed. Long ago a critic suggested that Prospero was Shakespeare. But the mistake has been that the play was supposed to represent Shakespeare's individual life. It might be taken as a portraiture of his poetic, universal life, or that of any great poet. Other mighty individuals have been suggested in place of Prospero, but in such cases there is merely the substitution of one name for another, whereby however nothing is explained. We can only say as we began, Prospero is the Poet generically, who, in the first place, embodies the manifold themes of his art in a dramatic form; and, in the second place, portrays himself in the act, portrays himself performing his own process also in a dramatic form. The drama can go no further; it has attained the universality of Thought.
Here also can be found the reason why it is impossible to give a theatrical representation of this play. What form shall we assign to Ariel and Caliban? A child for the one, and a low human shape for the other? Then we feel the impassible chasm which shuts off the poet's creation from the stage. The illustrative art is equally impotent in reaching these conceptions. Why is this? Because Ariel and Caliban are thoughts more than images; they are not only far beyond the realm of sensuous representation, but even begin to transcend the realm of pure imagination; hence we can read them and think them, but cannot image them with clearness; they lie too far in the sphere of unpicturable thought.

If we now put together the beginning and the end of the drama, we find that Prospero departs from the Real, passes through the Ideal, and returns to the Real. The middle stage is alone portrayed in the play. It would seem, therefore that Prospero, being forced to abandon the practical world on account of his devotion to his books and his art, solves in his theoretical domain all the contradictions of finite existence, and thus returns in triumph to the practical world. Thought therefore, though at first antagonistic, finally restores action. Here we behold the theme of Goethe's "Faust," yet treated in a very different manner. But, though it touches the real world at both ends, its action lies wholly in the ideal world.

We have now arrived at the point where we can see the unifying principle of three of Shakespeare's most important works, namely, "As You Like it," "Midsummer Night's Dream," and "Tempest." That principle is mediation through an ideal world. In "As You Like it," this world is idyllic, exhibits a primitive pastoral existence, hence approaches what is actual; but in the remaining two it is wholly supernatural. The three constitute a new species of drama, which belongs to Shakespeare alone. Though other poets have used similar materials and means, yet their products have been entirely different from these plays not only in degree of excellence but also in kind. The general movement is the same in all three: a breach in the real world, a transition to the ideal world where the breach is healed, and a return to the real world. The fundamental distinction between them — though they are not at all alike in details — lies in the fact that in "As You Like it" there is no self-reflection of any kind, hence it is the simplest in structure; that in "Midsummer Night's Dream" the objective dramatic action reflects itself in the "play within the play"; that in "Tempest" the subjective process of the Poet reflects itself along with the action. Taken together they constitute a dramatic cyclus, and may be called the ideal dramas of Shakespeare.

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Over the last forty years, postcolonial criticism has become a dominant mode of critical discourse for the profession of literature and Renaissance studies in particular, with *The Tempest* serving as *terminus a quo* for many such discussions across historical periods and academic disciplines.\[1\] During this time—not counting courses in Shakespeare, Renaissance drama, or early modern literature—*The Tempest* has been taught in English departments at the undergraduate or graduate level in freshman seminars; surveys of Great Books; capstone courses; writing and composition courses; seminars on literary theory, Marxism, postcolonialism, and race, gender, queer theory; early American literature and transatlantic literature courses; surveys of American literature; and courses on Romanticism, modernism, modern drama, Third World literatures, postmodernism, Chicano/a literatures, Afro-Caribbean literatures, and diaspora literatures. Outside English departments, the play has been taught in such varied disciplines as African American studies, American studies, anthropology, comparative literature, cultural studies, education, environmental studies, film studies, history, linguistics, modern languages, Native American studies, oppression studies, peace studies, philosophy, political science, psychology, religious studies, sociology, theater, and women’s studies.

Surely no other work of literature has been as assigned, deconstructed, interdisciplinized, revisioned, trivialized, and ventriloquized as *The Tempest*. Overwhelmingly, those who have included a reading of *The Tempest* in their various courses in their various disciplines have no formal training in Shakespeare or understanding of Renaissance poetics, and the play is seldom contextualized in the broader Jacobean and Renaissance culture from which it emerged.\[2\] Shakespeare’s play has become a shibboleth [outmoded, old-fashioned, perhaps untrue idea] and his Caliban an avatar, empty signifiers that represent the easiest, most recognizable, and least complicated example of all that Western colonialism aspired to or indeed became. Postcolonial assumptions about the play are so reflexive as to deracinate *The Tempest*, causing it to vanish into thin air, leaving not a rack behind. Once the initial argument evolved that *The Tempest* was primarily and consciously a play about colonialism, the premise was accepted with little or no reservation. And so all this begs the question, is *The Tempest* about colonialism or not?\[3\]

**T**EMPEST AGONISTES [AN EPITHET & ALLUSION TO MILTON’S SAMSON AGONISTES, FROM THE GREEK, INDICATIVE OF STRUGGLE]

From the outset, it is clear the action takes place on an island somewhere in the Mediterranean, the most familiar body of water in Europe and a defining boundary for Western culture for over two thousand years by the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*. Although events take place entirely on the island, the wedding of Alonso’s daughter in Carthage triggers the movement, the unjust banishment of Prospero from Milan fuels the plot, and the narrow sea route between Milan and Carthage delimits the scope of action. It is puzzling why so little postcolonial criticism focuses on the colonization of Africa, though non-Western critics of the early twentieth century suggest the link.\[4\] Even if we assume the island is North African rather than European, the suggestion of African colonization remains tenuous at best. After all, North Africa was annexed by Rome, supplied the West with emperors, produced no less a figure than Augustine, and was Christianized at an early date before being colonized by Islam. The weak insinuation of African colonization nevertheless makes more sense than to link the island to the New World, along with the corresponding insistence that Caliban is Native American.\[5\]

Two of Shakespeare’s primary sources—Montaigne’s “Of Cannibals” and accounts of the voyage of the Sea Venture—relate events that take place in the New World. Plausibly, this connection might insinuate a link between *The Tempest* and the Americas, though it is appropriate to ask why, given the New World material in his sources. Shakespeare so meticulously sets his play in the Mediterranean. This is not to say New World material plays no part in *The Tempest*, but merely that it is unlikely so adept a reader of source material would construct one of his few original plots in an entirely European context if New World colonialism was a driving issue. The second of these sources, the famous voyage, shipwreck, and reappearance of the Sea Venture, offers some interesting perspectives on Shakespeare’s possible intentions when adapting the story.\[6\]

In June 1609, nine vessels under command of George Somers left England for Virginia. The following month a storm separated the Sea Venture from the fleet, and three days later it was wrecked on an island in the Bermudas. During their nine months on the uninhabited island, the passengers experienced a number of seemingly miraculous happenings—providential circumstances transmuted in *The Tempest*—while they constructed two new pinnacles from the remains of the ship. The miracle of their subsequent reappearance at the colony caused a sensation in London, and various accounts of the ordeal were incorporated by Shakespeare, who was drawn to the providential aspects of the story, grasping the dramatic potential of a “devil’s” island turned unexpected paradise.
It is also telling that Shakespeare’s island, like its Bermudan counterpart, is uninhabited and cannot be colonized in the sinister sense of cultural and linguistic dominance. There are no natives of this Bermuda island, no Bermudan culture or language for Europeans to exploit. This matters, for Caliban is not indigenous to the island like the natives encountered by colonists in Virginia are indigenous to the New World. Caliban’s mother is a North African from “Argier.” Accused of witchcraft by other Africans, she conceived Caliban in Algeria with a “devil.” Caliban has no “people” on the island, he is king of no one, and he seeks to rape Miranda to establish progeny in the first place. There is no “Calibanic culture” here: no history or civilization or language. In order for there to be language in any meaningful sense, someone would have had to teach it to Caliban and be there to speak it with him, passing it on as a cultural legacy binding him to his culture and people. Caliban admits the absence of these things to Prospero in a central passage: “you taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse.”[7] It is not Prospero’s language that Caliban acknowledges receiving, but language itself. Before Prospero, Caliban was without language, unlike Europeans, Algerians, or Native Americans.

In fact, the only actual “Indian” within a thousand miles of the island in The Tempest is the dead one alluded to in Trinculo’s satiric observation about the gawking curiosity of Europeans: “When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian” (2.2.31–33). But this is clearly a lament on the inability of Europeans to live up to Christian ideals, not a colonialist wish for more dead Indians. Coming across the huddled Caliban obscured under his “gabardine,” Trinculo assumes it “an islander” struck down by a “thunderbolt” (2.2.36–37). But once he gets a look at the deformed, fish-like Caliban, he refers to him as “monster,” “mooncalf,” “puppy-headed monster,” “most scurvy monster,” “a very weak monster” (2.2). Stephano and Trinculo never refer to him as anything but monster, and when revealed to the assembled company at the play’s end, he is thought no more than “plain fish” (5.1.269).[8]

Not only are no indigenous people on the island, there is very little of the colonizing spirit in those Europeans who find themselves stranded there. Not one of them came to the island voluntarily. They did not storm it in search of conquest, as might have Greeks, Persians, Romans, Vikings, Turks, or Conquistadors. Every human character arrived by accident, and all are eager to return to Italy at the earliest opportunity. When the Europeans finally depart, they leave no colonists, settlements, or plantations behind. They appropriate no resources and take no prisoners. They rename no lands after themselves, plant no flags, and cede no territories to their heirs. Given the bitterly contested geography of Europe, one might think an island discovered in the Mediterranean after so many centuries would generate at least a spark of territorial interest, however barren. Yet none of these evils are manifested, though this reality is never acknowledged in postcolonial readings of the play.

What actual tendency toward colonialism appears in the play comes not from Prospero, nor the greedy Alonso, nor even those scheming climbers Sebastian and Antonio, but rather from Caliban himself, in league with the halfwit jester Trinculo and the drunken butler Stephano. Remarkably, Caliban conceives and orchestrates the hapless conspiracy to murder Prospero, couching his vengeful design in the desire to play kingmaker and establish Stephano as regent. From this perspective, Caliban is not victim of colonialism, but the island’s original and only colonist and would-be colonizer. Nor are our European buffoons interested in the plot until Caliban titillates Stephano by describing Miranda’s beauty—thus “native” Caliban’s ambition preys upon Stephano’s lust, making him confederate. What a reversal of stereotypes this postcolonial reading enables: the lusty, drunken, and slothful European corrupted by the ambitious and power-hungry Native American, as disenfranchised, lower-class Europeans are recruited to acts of colonization and rape by the putative representative of native cultures everywhere.

Neither racist example of native minstrelsy nor postmodern indictment of colonialism, the Caliban of this farcical subplot is one of the beauties of Shakespeare’s play, a tongue-in-cheek look at various sinful pretentions and comic relief from the serious issues of power, revenge, and forgiveness that are the dominant themes. One of the most damaging critical misrepresentations is this willful misreading of genre. The Tempest is a Shakespearean romance, a unique subclassification of classical and European Romance, infused with all expectations of the genre: stylized characters, fantastical locales, magic, miraculous happenings, strange creatures, and love-at-first-sight encounters. In their reduction of all manner of writing—from the mundane prosaic to the rhapsodically poetic—to mere “text,” postcolonial critics liberate themselves from limitations that would restrain their wildest readings, ground them in the real context of the play, and perhaps restore their sense of humor and wonder. For these critics, it is as if the resolution of the comic subplot—foiling the mock-colonialist usurpation of the island by the three stooges and leaving them chin high in a pool of horse piss—bespeaks a cruel precursor of waterboarding rather than a benign and uproariously appropriate “punishment” for so laughable a folly. Whoa!

But The Tempest is also a Christian romance, resonant with images of perdition and paradise, sin and redemption, grace and resurrection. Rather than ignore this context, which is woven into the fabric of the play’s language and imagery, postcolonial critics actively undermine the Christian ontologies of Renaissance theology and philosophy. Denying Renaissance culture the
unique expression of its fears, dreams, and mythologies, they simultaneously reinscribe it with postmodern, neurotic, skeptical, and politically-driven cultural attitudes and assumptions. Many in Shakespeare’s culture believed individuals could evolve or devolve on the Great Chain of Being, rising to the level of angels or wallowing in the brutishness of beasts through exemplary virtue or excessive vice. The postcolonial critic, denying ontological [philosophy associated with classifying and determining/measuring the existence of things/being] mobility and eschewing hierarchy as repressive, collapses this understanding, methodically plotting along a hermeneutical [associated with the theory & methodology of interpretation] line that levels distinction. Caliban, Ariel, Setebos, and the spirits under Prospero’s sway are entirely human and their reality is as temporally bound as our own. Meredith Anne Skura describes the process: “The recent criticism [of The Tempest] not only flattens the text into the mould of colonialist discourse and eliminates what is characteristically ‘Shakespearean’ in order to foreground what is ‘colonialist,’ but is also—paradoxically—in danger of taking the play further from the particular historical situation of England in 1611.”[9]

In the anachronistic postcolonial readings then, Caliban can only be viewed in the context of human history and material identity, despite a lineage and physical reality that reveals him ontologically part human and part something else. Little wonder critics such as Stephen Greenblatt are perplexed and dissatisfied with the ending of The Tempest, for there is no way outside of Christian ontology to make sense of the fairytale ending that is Caliban’s epiphany, his decision to “be wise hereafter / And seek for grace” (5.1.298–99).[10]

What information we have from the culture reinforces that Caliban was not viewed as postcolonial critics represent him. Meredith Anne Skura explains:

> Evidence for the play’s original reception is of course extraordinarily difficult to find, but in the two nearly contemporaneous responses to Caliban that we do know about, the evidence for a colonialist response is at best ambiguous. In Bartholomew Fair (1614) Jonson refers scornfully to a “servant-monster,” and the Folio identifies Caliban as a “salvage and deformed slave” in the cast list. Both “monster” and “salvage” are firmly rooted in the discourse of Old World wild men.... In other words, these two seventeenth-century responses tend to invoke the universal and not the particular implications of Caliban’s condition.[11]

In assessing these examples as “at best ambiguous,” Skura is needlessly generous to the postcolonial argument. Not only are Shakespeare’s references traceable to medieval notions of the Wild Man, there is no reason whatsoever to associate the words “monster,” “savage,” or even “slave” specifically with the colonial aspirations of Jacobean England. To the best of our knowledge, Shakespeare’s audience viewed Caliban as an archetype representing a host of mythic ideas about the primordial, monstrous, and sinful, not as colonized Native American. As Alden T. Vaughan remarks: “If Shakespeare, however obliquely, meant Caliban to personify America’s natives, his intention apparently miscarried almost completely.”[12]

The postmodern, antimetaphysical bias that razes the levels of being available to Renaissance culture seldom extends to Ariel, a much more logical choice to play the superimposed role of colonized victim: his presence on the island predates Caliban’s arrival, making him the earliest known inhabitant. Ariel is also intelligent, loyal, innocent, and capable of the best attributes of human sympathy and the desire for justice. It is Ariel who actually awakens mercy in Prospero toward the sinful characters, and when Prospero’s rage against the conspirators storms most intently, Ariel soothes it: “Your charm so strongly works ‘em / That if you now beheld them your affections / Would become tender” (5.1.16–18).

If, as so much postcolonial criticism suggests, Shakespeare intended to romanticize a native, why is Ariel never seriously considered? Despite his invisibility to the critics, he is all too real to the characters he alternately goads and chastens. Ariel’s high ontological status is overt and irreducible. He is unequivocally not human, yet working sympathetically toward the same ends as Prospero. When Prospero questions Ariel about the admonition that he should become tender in his affections toward his enemies, Ariel adds, “Mine would, sir, were I human” (5.1.20). Like Caliban, Ariel is never referred to as human, not by himself or by any character he encounters. And unlike Caliban, Ariel clearly possessed language, culture, and associate spirits before Prospero freed him from the torment of the tree. As a result of this ontological inevitability, Ariel cannot be coopted, reduced, or reassigned as colonized by any but the most vigorously anachronistic postcolonial arguments.

However easy it might be to refute the argument that Ariel is a victim of colonial cruelty, such a reading is infinitely more plausible than one that seeks to establish Caliban as anticolonialist hero. In postcolonial readings, Prospero is undisputedly the primary villain of the play, and yet very little is made of the relationship between Prospero and Ariel along colonial lines. It is true that once Prospero liberated Ariel from the tree, he required Ariel’s services for a determined length of time as consequence of
that liberation. But then he freed Ariel to the winds ahead of schedule, without subsequent entanglements. And yes, Ariel grumbled initially about the length of his service, but quickly recanted when reminded of the torment endured at the hands of Sycorax. Further, Ariel seems genuinely attached to Prospero, shares his vision of justice, and in expectation of freedom is correspondent to command while doing his spriting gently. Take the play’s ontological parameters seriously, and the premise that Ariel is native islander holds no validity: he is clearly a spirit, a creature of wind not bound by body or location, and has no material interest in the island.

To entertain a postcolonial reading that replaces Caliban with Ariel, affording him privileged subaltern status, poses another conundrum of which postcolonial critics want no part. If Ariel is human native and not ethereal spirit, then it is not Prospero but the Algerian Sycorax and her African confederates—by default Setebos and the other malevolent spirits must be human, too—who colonize, torture, and enslave Ariel:

And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee,
By help of her more potent ministers
And in her most unmitigable rage,
Into a cloven pine, within which rift
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain
A dozen years... (1.2.274–81)

This is as concise and graphic a description of colonization as appears in Renaissance drama, replete with cultural arrogance, extortion, torture, and unjust imprisonment. From this perspective, the colonization is a work of North African infamy, requiring perhaps a supplemental poetics of Occidentalism, not Orientalism. And it is the European Prospero who redresses colonial evil, freeing Ariel, abandoning the island, and unconditionally renouncing all claims over its inhabitants. Of course, such an extended reading strategy is unappealing to our postcolonial critics, whose ideological imperatives inhibit them from exploring colonialism outside Western culture.

PROSPERO AND POSTERITY

This brings us to Prospero, for his unjust demotion must follow the unwarranted elevation of Caliban as night follows day. Far from abetting colonialism, Prospero—himself a victim of usurpation, dispossession, and banishment, cast upon the island as a refugee—frees Ariel from colonalist torment inflicted by Sycorax, then thwarts the mock-colonialist conspiracy of Caliban. In many respects, Prospero is the ultimate colonialist stereotype: the wizened, gray-bearded autocrat—domineering, crafty, prudish and priggish, more taciturn and British than genial and Italian—a cross between Colonel Mustard and Gandalf in short pants and pith helmet examining the troops before the battle of Plassey. For all the wishful thinking invested in the romantic reimagining of Caliban, recasting Prospero as villain is as important for postcolonial approaches to The Tempest, since Prospero fits the negative stereotypes of colonizer more easily than Caliban can be reclaimed as sympathetic native.

However, although brusque, Prospero is benevolent, his considerable power cloaked in mercy and restraint. Caliban does not deny the humane care he first received from Prospero and Miranda, and concedes his attempted rape brought about the change in relations. We must remember that Prospero restricts the freedoms of Caliban only after he seeks to ravish Miranda:

Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,
Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honor of my child. (1.2.347–51)

Harsh words, but hardly surprising, given Caliban’s unrepentance. Quick to concoct elaborate backstory and ahistorical justifications indemnifying Caliban from the assault, postcolonial critics are remarkably unimaginative when it comes to the unmentioned specifics of the attempted rape. Assuming Prospero foiled the attack, is it not worthwhile to pause and imagine the scene? A father comes upon his daughter under assault, the perpetrator that strange, demi-human creature he brought to live in the cell alongside her. This is the recompense for the care lavished on the brute?
Given Prospero’s powers, manifested through the host of potent spirit ministers, the question is not Prospero’s intemperate language, but rather why he did not at once dispatch the creature. To Miranda’s remark that Caliban is “a villain...I do not love to look on,” Prospero responds,

But, as ‘tis,  
We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,  
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices  
That profit us. (1.2.313–16)

Considering the tasks undertaken for Prospero by spirits—not least of which are to “flame amazement” and tote a wooden banquet table across the island—it strains credulity to think Caliban’s meager skills as fire-starter and menial woodman require keeping such a dangerous entity so close. As Caliban concedes, Prospero has mastered the island’s secrets, and his alliance with Ariel ensures his comfort and protection. So why keep Caliban alive? As with all the sinful characters, Prospero keeps them close with the Christian objective of improving them through restraint, abnegation, and redemptive suffering—a motive he is not at liberty to divulge even to Miranda, who, although virtuous, must also undergo moral refinement.

What does Caliban suffer that comes close to torture or genuine slavery? When Prospero first summons Caliban, he grumbles, curses, and delays. For a slave, he is poorly trained, not at all cowed before his master. The exasperated Prospero can only spur Caliban with threats:

For this, be sure, thou shalt have cramps,  
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up. Urchins  
Shall forth at vast of night that they may work  
All exercise on thee. Thou shalt be pinched  
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging  
Than bees that made ‘em. (1.2.328–33)

In addition to such threats there are others delineated by Caliban: cramps and aches, spirits disguised as apes and hedgehogs that “mow and chatter,” then “bite” and “lie tumbling in [his] barefoot way” (2.2.10–12). Sometimes Caliban is “wound with adders, who with cloven tongues / Do hiss [him] into madness” (2.2.9–14). And yet, these spirits at other times serenade Caliban with “Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not” (3.2.138), followed with voices,

That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked  
I cried to dream again. (3.2.141–45)

The spirits that tweak and chasten him are those that elevate his senses and “wind him about” with music and poetry in an effort to develop his more human attributes, the better part of his legacy from his maternal line (3.2.136–44). As a result of Prospero’s ongoing compassion and tutelage, Caliban learns more than mere cursing: he speaks some of the play’s most poignant poetry. Prospero does not treat Caliban with the viciousness expected of a brutal colonizer, nor does he react to the attempted rape with anything like the violence one would anticipate, given his portrayal in postcolonial criticism. Caliban is kept close not because as slave labor he is invaluable to some never-mentioned colonialist project, but because Prospero recognizes a Christian obligation to the creature, that thing of darkness he acknowledges his. This is most obvious at the play’s end, when Caliban the would-be rapist adds attempted murder to his rap sheet. When brought before the company and exposed as unequivocally guilty of attempting two heinous capital crimes, Prospero’s rough justice extends no further than ordering Caliban to clean his room. This is the stuff of vexed yet tender-hearted fathers—not remorseless colonizers.

Postcolonial critics are also uninterested in Prospero’s treatment of Ferdinand, the foil to Caliban’s grumbling excesses. Ferdinand has no acquaintance with hard labor, nor as prince does he know subservience, hunger, or privation. Eager to have Ferdinand as son-in-law, Prospero nevertheless exposes him to the same drudgery that signifies Caliban’s “slavery”: bringing in wood. Caliban’s first contentious words in the play—“There’s wood enough within” (1.2.318)—foreshadow Ferdinand’s humble acceptance of his ordeal as “patient log-man” (3.1.67). Along the way, Ferdinand—who never sought to rape or murder anyone—
is like Caliban led astray by spirits, controlled, berated harshly, accused of treason, manacled, and overpowered by Prospero. This parallel treatment serves to expose differences not among nations and cultures, but in individual hearts and human natures.

**THE TEMPEST AND INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE**

Despite *The Tempest*’s fairytale ending, Shakespeare understands that such utopian visions cannot be for sinful creatures of flesh and blood living in a fallen world. This is why the play takes place on a mythical island in the Mediterranean, and not in the Bermudas. Shakespeare is not writing about New World wonders, marvelous possessions, or greener Edenic pastures overseas, however much postcolonial critics force such readings. Rather, the miraculous reconciliation the play provides can exist only on an enchanted island: one that will vanish like an insubstantial pageant when the company returns to human civilization.

Shakespeare seems immune to idealistic utopian daydreaming that fueled destructive colonial excursions, voyages seeking desired for but never discovered cities of gold and fountains of youth in the pristine New World. Shakespeare’s pragmatic rejection of utopianism can be viewed in the mockery of Gonzalo’s self-contradicting commune, in the antiromantic characterization of Caliban, and in Prospero’s cynical response to Miranda’s exclamation at seeing a mass of humanity assembled for the first time at the play’s end: “Oh, brave new world/ That has such people in’t!” (5.1.185–86). Prospero’s jarring reply—“’Tis new to thee” (5.1.187)—undercuts the idea that humanity can remain in a state of grace, and reminds us that any colonizing vision that seeks heaven on earth is ultimately doomed to disillusion.

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2. Most of these courses have nothing to do with Renaissance culture or Shakespeare, and make no effort to be careful or fair in appropriating *The Tempest* to their particular subject matter. Typically, other academic disciplines—and literary sub-specialties within English departments—cherry pick *The Tempest* to make tendentious points about colonialism today.

3. Postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest* are almost always compulsively literalist, although they do not read the play literally on its terms, allowing it to mean what it says or establish its own poetic and cultural hermeneutics. Rather, they project upon the Renaissance a series of materialist assumptions, ways of seeing the world that ultimately reveal more about the interpreters than they do *The Tempest*.


Jameson marshals this newly-resymbolized, postcolonial Caliban to speak on behalf of marginalized groups within the United States: “It is significant that in the United States itself, we have come to think and to speak of the emergence of an internal Third World and of the internal Third World voices, as in black women’s literature or Chicano literature for example” (49). Ronald Takaki asserts in Iron Cages: “As Englishmen made their ‘errand into the wilderness of America,’ they took lands from Red Calibans and made Black Calibans work for them,” suggesting that Caliban in reality “could be African, American Indian, or even Asian” (11, 13).


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