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Caliban the Savage : Shakespeare's Critique of Colonialist Misappropriation of Indigenous Identities

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis engages with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, analyzing the character Caliban as a critique of British colonialism. I argue that Caliban is not intended simply as a begrudged antagonist, but as a figure intended to represent New World natives. Shakespeare's "savage" also acts as an on-stage embodiment of Africans and other victims of British imperial exploits that suffered subjugation and hegemony. With this character, Shakespeare provides a demonstration of the relationship between Europeans and the colonized, while challenging the very institution of colonialism. Such a work provides valuable post-Shakespearean insights as well. Caliban contributes directly to the dialogue surrounding the experience of the indigenous, the costly cultivation of English identity, and the European condemnation of New World cultural practices. Considering Caliban's nature, story and experiences is pivotal when navigating diasporic literature, as these elements have direct implications for later writers who subsequently attempt to navigate such nuanced experiences.

Keywords: Shakespeare, *Tempest*, Caliban, savage, Colonialism, European, English, imperialism, nature, literature

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

Caliban the Savage: Shakespeare's Critique of Colonialist Misappropriation of Indigenous Identities

by

Leonard Hughes

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CALIBAN THE SAVAGE: SHAKESPEARE'S CRITIQUE OF COLONIALIST
MISAPPROPRIATION OF INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES

A THESIS

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A most intriguing function of Shakespearean drama is its ability to reflect and offer commentary on both the values and overall structure of the viewing community: while the dramas were entertaining, what Shakespearean viewers saw on the stage was often intended to represent their current state, their actions, and implications of such actions. Because of the ambiguous nature of theater crowds, with various members of the social hierarchy present, Shakespeare had the opportunity to contribute a particular discourse with his play *the Tempest*. According to the Arden edition of *the Tempest*, the play “charmed Jacobean audiences, played (in substantially altered form) to packed houses from the Restoration through the 18th century, emerged (in its original form) as a social point in nineteenth-century European debates about the nature of humanity, and served disparate symbolic roles in twentieth-century writings on western imperialism and its demise” (Vaughan and Vaughan 1).

Many of the works of Shakespeare appear to introduce viewers to the nature of their own society. It is quite possible that Shakespeare adopts principles of Aristotle's with regard to tragedy. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare expresses that the purpose of performance art is literally to reflect reality as if holding up a mirror to society:

For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as't were, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature; scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. (III.ii.16-24)

Shakespeare's use of action as a means to imitate life proves useful as a social critique of the immediate English viewing community, and even provides valuable commentary for

later audiences. Such artistic choices are very important when considering how he engages with more controversial concepts, namely the misdeeds of the aristocracy. In *The Tempest* specifically, Caliban is depicted as a savage, horrid beast and as the slave of the westerner, Prospero (I.ii.308-317). Caliban is the villain of the story, but he is not a mindless schemer who provides comic relief. Shakespeare depicts the aristocracy's investment in breaking down and ruining Caliban, making clear the reason for his actions toward them. Though he lived on the island before the arrival of Prospero, he was taken and enslaved. Throughout the play Caliban is told that his life prior to this was meaningless because of his nature as a monster (I.ii.352-363). He is robbed of his agency, his family lineage, his language, and plenty more.

With this depiction Shakespeare introduces his audience to the plight of the colonized through the character of Caliban, questioning the path of English hegemony. This also contributes to the start of a certain literary conversation; the enduring contribution of *The Tempest* is the dialogue that allows for literary minds post-seventeenth century to discuss with more accuracy the lives of indigenous victims of British imperialism. Shakespeare's character design allows future minority writers a way to reclaim the stories taken from them, and a means by which to highlight their own nuance, autonomy, and agency.

This project explores the way in which Shakespeare challenges English colonialism, specifically the relationship between colonizer and the colonized as depicted within *the Tempest*. Shakespeare does not use Caliban simply as a bitter antagonist or an insidious supporting character amidst a more important plot but as a challenge to early moral imperialism and colonization by embodying what later becomes the “noble savage” myth. While there is no explicit connection between Shakespeare and the coining of such a phrase, Caliban's character depicts the very base of the trope.

The term “noble savage”, used to describe (in a derogatory sense) people of the new worlds, was first coined by John Dryden in his play *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1670), a tragedy that attempts to reenact the defeat of the Moors by the Spanish in 1492. The audience encounters the phrase when spoken by the play’s protagonist Almanzor:

No man has more contempt than I, of breath;
 But whence hast thou the right to give me death?
 Obey’d as Sovereign by thy Subjects be,
 But know, that I alone am King of me.
 I am as free as Nature first made man
 ’Ere the base Laws of Servitude began
 When wild in woods the noble Savage ran.

(1.1.1.203-21)

The above context is significant because it highlights the attitudes of invaders towards these “savages” and sets the precedent for how such people would be written about in centuries to come. Wil Verhoeven discusses the influence of writers such as Dryden and later Jean-Jacques Rousseau on other early writers and explorers, and the way that ideas about these noble savages, or “natural” men, impacted colonialist ideologies. Verhoeven explains that “In the decades following the 1763 Peace of Paris, which consolidated Britain’s hegemony in North America, increasing numbers of British travelers of one kind or another struck out for America’s western wilderness hoping to catch a glimpse of a real-life specimen of Rousseau’s *savage man*. When their accounts of America’s pristine wilderness and its natural inhabitants reached audiences in Europe, many believed they recognized in them the very *state of nature* that Rousseau had written about in his *Discourse*” (Verhoeven 225). Literature that recounted

English travelers' sightings of natives with exoticized detail worked not only to inspire more and more excursions to unfamiliar lands but also to cement the mythology that surrounded what lies beyond the shores; such stories inspire a sort of conquest tied directly to the English sense of importance and the overall duty to establish national identity by lording it over those deemed lesser.

In *Transatlantic Encounters*, Alden T. Vaughan details the story of Captain Martin Frobisher's capture of a Canadian native and the exploitation of this figure in England in 1576. He describes the reaction of the English upon looking at the man from Baffin Island, and their attempt to find language to describe such a figure (Vaughan 47). The onlookers reference the appearance and the language of the captive man as being like nothing they had ever seen. The success of such a capture prompted him to travel again to Baffin Island in 1577 and capture more island dwellers. These latter endeavors, however, proved disastrous, as one of his ships sank and the native Inuit people, who may have already experienced European strangers, proved distrustful of him; Vaughan explains that five of Frobisher's men disappeared without a trace, presumably taken by the natives (Vaughan 45).

Frobisher did manage to bring more natives to England, but each of these fiascos resulted in their deaths a short time after their arrival. England remained a step behind its European counterparts in terms of capturing the New World. Vaughan writes:

Spain had initiated the practice in March 1493, When Columbus's Niña landed at Lisbon, Portugal. Crowds along the Tagus River stared less at the storm-battered ship, and its suddenly famous commander than at ten strangers from across the ocean, with scanty garments, feathered hair, and tattooed faces. Several of the captives accompanied Columbus to an audience with Portugal's royal family at a monastery north of Lisbon,

Where King John II was startled by their nakedness yet impressed by their intelligence.

(Vaughan 12)

The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of the implications of Caliban's character by analyzing language, historical context, and other key elements. These will be used to solidify connections between the character's experiences and the trope of the natural man or the savage. What will result is a visible depiction of Caliban's intended purpose.

Although the specific label of “noble savage” for such a character comes more than a century after *The Tempest*, Caliban's character demonstrates the playwright's awareness of an invader's misguided understanding of those being colonized; Caliban is described frequently as a monster by various characters, although they find uses for him. Nonetheless, Miranda (I.ii.308-309), Prospero (I.ii.318-319), and even Stephano (II.ii.49-50) deem Caliban to be something cruel and untamed, and savage. According to the *OED* (5), the word “savage” had been used in the sixteenth century as a description “of peoples or (now somewhat *rarely*) of individual persons: Uncivilized; existing in the lowest stage of culture.” The Middle English and Anglo-French root words described dwellers of the woodlands and forest. Despite what he might have to offer, his “savage” nature is seen as innate, and therefore, is a rationale for his captivity.

“When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known” (I.ii.358-361).

What makes Caliban special is the exploratory nature of his dialogue throughout the play; Shakespeare appears to “respond” in a sense to the English identity developed by colonial exploits in writing by giving voice to the very “savage” the empire harms on its quest. Because the English assessment of indigenous peoples of the new world is based on what they value, their invasions and the uprooting of the native way of life is described as a gift. Shakespeare has

Prospero and Miranda express exactly this idea when speaking to Caliban. He, however, challenges the idea, not with humble gratitude, but with genuine anger:

You taught me language, and my profit on't
 Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
 For learning me your language! (I.ii.363-366)

The Arden edition suggests that Shakespeare may have “borrowed from Montaigne’s description of Brazilians, in John Florio’s translation in 1603” (Vaughan and Vaughan 45). Montaigne reports the findings of various sources to describe the native people of Brazil, especially their practice of eating defeated enemies. He appears to relate these people to the Italians referred to as “barbarians” who later conquered Greece.

Notable in this context is the bias the European travelers brought with them to the New World; unfamiliar cultural practices would be labeled “barbaric” by any with strong ties to the English homeland. As depicted frequently within *The Tempest*, the aristocratic characters demonstrate a feeling of superiority to Caliban, whom they deem savage and barbaric. They are clear and intentional in their efforts to distance themselves from him through speech and through action, as the essence of Caliban’s character (his culture, his native language, and especially his appearance) undermines what they consider to be ideal.

Montaigne goes on to describe the culture of Brazilian people with sufficient nuance, describing the importance of their closeness with nature. He explains that the natives operate with an incredible simplicity by leaning on the laws of nature. He appears to admire them, professing that:

The lawes of nature do not yet commaund them, which are but little bastardized by ours.
 And that with such puritie, as I am sometimes grieved the knowledge of it came no

sooner to light, at what time ther were men, that better than we could have judged of it ... for meseemeth that what in those nations wee see by experience, doth not onelie exceed all the pictures wherewith licentious Poesie hath proudly embellished the golden age, & al hir quaint inventions to faine a happy condition of man, but also the conception & desire of Philosophie.... so pure and simple, as we by experience; nor ever beleeve our societie might be maintained with so little arte and human combination... It is a nation, would I answer *Plato*, that hath no kind of traffike... no occupation but idle; no respect of kindred, but common, no apparrell, no agriculture, no metal, no use of wine, corne or mettle. The very words that import lying, falshood, treason, dissimulation, covetousnes, envie, detraction, and pardon, were never heard of amongst them. (Rpt. in Vaughan and Vaughan 61)

Montaigne evokes the trope of the noble savage with this description of the natives as carefree and peaceful without the stress of an intricate hierarchy. However, he very importantly challenges the idea that the culture of New World dwellers is inferior. Such a challenge is a frequent occurrence within *The Tempest* as Caliban pushes against the conditions of his captivity and resists the idea that he is lesser.

This influence is clear in Shakespeare's design of Caliban's many disputes of the notion of his own inferiority. Montaigne describes the wartime behaviors of the native Brazilians, explaining that they do battle with local tribes wearing very little clothing and wielding a bow and spear. He discusses in depth their traditional custom of roasting and eating their defeated foes and sharing such spoils with their comrades. Instead of expressing fear or shock at the brutal practice, however, Montaigne objectively interprets the custom, humanizing the natives by asserting:

I am not sorry we note the barbarous horror of such an action, but grieved, that prying so narrowly into their faults, we are so blinded in ours. I think there is more barbarisme in eating men alive, than to feede upon them being dead; to mangle by tortures and torments a body full of lively sense, to roast him in peeces, to make dogges and swine to gnawe and teare him in mammockes (as we have not only read, but seene very lately, yea and in our owne memorie, not amongst ancient enemies, but in our neighbours and fellow-citizens; and which is worse, under pretence of piety and religion) then to roast and teare him after he is dead.” (Rpt. in Vaughan and Vaughan 330)

Montaigne’s commentary is demonstrative of genuine acclaim for the practices of the native Brazilians; his narration maintains the dignity of the native people without inclusion of the influence of white outsiders. Furthermore, his comments here critique the barbaric and violent nature of western punishments that inflict cruelty on living bodies.

Alen Avdic discusses the way that imposing language upon natives contributes directly to colonization efforts; language becomes a signifier of identity and is associated with social status. Avdic explains that Prospero, Miranda, and others in the play “follow this pattern mainly by showing their supremacy over the island’s native either by imposing their language onto him or by envisioning profit in displaying the exotic other as a sideshow attraction in England. Either way, the will to rule over the other rests on the power of language to signify the other as uncivilized and brutish hence making the process of civilization justified in the course of their narrative” (Avdic 62). Dominance over such an important social component as spoken language is intended to grant those around Caliban the ability to control a significant portion of his autonomy, and thus the suppression of his identity sustains their own.

Shakespeare frequently indicates the importance of language and the role it plays in the struggle for power within the play; dominance for the aristocrats means asserting hegemony and indoctrinating natives into the supposedly superior culture. Since communication is central to the very establishment and maintenance of any society, language itself naturally becomes extremely important amidst a clash of cultures. *The Tempest* does well to highlight this; Avdic explains that within this work, language “is essential in understanding the manner in which the play is interpolated with colonialism. Whether written or spoken, the need for human beings to communicate is pivotal to our social development, and so in the colonial discourse language will be the first thing to be passed on from colonizer to the colonized” (62). The assertion that Caliban had absolutely no language or culture at all before the arrival of Prospero and those near to him is a most telling detail, one that makes such interactions nearly allegorical in terms of how Europeans would think of the inhabitants of the New World. To Caliban's captors, his language was meaningless noise; he had no culture, no power, and no purpose before they had found him. Although he may have existed and thrived without interruption, his value and autonomy become irrelevant outside of what he can offer to the colonizers. Servants like Caliban are often reprimanded for even mild insubordination and urged to rejoice in their salvation while reflecting negatively on their past condition (Avdic 63). The viewer is enticed to accept the description of Caliban provided by his captors as literal; one might take for granted that Caliban is literally a beast. Nevertheless, within a play where dialogue is so pivotal, a careful reader can assert that Caliban is simply a man in a cage who almost has no say in his own narrative.

Throughout the course of the play, we see that Shakespeare has Caliban challenge the perception of those who assume dominance over him, urging the viewer to question the reliability of the structure at hand: is Caliban evil? Has he been wronged, or does

he deserve captivity? Who decides who the monsters are? More importantly, what does Shakespeare know about the misappropriation of this sort of character? Because of the derogatory and often sharp language of those who engage with Caliban, it is suggested that Caliban is a mindless beast with violent desires. Shakespeare uses Caliban's dialogue to challenge the notion of what is familiar; Caliban is not a monster bent on destruction, but a scorned victim of colonization who has lost in birthright to invaders:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
 Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
 Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
 Water with berries in't, and teach me how
 To name the bigger light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
 And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.
 Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
 Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
 For I am all the subjects that you have,
 Which first was mine own king. And here you sty me
 In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
 The rest o' th' island. (I.ii.332-345)

Caliban here reflects with regret on the experience of being colonized—specifically, as the Arden indicates, being taught a sort of astronomy (I.ii.336-337) by Prospero in return for being shown the island. He laments the loss of autonomy at the hand of Prospero, and the consolidation

of his territory to one small portion of the island he called his home. This is the cruel reality of colonialism that Shakespeare appears to highlight in this encounter; rarely ever was there a sort of tradeoff between the natives and the English ruling class. Instead, as expressed in Caliban's speech, the indigenous were subjugated and their history rewritten.

Because Shakespeare's portrayal of Caliban is a challenge to an early construct of colonialism, *The Tempest* offers valuable insights in terms of understanding indigenous people's condition under colonization. What this means is that Shakespeare's character contributes to a social critique that reaches far beyond the original viewing audience and holds key implications for the writings of later generations of authors. The language and attitudes demonstrated in *The Tempest* appear to be indicative of a colonizer's attitudes, intentions and even practices regarding natives (or slave owner-to-captive dynamics). This assertion is sustained in part by a handful of Prospero's interactions with his servants, both Caliban (in the above quotation) and Ariel, the magical spirit. In an earlier sequence, Prospero the rightful Duke of Milan firmly reprimands Ariel for bringing up his eventual freedom from servitude, reminding him to appreciate his condition:

Thou liest, malignant thing! Hast thou forgot
 The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy
 Was grown into a hoop? Hast thou forgot her?
 I must
 Once in a month recount what thou hast been,
 Which thou forget'st. This damn'd witch Sycorax
 For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible
 To enter human hearing, From Argier,

Thou know'st was banish'd: for one thing she did

They would not take her life. Is this not true? (I.ii. 256-78)

Prospero here intends to remind Ariel of his former servitude under Caliban's mother Sycorax and the conditions in Argier, which is an early name for the capital city of Algeria. In *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance*, Andrew Hadfield explains that the island where this takes place, while ambiguous, "is somewhere off the coast of Africa, probably off the coast of Algeria or Tunisia. As Gonzalo makes clear, the Europeans are returning from the marriage of Alonso's daughter, Claribel, to the King of Tunis" (Hadfield 243).

Caliban, as Sycorax's son, is African, and Ariel was at least a servant in Africa for some time. Both are exploited for their exotic talents by the ruling class. Prospero rationalizes that slavery on the island is far better than whatever life his servants had prior. While Shakespeare may certainly be less concerned with an exact geographical location and more concerned with depicting the relationship between Prospero and his servants, assigning a loose nationality to Ariel and Caliban works to solidify the imagery, making Prospero's harsh treatment of them indicative of colonial hegemony.

Shakespeare seems to loosely attribute an area of origin to his two servants Ariel and Caliban, as well as Caliban's mother Sycorax. Granting such characters a place of origin however, does not inextricably tie them to a racial identity. The play, instead, contains various contextual links between Sycorax, Caliban and blackness that appear to imply ethnicity. Prospero's description of Sycorax's status as a "damn'd witch" (I.ii.265), a term often used to vilify indigenous appearance and practices, is one such indication (Vaughan and Vaughan 51). The Arden indicates that *the Tempest* "never describes Caliban's complexion, but 'this thing of

darkness' (5.1.275) may refer to a dusky skin; his enslavement by European intruders reinforces Caliban's thematic tie to Africa; his name, if derived from the town of Caliber, is emphatically African, and if 'Caliban' is instead a purposeful anagram of cannibal, it is as symptomatic of English perceptions of Africans as of Native Americans" (Vaughan and Vaughan 48). In the same manner as Caliban's physical description as beastly and unsightly can be read as an indication of racial attributes, the labeling of Sycorax as a witch is indicative of cultural practices that are unfamiliar to white travelers. Matthieu Chapman writes that within early English dramas, witches and devils would be represented by dark figures, a practice that fixed the concept of evil and dark skin very closely (Chapman 142). As a result, English Christians who saw this on stage would begin to closely associate the darker bodies with evil. This detail is key in terms of Prospero's characterization of Caliban. Prospero references both a distance of blackness from "humanness" and connects it with a damning evil when speaking of Caliban to Alonso:

Mark but the badges of these men, my lords,
 Then say if they be true. This mis-shapen knave,
 His mother was a witch, and one so strong
 That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs,
 And deal in her command without her power.
 These three have robb'd me; and this demi-devil—
 For he's a bastard one--had plotted with them
 To take my life. Two of these fellows you
 Must know and own; this thing of darkness I
 Acknowledge mine. (V.i.269-276)

The dehumanization of blackness is an element that is central to Prospero's attitude towards Sycorax and her son Caliban and a fixture that helps solidify Caliban as a representation of the subjugated outsider. Furthermore, this statement, particularly the final lines, solidifies the close association of the dark figure of Caliban and evil. The statement demonstrates Prospero's understanding of racially charged language; this is as much a condemnation of Caliban's person, his entire essence, as it is of his actions. As the "thing of darkness" Caliban is detached from humanity, and whereas a human servant might be able to be absolved after adequate punishment, the inhuman Caliban is deemed an evil stain.

We must also examine the way a writer might attempt to capture a history that includes atrocities, specifically racialized history and its implications. England in the seventeenth century had begun to take a serious interest in expansion in various directions and to many different ends. Why would these endeavors be important for writers and playwrights? The writing that depicted such events would directly affect the narratives surrounding both the homeland and the new territories. We can look at colonial writings of the early seventeenth century and their effect on the English sense of nationality. Hadfield discusses the function of colonial literature and its role in molding the traveler's sense of identity:

In short, colonial literature, like the colonist, occupies an ambiguous position between the motherland and the colonized land. Colonial literature is often vociferously committed to the metropolis, which it has irrevocably left behind, and yet, in the face of a different location and a different culture, is obliged to acknowledge that the identity of 'home' has changed beyond recognition. Just as new identities are forged in such a process, so is there a concomitant need for the new forms of government, making the colonist a radical

thinker whether or not he accepts such a position, because colonizers have been forced to recognize the violence necessary for the formation of states. (Hadfield 70)

Amidst evolving external realities, the British sense of self had begun to change, and with these changes followed the rationalization of both violent ideologies and actions. Political events such as England's rivalry with expanding European nations such as Spain contributed heavily to molding the English sense of identity. Political messages were present within such literature. According to Hadfield one important (though not central) purpose of English colonial literature was to "promote the myth of Spanish cruelty and greed, so defending the natural English right to empire as a civilized way of spreading trade and Christianity to the barbarians" (71). More importantly, English colonial writers used knowledge of Spanish colonial exploits to "reflect on their own political status and to consider exactly what the establishment of an empire could mean" (71). Not only do stories of such conquest offer inspiration to the English in terms of the glory of colonial exploits, but the language used by the Spanish also stands as a precedent on how to address the locals. Prospero's attitude towards Caliban, reflected in his many chastisements, appears to echo the basis of England's newly developed sense of identity that rationalizes hegemony and violence against natives. To Prospero, whose motivation is regaining the acclaim and status he feels is owed to him, making use of non-white "inhuman" locals as slaves is symptomatic of such an oppressive ideology.

The circulation of geographical or cultural information was most easily shared through what is now known as colonial travel literature. Hilal Kaya explains that "the English people traveled foreign lands and shared their knowledge by writing. In other words, the purpose of writing about other lands and recounting one's experiences of foreign travel is that these representations increase the reader's knowledge of other cultures, providing useful

information” (Kaya 68). The article explains that travel literature was not very common prior to the start of the seventeenth century, when it suddenly became almost immediately prevalent. One key component in the popularization of such literature, particularly travel literature that described colonial exploits (for example, the establishment and success of colonies in distant lands), was the fact that the spread of such knowledge contributed directly to the power of the English empire. Kaya notes that “It can be argued that such writings were produced out of the need to struggle with the victories of other rival nations (Spain and Portugal) to protect the English independence” (70). While travel literature did in fact focus much on current events, observations, and recordings, England’s political landscape also began to become a feature of English writing.

Creatives like Shakespeare participated in such dialogues, using his various dramas to develop political ideas. Shakespeare frequently demonstrates a familiarity with the politics of racial identity and seems to understand the implications of the language used to discuss it. This is demonstrated through the experiences of various characters of his such as Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus* and Othello in *Othello*:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram
Is tugging your white ewe. Arise, arise,
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.
Arise, I say! (I.i.90-94)

Here we begin to see the notion of the exotic outsider, not quite a savage, but certainly someone who did not belong aside from what he could provide. In Othello's case, it is military leadership and prowess: “Shakespeare successfully displays the idea that although Othello

will remain as one of the outsiders within the society, when the colony of Italy, Cyprus, is threatened by the Ottomans, Othello is, nevertheless, needed as an important soldier to meet Turkish danger in Cyprus” (Kaya 80). Like Caliban, Othello is unavoidable, an unsightly outsider whom others endure because he can contribute. He isn't of the servant class but serves, nonetheless. While his talents are acknowledged, his otherness cannot be ignored.

The Tempest appears to depict a version of the same European political ideals, with Prospero and his family seemingly representing the ambitious colonial English questing for dynasty, and with Caliban representing the wild savage, the vicious untamed native. Prospero's entire quest through the course of the play very closely parallels the ideology and efforts of the English.

Many similarities can be drawn between Caliban and the protagonist of Aphra Behn's short fictional work *Oroonoko*. The story details the experience of a prince who is deceived and sold off into slavery by colonists. Because Oroonoko's narrative closely parallels the experience of Caliban, the novel becomes important when discussing Shakespeare's effect on later generations of artists writing critically about British imperialism (Kaya 97). Some significant similarities between Caliban and Oroonoko are that they have been unfairly robbed of royal lineage in their native land and thrown into servitude, but also that they are deemed useful or special because of their talents. In the case of Oroonoko, he is admired for his physical prowess, handsome looks, and royal heritage. Behn writes:

He was pretty tall, but of a Shape the most exact that can be fancy'd: The most famous Statuary could not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn'd from Head to Foot. His Face was not of that brown rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polished Jet ... His Nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat:

His Mouth the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole Proportion and Air of his Face were so nobly and exactly formed, that bating his Colour, there could be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. (Behn 21)

In this description, the admiration of Oroonoko lies in what the narrator identifies as Eurocentric and familiar characteristics: the white observer has no attraction to native markings, nor does she compliment any such characteristic. Distancing this unique “savage” from blackness makes his usefulness more easily rationalized, as the natives are frequently demonized within English literature that describes the New World.

Early in the novel, the author offers a description of the west Indian people that the Europeans trade with that is somewhat similar to the idea of the "noble savage" trope. Behn writes:

They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touched. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance; and being continually used to see one another so unadorned, Like our first Parents before the fall. It seems as if they had no wishes, there being nothing to heighten Curiosity: but all you can see, you see at once, and every Moment see; and where there no Novelty, there can be no Curiosity (7).

These observations contribute to the notion that the native people should be easy to overtake whether they are commoners or royalty. The only difference is that those with talents or high-ranking lineages, such as Oroonoko or Caliban, are particularly useful as domestic servants. Behn, as Kaya explains, does not analyze the practice of colonialism or slavery; she is known to be loyal to the British government. Kaya notes that “at the end of the novel, Behn

seems to be sorry for Oroonoko, but her pity is just for one man. She does not criticize the whole system of colonization and slavery” (Kaya 98). This appears to be where the narrative usage of Shakespeare and Behn’s character’s deviate. Behn’s narration laments the suffering of a single “Great Man; worthy of a better fate” (Behn 239). The language of *The Tempest* highlights the loss of Caliban’s native land, native tongue, culture and family. These are the true casualties of English colonial endeavors.

When Oroonoko begins to demand his freedom after his love becomes pregnant, it becomes apparent that the narrator believes he should be satisfied with conditions at the hands of the colonists; in a similar fashion as Caliban in *the Tempest*, the narrative begins to lean toward a judgment of Oroonoko's character. It is implied that his past life outside of what is implemented by white masters is nothing and that without their culture and language, he is owed no admiration. In the *Tempest* Shakespeare depicts a colonial ideology that utilizes the concept of the outsider or the other, as both a rationale for solidarity with the ruling class and a justification for the subjugation of native people. This creates a particularly complex circumstance; although Caliban is essentially a native to the island, he is ostracized as an outsider. Those who colonize him then, through appropriation and hegemony, become the island’s ruling residents.

In *Things of Darkness* Kim Hall discusses the early popularization of the African body as an indication of a grotesque subhuman nature. According to Hall, early English audiences were captivated by the description of African figures as “out of joint” in early travel literature such as *Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. Such descriptions worked to support the superiority of Europeans by offering overdramatized depictions of the natives worlds away, suggesting that they ate raw flesh, walked on one foot, had eyes on their shoulders, and had eyes with no lips (Hall 25).

Hall's account of descriptions of Ethiopia, for example, introduces to readers a sense of unsustainable spontaneity, a frightening disjointedness of not only the native people but also their culture and even the landscape. Such detail "insists on the absolute difference between the reader and the subject. Like Ethiopia's rivers, the bodies of the natives, who have but one foot and who change color, are unstable and disordered. Such corporeal and geographical transgressions, as anthropologist Mary Douglas has revealed, are often the signs of a threat to a culture's social boundaries" (27). The comparison of this fabricated understanding of African natives with English culture became important to building a sense of identity and helped to rationalize and dignify European involvement in Africa, particularly the slave trade. The characterization of Caliban as monstrous is strikingly similar to the descriptions in John Mandeville's adventures. Such a description functions in essentially the same manner; the language was chosen to establish Caliban as an other, a dangerous oddity. He is understood to be subhuman, and like the distorted recollection of the native Ethiopians, the dehumanization of Caliban solidifies a sense of identity for the elite.

Deborah Willis discusses how this idea is demonstrated in the play and how it contributes to the understanding of the impact of seventeenth-century colonialism. She establishes that the "discourse operates in part by 'producing' a threatening 'other' that can be used to confirm colonial power. In *The Tempest*, otherness is embodied by the 'masterless' men, Stephano and Trinculo, by the sexuality of Miranda and Ferdinand, and especially by Caliban. The threatening other is used by the colonial power to display its own godliness, to ensure aristocratic class solidarity, to justify the colonial project morally, and to 'further its workings' through the reorientation of desire" (Willis 277). The qualities that define the savage and masterless man

become a trope that solidifies the newly shaped English identity that was forged in large part by the influence of colonial travel literature. Willis writes that throughout Shakespeare's work,

Descriptions of Caliban in the text are varied and suggest that indeterminacy is an essential feature of his character. He crosses several real boundaries: half-human, half-devil or perhaps half-human, half-fish; abnormal mentally and physically; savage, 'strange beast' and 'moon-calf.' As 'wild man,' he is also a composite, possessing the qualities of the 'noble savage' as well as the monster. He is capable of learning a language, of forming warm attachments; he is sensitive to beauty and music; he speaks—like the aristocratic characters—in the rhythms of verse, in contrast to the prose of Stephano and Trinculo; he can follow a plan and reason; yet he is also physically deformed, 'vile', credulous, and capable of rape and brutality. (284)

While Caliban is given such derogatory attributes that are passed off as almost innate, he is still used for his various skills and knowledge. These more positive attributes are noticed as redeeming qualities or signs that he has a place in society. Instead, Caliban is used for what he is worth under the justification that his physical essence is not that of a real human being. While Caliban has some nuanced capabilities, the features of his personality that mark him as an "other" take precedence. His servitude is justified by noted characteristics, and the instance of him showing a lapse in restraint is used to define him (Willis 285).

The Tempest depicts the way that colonization developed the English sense of identity, but also the implications of that new identity. With the expansion of English dominance becoming increasingly important, colonial endeavors began to augment travelers' desire to honor the homeland with glory and conquest. Such renown is central to the attitude adopted toward indigenous people of the lands the British began to settle; if British culture and heritage were a

paeon to the elite class, then other cultures could be deemed inferior as a result. Thus, the sentiment of “otherness” is developed in terms of native peoples. Not only are these people considered lesser, but also their ability to change is doubted entirely.

Patricia Akhimie's *Shakespeare and The Cultivation of Difference* discusses this very stressed relationship as depicted in Shakespeare's work, specifically the way that Caliban's prestige is erased and replaced with subservience to Prospero's will. Akhimie explains, “Caliban, once the would-be king of the island, is a cultivated servant. Grouped together with Stephano and Trinculo, Caliban has found not the gods nor kings he hoped to worship, but the members of a working-class to which Prospero has seen to it he will now belong” (Akhimie 25).

In terms of the state of “otherness” imposed upon the natives that Caliban represents, the play seems to depict two theories. Akhimie describes these two theories as:

One that suggests that improvement is possible and can be facilitated by cultivation: education and the practice of good conduct. Prospero, Ferdinand, and Miranda are all elevated in this way. The second theory, though, is that some people cannot be improved and, indeed this second, contradictory theory may be necessary in order to shore up the first: perhaps in order for some to improve, others must be deemed unimprovable.

In response to Prospero's desperate desire to rise by regaining lost social status, Caliban emerges as a kind of counterpoint or benchmark, representing an uncultivable underclass of subhuman who cannot improve. (19)

These two conflicting points are sustained particularly at the moment Prospero makes distinctions between Caliban and the other two conspirators in Act 5; it seems to be suggested that Stephano and Trinculo, while criminals, are still white and therefore can somewhat be reformed. The “demi-devil” (V.i.272) Caliban, however, can never be changed or improved. His

permanent distance from whiteness and Christianity bar him from any hope of ever being akin to the European.

Hall presents evidence that suggests that early modern England used a commodified concept of blackness to solidify elitist high-society ideology. According to Hall, black people “were brought to England not only as slaves with the absolute objectification of that state but also as curiosities who represented the riches that could be obtained by European travelers, traders, and collectors in Atlantic enterprise” (Hall 211-212). She elaborates that the presence of black servants amongst affluent individuals worked to establish prestige, the way that expensive clothing or jewelry might. The image of the exotic black figure became a commodity, a consumer item tied to the European sense of self: “The placement of black face on furniture, flasks, signs, lights, and other artifacts indicate that dark-skinned Africans were objects of symbolic importance and cultural exchange long before they became a numerically significant group in the English population. Later the appearance of actual black attendants in English portraiture is associated with the increase in consumer goods in the seventeenth century” (212).

Chapman discusses the juxtaposition of blackness and whiteness, and the importance of race as a developmental factor in European identity. This subconscious factor would become extremely apparent, particularly in English literature and drama. Because of the depictions of devils as black figures on stage, blackness would become almost synonymous with inhumanity, illness and even death itself. These types of characters became more frequently present in drama. Chapman explains that “rather than the English using blackness to represent devils, they used the inhuman devil to represent notions of blackness, thus adding death to the numerous meanings inherent to blackface cosmetics” (42). He further elaborates that, in the sixteenth century,

The black body on stage, through the use of the same blackening prosthetics as stage devils, came to represent living death and became a form of structural commodity that, through its staging, confirms and enhances the recognition of one's individual subjectivity. After the encounter with black flesh, the staging mechanisms for blackness evolved, moving away from devils morphing into humanized representations of black flesh that appear as manifestations of the subject's wealth, the subject's capacity for property, and the subject's capacity for interlocution. These staged blacks do not own property, but rather appear as property of a subject" (42).

Dramatized depictions of black figures on stage being closely associated with subhuman creatures and even death itself go beyond the symbolic. Once this sort of imagery is actualized, it is relatively easy to understand how it would be adopted into engagement with the people of distant non-white lands. With no real personal experience of indigenous people, Europeans would of course recall depictions of the evils depicted on stage to understand the natural man.

How does Caliban express the effect that colonialism has on his own identity? Surely, he opposes his subjugation in bold retorts and affirmations of his own autonomy, but what toll has his imprisonment taken on him? Shakespeare appears to allow Caliban to express how negatively slavery has affected him:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again. And then, in dreaming,

The clouds me thought would open and show riches

Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked

I cried to dream again. (III.ii.129-136)

Caliban here explains that the illusions and sounds of the island do not hurt anyone, a knowledge that only a native to the island might know. He does not, however, express much comfort in being awake, although he knows the images are harmless because the stress of his real life is far worse than the world of his dreams. Caliban “cried” to dream again and to escape the harsh reality of his subservience. Shakespeare adds nuance to Caliban's character by not simply making him an aggressive thorn in Prospero's side or a figure of comic relief, but a transparent servant who expresses anguish. Thus, Caliban is humanized before the audience in more than one way, as a resilient conspirator and as a victim. The strategic design of Caliban's character, while intended to be critical of the immediate viewers of Shakespearean drama, carries undoubtable importance for later generations of writers. Works such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for example, would attempt to engage the New World traveler's experience, but such depictions often fail to humanize the indigenous people; the interactions between English and natives instead lean heavily on the tropes developed by travel literature, neglecting the lived experience of all but the white travelers. In such contexts, the dark skin of the natives would still be vilified, their culture would be critiqued and discouraged, and this would be used as a rationale for their subjugation. The impression left by Shakespeare on the discourse surrounding the victims of colonialism is undoubtable. It may be fair even to assert that some pre-Victorian abolitionist literature draws inspiration from Shakespeare's intentional character design. An important component of Hannah More's “The Sorrows of Yamba” for example, is the ability to establish pathos with readers:

Down my cheeks the tears are dripping,
Broken is my heart with grief;
Mangled my poor flesh with whipping,
Come kind death! and bring relief.
Born on Afric's Golden Coast,
Once I was as blest as you;
Parents tender I could boast,
Husband dear, and children too. (9-16)

Like Caliban, the subject of Moore's poem is taken from her homeland, expresses missing her family, and sheds tears and a longing for rest. Most strikingly, the subject is allowed to freely and directly express this grief. While it cannot be confirmed that Moore read *The Tempest*, the stylistic parallel is noteworthy. Shakespeare's Caliban offers a critique of colonial endeavors, but the depth of such a dialogue has lasting implications for post-colonial writers, various non-white people who seek to reclaim their own narrative.

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