



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di laurea Triennale in
Lingue, Letterature e Mediazione Culturale

Tesi di laurea triennale

**Transforming Caliban:
Analysing the Evolution of Imagery and Representation in
Shakespeare's *The Tempest***

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Anno Accademico 2023-2024

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Foreword: Caliban, son of Sycorax, the native

Since the initial publication of *The Tempest*, Caliban has been described as “a savage and deformed slave” in the dramatis personae. Despite being summarized in just these five words, the character I will focus on in this thesis has been extensively analysed and interpreted by numerous scholars, with each one of them attempting to explain his mysteries and enigmas. What is certain about Caliban are his actions on stage and certain aspects of his past, both of which are crucial parts of the story: he is the sole living individual on the mysterious island, the son of Sycorax, an African witch who was also exiled there. When he is found by Prospero and Miranda, he shows compassion and friendliness towards the two exiles, teaching them how to survive in his environment, and earning their affection for this. At some point in time, however, Caliban attempts to rape Miranda, leading to his enslavement by Prospero as a consequence, and sees the control of the island seized from him by the magician. (1.2.331-44).¹ Caliban is first seen on stage cursing Prospero for his condition before being assigned the task of gathering wood (1.2.374). He then encounters Trinculo and Stephano, whom he mistakes for deities, and pledges his allegiance to them (2.2.111-58) in an attempt to have Prospero killed by the drunkards (3.2.85-104). The plan is then foiled (4.1.256-62), and eventually, Caliban, at the mercy of Prospero and acknowledging that Stephano and Trinculo are mere foolish drunkards, submits to the sorcerer and vows to “seek for grace” (5.1.295).

Shakespeare’s decision to refrain from providing a detailed physical description of Caliban in his play is consistent with his usual practices, allowing for various different interpretations by actors. Despite this lack of physical description, Caliban stands out among the other characters by possessing unique characteristics that are emphasised through the words of the other characters. In fact, as the play progresses, more and more derogatory appellatives such as “freckled whelp” (1.2.283), “earth” (314), “tortoise” (316) “filth” (345), “hag-seed” (364), “fish” (2.2.24), “mooncalf” (102), “beast” (4.1.140) and “misshapen knave” (5.1.268) are used to describe the son

¹ Shakespeare, William, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Tempest*, ed. by Stephen Orgel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. This is the edition I have used throughout the thesis.

of Sycorax, portraying him as someone fundamentally human, yet with monstrous qualities. *The Tempest* was first performed on Hallowmas' night at Whitehall in 1611, twelve years before it was first published in the Folio of 1623 (following Shakespeare's death in 1616). Shakespeare relied on the actors' abilities in acrobatics, athleticism, and mimicry, as well as on the costumes and, above all, on the dialogues to portray each character, and particularly to bring out the distinct nature of Caliban. During the seventeenth century, the absence of detailed character descriptions was a common occurrence in theatre. However, it is interesting that Caliban's monstrous appearance, as highlighted by both other characters in the play and in the *dramatis personae*, set him apart. These 'descriptions' and the treatment Caliban is subjected to in the play, together with historical studies, have led to a myriad of different interpretations, speculations, and even rewritings by scholars and writers over the centuries. All these attempts at inserting Caliban into a precise category have proven to be a complex and evolving topic as time has passed.

As additional inquiries and studies were carried out on the source material – across a wide range of disciplines, from history to philosophy – a growing number of adaptations for the stage first and for the screen later were produced. These new adaptations of the play gave rise to diverse interpretations of Caliban, each uniquely conceptualised, developed, and portrayed on stage with noticeable variations not only in physical features, but also in the symbolic significance that Caliban conveys. Given that one cannot solely define Caliban's character by the actors who portrayed him, this thesis seeks to examine these evolving depictions.

In order to better understand the matter, in this thesis I will explore those that I believe to be the primary 'visions' of Caliban and part of the associated concepts that are most closely linked to the character. Commencing with the portrayal in the Shakespearean drama, I will delve into the various 'inhuman' ideas and interpretations of Caliban, ranging from the broad yet significant representation as a "monster" born out of the anxieties towards the 'otherness' of the New World, to the depiction of him as the abnormal offspring resulting from the coupling of a witch and a demon

as perceived through the lens of King James I's *Daemonologie*. Following this analysis, I will then examine the animal imagery used to define Caliban and his characteristics, with a particular emphasis on aquatic and amphibian animals. The initial stage of the character will be concluded by exploring his depictions in visual art and the endeavours of artists to move beyond from the limitations of the play's dialogue in order to portray a more authentic version of Caliban.

The second 'phase' of Caliban, in my view, is more recent, and is especially aligned with numerous ideologies that emerged in the twentieth century, including anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and feminism. In modern discourse, Caliban is no longer perceived as a mere monster; rather, he is increasingly viewed as a human figure, emblematic of a native who suffers as a result of Prospero's colonial endeavours and ideologies. After examining the English colonial culture and its relevance to the character of Caliban, I opted to briefly investigate the theme of deformity and the stigma that associates with it. This motif is employed by Shakespeare not only in *The Tempest*, but also, arguably to an even greater extent, in *Richard III*. I contend that an exploration of this theme is crucial for comprehending the character of Caliban from both a historical and a humanistic standpoint. To further this analysis, I made the choice to examine a twentieth century reinterpretation of the play that is widely renowned for its anti-colonial themes and serves as a compelling example of Caliban's evolution from a monstrous antagonist to a tragic figure: Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*. This play has proven to be an insightful subject for study, particularly due to its examination of the relationship between Caliban and feminist principles.

1. “Not honoured with a human shape”: the monstrous Caliban and the image of Sycorax

Shakespeare clearly pushes forward a monstrous image for Caliban, but the “category” of such monstrosity remains unclear, and the reason for this is found in the myriad of attributes thrown at him, that make him out to be a devil (or half of one) in certain lines (1.2.319; 2.2.56, 84, 93; 4.1.188; 5.1.272), an unspecified monster in others – the word ‘monster’ appears 47 times in the play from act 2 to act 4, and 46 times it refers to Caliban – an animal in other ones still – from ‘tortoise’ (1.2.316) to ‘fish’ (2.2.24-34) and ‘crab’ (3.1.8) – and various other connotations that all differ from one another, some even to the point of contradiction.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen sheds light on a possible reason for this vagueness of form, explaining that

This refusal to participate in the classificatory "order of things" is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions.²

This is quite true for Caliban, since the terrifyingly abhorrent appearance of his body does not allow a hypothetically accurate representation of the character’s looks: demon, human, land animal, fish of the sea, spirit of the earth... all these images collide and mash in Caliban’s nature and figure, yet none seems to ever overcome the others into a clear definition. This lack of clarity of image opposes any and all categorization systems and laws of nature. I will attempt to explain this issue in the next pages.

Despite this fundamental shortcoming, one thing remains certain of Caliban: whatever decision is taken for his representation, he remains an “other”, a “difference made flesh”.³ This almost comes natural when one observes the historical context of *The Tempest*’s first performance: just a few years before its debut at Whitehall, the Virginia Company had established on the 14th of May 1607 the first permanent settlement in North American territory, Jamestown, named after King

2 Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, “Monster Theory (Seven Theses)”, in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 6.

3 Cohen, p. 8.

James I.⁴ After this first success, more and more voyages were undertaken to find fortune in the New World. The reports, the travel diaries and the letters written by the people on these voyages (merchants, settlers, explorers and even castaways) became a new literary genre, ‘travel literature’. According to Stephen Orgel, two texts from this genre – that had quickly rose to popularity in the mainland – are among those that have impacted Shakespeare majorly in the writing process of *The Tempest*: Michel de la Montaigne’s essay “On the Cannibals” (translated by John Florio)⁵ and the “Strachey Letter” from explorer Samuel Purchas’ book *Purchas his Pilgrimes*.⁶ Such literature also originated a number of tropes about native populations that are present and easy to spot in the Shakespearian text. Most of those tropes and stereotypes are of course negative, offering a warped and deformed image of the natives, an image that was created by colonizers because of the differences that these people showed from the European ‘norm’. It is this “otherness” that pushes the travellers from the old world – and from England especially – to describe natives as monstrous aberrations by exaggerating these cultural differences⁷. In Caliban’s case, it is the sexual difference that is the most prominent, and will be focused on in later sections.

It is important to notice that Caliban is not the first Shakespearian antagonist painted as deformed in mind and body alike, for in 1592 Shakespeare had written *Richard III* and before that (1590) *Henry VI*, in which an infant Richard is colourfully described as “an indigest deformed lump, not like the fruit of such a goodly tree” (5.4.51-2).⁸ Of course, the real Richard was no monster, but through Shakespeare’s popularity we witness a change in the cultural response to the character. History paints the monstrous picture over the image of the ‘evil’ king, deforming the true image of the king into one that evokes repulsion and horror, reflecting Richard’s actions and behaviour in life towards society. This same process is the same that occurred in the case of the

4 According to Encyclopedia Britannica (<https://www.britannica.com/summary/Jamestown-Colony#:~:text=Named%20after%20King%20James%20I,and%20films%2C%20many%20of%20them>).

5 Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Tempest*, pp. Ccxxvii-ccxxxviii.

6 Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Tempest*, pp. Ccix-ccxix.

7 Cohen, p.7.

8 Shakespeare, William, *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, ed. by Michael Hattaway, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

natives of the colonized lands and all other “deviants” from the norms of culture and society. That is, Cohen explains, what society has used to create monsters: human characteristics deviating from cultural norms, from barbarians to political opponents, exaggerated to abhorrent levels.⁹

Caliban’s monstrous being can be found also beyond his actions and personality: he is the son of the witch Sycorax “got by the devil himself” (1.2.319) in Prospero’s words. If Prospero speaks the truth, it means that Caliban is a son born out of wedlock from a witch and a devil, making him both a bastard and a demi-devil, therefore a monster (5.1.272-3). The debates on the topic have reached various conclusions, some scholars even hypothesising that this demonic father is the figure of Setebos,¹⁰ the same who is called a god by Caliban (1.2.372). This theory finds somewhat of a foundation in the fact that Setebos was actually a god for the natives of Patagonia, and was redefined as a “greate deuille” by Italian explorer and scholar Antonio Pigafetta in his *Relazione del primo viaggio intorno al mondo* (1519-1522).¹¹ Other than Prospero’s words about Caliban’s heritage being among the most discussed lines in the text amongst scholars, – it is unclear whether Prospero is speaking literally or just insulting Caliban – they can also be seen as an example of monstrification in the same way that Cohen defines “the quintessential xenophobic rendition(s) of the foreign”,¹² with Caliban being not only shown as ‘different’ from European Christian norms, but a direct antithesis of them (uncivilized and antichristian). In *The Tempest’s* case, the focus is on the fear of contamination and impurity through sexual mingling, which appears more clearly in Caliban’s remark “Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else This isle with Calibans” (1.2.348-9). However, if we consider the possibility that the demonic heritage of the character is not the truth, one could say that Prospero’s perspective sorts the same effect as the image of King Richard III in *Henry V*, turning Caliban’s moral transgressions into physical

9 Cohen, pp. 8-11.

10 Latham, Jacqueline E., “The Tempest and King James’s Daemonologie”, *Shakespeare Survey: An Annual Survey of Shakespeare Studies and Production*, 28 (1975), p. 118.

11 Antonio Pigafetta, *Magellan’s Voyage: A Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation*, transl. and ed. by R. A. Skelton, Vol. I, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969, p. 183, quoted in Vaughan, Alden T. and Vaughan, Virginia Mason, *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 38.

12 Cohen, p. 14.

characteristics, “making” him into the monster he is physically through the power of language. The different, again, is made monstrous, abhorrent, and into something made to be eliminated or submitted and enslaved through a process that Cohen defines a

Hegelian master/slave dialectic that naturalizes the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous.¹³

This enslavement happens, as I mentioned, through the power of language. Through language, in Caliban’s perspective, he finds himself going from being his “own king” (1.2.342), owner and sole sovereign of the island, to what Miranda describes “a thing most brutish” (1.2.356) that had no purpose before hers and Prospero’s arrival to his territory. Both father and daughter attempt to replace Caliban’s self sufficiency and ‘savage’ system of meaning by teaching him their language, the ‘European’ language. Tied to the language come the values of colonial Europeans, values that bring forth the submission and monstrification of all which does not comply to the norms of said Europeans. Inevitably, Caliban ends up falling from his throne, turning into the “abhorred slave” (1.2.350).

And yet, in the end, when Caliban finally accepts his new position and submits completely to Prospero, the mage does not punish him further, instead declaring “this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-6). He decides to accept the monster that he practically helped create, as again Cohen states

Monsters are our children... they bring knowledge, human knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place.¹⁴

Shakespeare has managed to make Caliban into a mirror of the fears of his society and times, and with the decision to accept him, Prospero shows his own beliefs and gives a sort of lecture to his spectators, asking them to reevaluate their assumptions.

Despite Cohen’s conjectures and hypotheses, the question of what kind of creature Caliban is exactly remains, since Shakespeare never explains whether the insults thrown at Caliban are

13 Cohen, p. 11.

14 Cohen, p. 20.

actually descriptive or are merely based on his unspecified deformity. Lauren Eriks Cline attempts a possible explanation of this confused image saying that the language lessons given to Caliban by Miranda before the start of the play's events have been

an attempted facialization of Caliban... And as language requires Caliban to 'make his purposes known', Caliban... translates the 'qualities' of the island... And when bodies... reassert themselves, in the form of Caliban's illicit desire for Miranda, Caliban must be plunged... into the black hole of subjectification... as a blank surface on which to mark endless abjected identities.¹⁵

While this explanation is interesting and thoughtful, it has not satisfied the community of scholars, to the point that even Cline herself has attempted a more stable and fixed interpretation. In her attempt, through the relationship between Caliban and his island, Cline divides Caliban's movements in this 'escape from a true image' into "becoming-animal" and "becoming-imperceptible".¹⁶

The "becoming-animal" movements which Cline mentions refer to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, during which Daniel Wilson writes and publishes in 1873 *Caliban: the Missing Link*. Wilson, who spoke of Caliban as an

intermediate being, between the true brute and man, which, if the new theory of descent from crudest animal organisms be true, was our predecessor and precursor in the inheritance of this world of humanity.¹⁷

was influenced in the writing process by the ideas and theories of Charles Darwin, which had become so popular as to influence many of the stage directors of those years. The Caliban of this 'era' is defined by Alden T. and Virginia Mason Vaughan in *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History*, "part beast, part human, and wholly Darwinian",¹⁸ and his stagings show this through both advanced physicality and peculiar costumes. These costumes tended to give to the character looks that went from the more aquatic and fish-like "novel anthropoid of a high type",¹⁹ to a more simian look, both of which were coupled with a great physical presence by the actors. On the topic of the more ape-like costumes and style, Trevor Griffiths dwells into the intermittent performances of

15 Cline, Lauren Eriks, "Becoming Caliban: Monster Methods and Performance", in Valerie Traub, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 713.

16 Cline, p. 715.

17 Wilson, Daniel, *Caliban: the Missing Link*, London: Macmillan, 1873, pp. Xi-xii.

18 Vaughan and Vaughan, p. xxii.

19 Wilson, p. 79.

British actor Frank Benson, who influenced generations of audiences and actors with his take on Caliban (1891-1911), which was less monstrously human and more consciously a ‘missing link’, to the point that he had spent “many hours watching monkeys and baboons in the zoo, in order to get the movements in keeping with his ‘make up’”.²⁰ But even with Benson’s performances being so influential, a problem quickly arises: if Caliban is supposed to represent the Darwinian missing link between man and ape, the fish-like insults and costumes do not fit in, and the same goes with performances cited by Cline, such as Tyrone Power’s in 1897 that mixed both scales and fur with long claws, Murray Currington’s in 1918, which was seal-inspired, and G. Wilson Knight’s in 1937, which involved the use of grease together with a green and purple costume which was reptilian in looks.²¹ All of these different takes and performances create a crisis in the missing link theory of the time, but the animality of Caliban remains a main trait of the character, only appearing in a more clustered fashion as more and more performances happen in time.

The “becoming-imperceptible” movements are instead more complex and theoretical, and they tie to how, escaping the animal parentage, Caliban attempts to lose his own corporeal nature through what Cline calls a “desire for multiplicities”,²² which she explains through the character of the witch Sycorax, Caliban’s mother. She has appeared in rare stage performances, the first time being in 1670, in *The Tempest or, The Enchanted Island* by English playwright William Davenant (where she curiously was rewritten as Caliban’s twin sister), and she made appearances in two plays in the eighteenth (1778) and nineteenth century (1846, written by French dramatist Eugene Scribe). The character then made more appearances in a number of stage and movie adaptations of the twentieth century, – always as a figure that reminds me of the mythical Echidna, a creature from Greek mythology known as the mother of many monstrous creatures such Cerberus and the Sphinx – two among them being especially worthy of note: Peter Brooks’ staging from 1968 makes

20 Griffiths, Trevor R., “‘This Island’s mine’ Caliban and Colonialism”, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 13 (1983), p. 166.

21 Cline, p. 716.

22 Cline, p. 718.

Sycorax into a woman of enormous size, capable of expanding herself with her magic even further, while Derek Jaman's movie adaptation from 1979 turns her into a monstrous being resembling a sow surrounded by piglets and "delivering... amid pus, maggots and a buzz of flies".²³ It is this great expansiveness, this multiplication, that appears in Caliban: he attempts to multiply first by raping Miranda (1.2.347-50), and then through a brood of Stephanos (3.2.102-3). Despite his failure in these attempts to expand (that are still technically animal movements), he succeeds not in becoming imperceptible, but rather in becoming 'indefinable', 'unrestricted' through the uncertainty he constantly creates by escaping categorization. If we take Cline's point of view, and look at the many interpretations of Caliban as if they actually were many different 'Calibans', they become a multiplicity of bodies that 'people' the stage islands: individually, each Caliban is systematically categorized, but collectively they show "the monster's continual escape acts: the Caliban who sheds cultural skins as fast as they are produced for him, only to reappear again in a different guise."²⁴ achieving therefore the imperceptibility he has metaphorically chased.

Yet there is still more to say about Caliban, and other interesting interpretations of the character that we can analyse.

1.1. King James's influence: the devil-spawn Caliban

While 'monster' is the most commonly used word in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to refer to Caliban, there is another specific aspect of the character that both scholars like Jacqueline Latham – whose theory linking Caliban with the writings of James I I will explain later – and artists like William Hogarth, who was the first to ever illustrate scenes from *The Tempest* in 1736 and did so with large amounts of biblical iconography,²⁵ have focused on. This aspect is the demonic one, and it has been used and analysed in order to better categorize the islander: more than once, characters refer to Caliban as a devil for his deformed appearance and morals, the most meaningful one being

23 Zabus, Chantal, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, New York: Palgrave, 2002, p. 259.

24 Cline, p. 722.

25 Vaughan and Vaughan, pp. 216-218.

the islander's master himself, Prospero. It is Prospero who explicitly calls him "(a son) got by the devil himself" (1.2.319) and "demi-devil" (5.1.272), at one point going so far as to say

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
And, as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers. (4.1.188-192)

Quite literally, here, Prospero mentions Caliban's inhuman, devilish and unchangeable nature that even he could not sway by teaching him the language and giving him (supposedly) affection, as Caliban says in the second scene of the first act "thou strok'st me and made much of me... and teach me how to name the bigger light and how the less" (1.2.332-5).

While Prospero's words about Caliban's demonic nature are not to be taken as truth, this possibility of devilish heritage of the character ended up being an important point of discussion about Caliban, and to delve into this requires scholars to begin from Caliban's mother, Sycorax the witch. While she does not appear physically in *The Tempest* (except for rare occasion I already mentioned), she still is one of the major factors that created the personality of her son, and interestingly, she mirrors Prospero and Miranda by being herself condemned to exile on the island: according to Prospero, who was told the story by Ariel, Sycorax was not a native to the island, – despite this 'nativity' being a trait that is sometimes misattributed to her – being actually a woman from Algiers ('Argier' or 'Argièr', in Shakespeare's times²⁶) (1.2.261). This means she – and therefore Caliban too – is of African origin, a detail of major impact for the way a character was examined and critiqued from the English society of the times, that would see in such an ethnicity – combined with the social (and physical for Caliban) deformity – the source of moral deficiencies, seeing Africans as "blacke, Savage, Monstrous, & rude".²⁷ This racial stereotyping went even further, however, seeing that Cohen mentions that – especially since the Renaissance, when dark skinned individuals started to be forcefully brought to Europe – "Dark skin was associated with the

26 Shakespeare, William, *The Arden Shakespeare. The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, London: Bloomsbury, 2015, p. 168.

27 William Cuninghame, *The Cosmological Glasse, conteinyng the Pleasant Principles of Cosmographie, Geographie, Hydrographie or Navigation*, London, 1559, fol. 185, quoted in Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare. The Tempest*, p. 51.

fires of hell, and so signified in Christian mythology demonic provenance”²⁸. With this considered, it is no surprise how such marginalizing politics produced Caliban as a specific cultural body at a specific historical period, the seventeenth century. The influence of this specific image influenced critics even centuries afterwards, such as Gordon Crosse, who outright rejected the 1900 performance of Frank Benson – which, while being ape-like in its movements and hairy costume, still showed his white skin – while being indifferent to other representations of the character that had him having dark skin.²⁹

Some scholars, like James Seth, refer straight to the sea as the source of Caliban’s devilish nature, with the explanation that the sea was described as hell by travellers, a theory supported by Shakespeare himself, who uses such an equivalence in his play: the titular opening tempest is staged first through the fears of the mariners of sinking down to hell,³⁰ then through Ferdinand’s cry of “Hell is empty,/ And all the devils are here” as he jumps off the ship (1.2.214-5). Other experts, Frank Kermode amongst them, speak of Caliban’s satanic birth to account for his deformity, and theorize his father might be a sea devil, or even – despite, as said in the previous section, how Caliban sees him as a god (1.2.372), without reclaiming such heritage for himself – Setebos.³¹ Considering such a birth, with the racial stereotyping and the involvement of Christian beliefs, Sycorax and Caliban could be tied together with the image of witches mating with “the black devil”.³² However, to speak about the topic of mingling with the devil, it is compulsory to analyse the character given to a devil involved in such mingling: the ‘incubus’.

The incubus had been extensively examined and researched since long before the era of Shakespeare, with King James I of England (also King James VI of Scotland) potentially serving as a significant source of information on the subject for the playwright due to his influence and

28 Cohen, p. 10.

29 Cline, p.714.

30 Seth, James, “Strange Fish: Caliban’s Sea-Changes and the Problems of Classification”, in Keith Moser and Karina Zelaya, ed., *The Metaphor of the Monster: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding the Monstrous Other in Literature*, London: Bloomsbury, 2020, p. 95.

31 Shakespeare, William, *The Arden Shakespeare: The Tempest*, ed. by Frank Kermode, London: Methuen, 1954, p. xl.

32 Cohen, p.16.

proximity to the time period. James, who had succeeded Elizabeth I in 1603, is remembered – amongst other things, such as his involvement in the witch hunts – as a man of great knowledge and literacy, and a gracious benefactor of literary arts, becoming the patron of Shakespeare’s company ‘The Lord Chamberlain’s Men’, which was renamed ‘The King’s Men’ in honour of James himself. A prolific writer of poetry, political theory and philosophy, James had written in 1597 a philosophical dissertation that included a study on demonology titled *Daemonologie*.³³ The book is written in the form of a Socratic dialogue between Epistemon (more gullible) and Philomantes (more sceptical), and scholar Jaqueline E. M. Latham attempts to find the connection between it and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, especially its most enigmatic characters, Caliban.³⁴

To speak of Caliban’s birth and lineage, one has to, again, begin from Sycorax: while her simply mating with the devil would work as a valid explanation and interpretation for continental Europe, the same cannot be said for England, where concerns about witches harming the population and summoning familiars were the ones to focus on. Incubi are creatures that had appeared in English accounts since centuries before Shakespeare’s activity, but late in their appearance in native accounts of witch trials – according to historian Keith Thomas “the sexual aspects of witchcraft were a very uncommon feature of the trials, save perhaps in the Hopkins period”³⁵ – during the late seventeenth century. Author Barbara Rosen even remarks that “the English witch was frequently unchaste, but in the usual prosaic fashion”.³⁶ Despite this detail, studies of witchcraft like those of James I still spread the idea of demonic coupling across the Elizabethan period.

Assuming Shakespeare did in fact study the *Daemonologie* – which is plausible, as it was published in Edinburgh in 1597, and was reprinted in London in 1603 – one can notice some aspects that did influence how Caliban’s character was moulded into its shape. King James wrote the book as an answer to the criticisms to another text, *Newes from Scotland declaring the*

33 James I, *Daemonologie (1597)*, ed. by G. B. Harrison, London: John Lane – The Bodley Head, 1924.

34 Latham, p.117.

35 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, New York: Scribner, 1971, p. 578, quoted in Latham, p. 118.

36 Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft*, London: Edward Arnold, 1969, p. 338, quoted in Latham, p. 118.

damnable life and death of Doctor Fian, a notable Sorcerer, an anonymous report of a court trial which James judged, written in 1591: one Dr Fian (and many others) were accused of “torture, the devil’s mark, a witches’ sabbath, an obscene kiss, a christened cat bound to... a dead man, and intercourse with the devil”.³⁷ While Reginald Scot – one of the historians of the trial which *Daemonologie* was written as an answer to – had written extensively about sexual relations with incubi, defining them, in his *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, “abominable lecheries”³⁸ to entertain his public, in King James’ writings, the character of Epistemon explains in a truly technical way the only two ways the devil uses to unite with a woman (the book is quite reluctant to explain the figure of the succubus, which is supposedly the female incubus): starting from the Christian tradition, the incubus does not possess seed of his own, so he either steals the sperm from a dead man (and remains invisible during the insemination) or directly takes possession of a dead man’s body, using it to inseminate the woman with deathly cold seed.

Here arises an issue: in this perspective the child of such a union is still human, and Epistemon, despite his credulous nature, is doubtful of even that possibility to be real. He ends this argument deeming all the stories about monstrous and devilish births as “nothing but *Aniles fabulae*”, as the devil is only a carrier, and not a true participant in the act.³⁹ James therefore rejects the idea of monstrous births, while Shakespeare shows interest in such a theme, which was a popular trope in Britain since the XII century, when Merlin was said to have been fathered by an incubus in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*.⁴⁰ Latham considers Caliban closer to the image of the “mooncalf”, a monstrous birth resulted from such devilish mating or, according to the Broadside ballads of the sixteenth century, from sins of vanity and pride, blasphemy or adultery, making the monstrous shape into a mirror for a person’s (or more people’s) morality.⁴¹

37 *Newes from Scotland declaring the damnable life and death of Dr. Fian, a notable sorcerer (1591)*, ed. by G. B. Harrison, London: John Lane – The Bodley Head, 1924, pp. 9-14

38 Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, quoted in Latham, p. 119.

39 James I, pp. 67-68.

40 Latham, p. 120.

41 Latham, p. 121

Reinforcing this vision, Stephano in *The Tempest* calls Caliban a mooncalf (2.2.102),⁴² and the stage adaptations of the play make use of the ballad style of monstrous creatures to represent the scene of the banquet brought in by the “living drollery... of monstrous shape” (3.3.18-34), like the one by Peter Hall in 1974.⁴³ Furthermore, Caliban represents just one of the 'mooncalves' that Shakespeare employs in a similar fashion to the traditions and examples referenced by James in his academic writing, coming after Richard of Gloucester in both *Henry VI* – where he is described as “an indigested and deformed lump,/ Not like the fruit of such a goodly tre” (5.6.51-2)⁴⁴ – and in *Richard III*, – where he is called by queen Margaret “elvish-marked, abortive, rooting-hog!/ Thou that was sealed in thy nativity/ The slave of nature and the son of hell!” (1.3.225-7)⁴⁵ – showing how his deformities indicate his depravity.

Consequently, where King James just dismisses monsters by declaring their non-existence outside mythological and popular storytelling, Shakespeare shows and manifests interest in them, and thanks to the *Daemonologie*'s awareness of the continental tradition of witchcraft he manages both to show and emphasize the fundamental and biological humanity of Caliban and to make his nature yet more elusive. In Latham's interpretation, Shakespeare exploits all these ambiguities, giving the islander a multi-faceted character: a wild-man, usurped by new civilization (Prospero), superior to people like Trinculo and Stephano, yet inferior to noble souls like Ferdinand; a monstrous symbol of the untamed within us. This becomes especially important when Caliban repents in the final scene, saying he will “seek for grace” (5.1.295): Latham specifies that as a human, Caliban is capable of redemption, but if he is seen as a devil, he is incapable of it, and his words are a mere stratagem.⁴⁶ The word ‘monster’ held incredible power in the seventeenth century, and it is the kingpin of the discourse: it can refer to moral depravity, as it does in *King Lear*

42 However, Stephano is under the belief, in that moment, that he is seeing a four legged monster that “vents Trinculos”.

43 Latham, p. 121

44 Shakespeare, William, *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, ed. By Michael Hattaway, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

45 Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedy of King Richard III: The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. by John Jowett, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

46 Latham, p. 122.

(1.1.214; 1.2.85),⁴⁷ or to physical aspect, in the way it does in the *Daemonologie*. For Caliban, it is both meanings, moral and physical, mooncalf and depraved, that are valid, emphasizing his twofold evil.

Other similarities between the *Daemonologie* and *The Tempest* can be found. In the preface of James' book there's a reference to the power magicians (like Prospero in the play) wield, which gives them ability to "suddenly cause be brought unto them, all kindes of daintie disshes, by their familiar spirit",⁴⁸ a point that is explored further by Epistemon (who then rejects it) in the first book:

at the fall of Lucifer, some Spirites fell in the aire, some in the fire, some in the water, some in the lande: In which Elementes they still remaine. Whereupon they build, that such as fell in the fire, or in the aire, are truer then they, who fell in the water or in the land,... But to returne to the purpose, as these formes, wherein Sathan oblishes himselfe to the greatest of the Magicians, are wouderfull curious; so are the effectes correspondent vnto the same: For he will oblish himselfe to teach them artes and sciences, which he may easelie doe, being so learned a knaue as he is: To carrie them newes from anie parte of the worlde, which the agilitie of a Spirite may easelie performe... And he will also make them to please Princes, by faire banquets and daintie dishes, carryed in short space fra the farthest part of the worlde... . Such-like, he will guard his schollers with faire armies of horse-men and foote-men in appearance, castles and fortes⁴⁹

These words have many clear correspondences with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: the storm itself is an illusion summoned by Prospero (1.2.26-29) through Ariel, who acts as an extension of Prospero's will over nature to control the castaways' movements and reports news of their deeds to him (1.2.189-224); the scenes of the banquet (3.3) and of the masque (4.1.138) have creatures and spirits appearing, who unleash themselves onto Caliban and his companions as punishment and torment (4.1.256-67); and another reference is found in the differences between Caliban and Ariel, with the former being the evil opposite of the latter in the same way the earth is opposite of air (1.2.314).

It's also worth mentioning that King James exposes the three passions the devil uses to win over people, which are "Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great pouerty."⁵⁰ While the third passion can be attributed more to Stephano and Trinculo, the first two are Prospero's 'sins': the curiosity has

47 Shakespeare, William, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. by Jay L. Halio, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

48 James I, p. xiii.

49 James I, pp. 20-22.

50 James I, p. 8.

led him to his studies of magic and his exile (1.2.54-151), and the desire for revenge against Antonio is at the end rejected through forgiveness (5.1.130-1). A new interpretation becomes possible through James' text, that makes Caliban out to be a demonic entity representing Prospero's fears and propension towards evil, that is defeated through forgiveness and acceptance by Prospero's declaration "This thing of darkness I/ Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-6).

1.2 Animality and hybridity, "sea-change" and Sycorax's witchcraft

I have already mentioned the animality of Caliban, specifically in some of his stagings, with simian or fish-like costumes and involving a great amount of physicality. While I have already addressed the concerns about these bizarre characteristics not being completely accurate nor fixed, there is one noticeable passage from Shakespeare's play that made more than one scholar wonder: in the second scene of the second act, when the character of Trinculo makes his entrance, he spots Caliban hidden under a gaberdine and proceeds to utter a long commentary on the strange appearance of the figure he is observing:

What have we here, a man or a fish?—dead or alive? A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-John. A strange fish! ... There would this monster make a man—any strange beast there makes a man ... they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms! ... this is no fish, but an islander, that hath suffered by a thunderbolt. (2.2.24-35)

This part of the scene confuses the notions over Caliban's looks and nature: Trinculo changes the name he uses to refer to him four times, going from "fish" to the more general "beast", moving to the bizarre "dead Indian legged like a man and his fins like arms" before finishing with a more mundane "islander". With the arrival of Stephano soon after, things complicate further when he sees Trinculo and Caliban grappling under the latter's gaberdine, and believes them to be first an amalgamate "monster of the isle with four legs" (2.2.63), then to be a devil (2.2.93) after Trinculo calls his name. Things remain twisted until the end of the scene, with Stephano calling Caliban – after he and Trinculo separated – "mooncalf" (2.2.102). After that line – even if the word already appears in Trinculo's initial comment on Caliban's figure – begins the sequential use of the word

“monster”, which is used to refer to Caliban thirteen times after “mooncalf” out of the seventeen in this scene alone, including the first variant of the word in “puppy-headed-/monster” (2.2.148-9).⁵¹ It is evident that all these designations are quite different, but the appearance of both animal and human imagery – and monstrous imagery as well – could signify something more concrete: Caliban could well be not just the physical manifestation of the fear that European colonisers felt towards both the brutality of native populations and the possibility of native men interbreeding with European women, but he could be also a physical manifestation of ‘otherness’, not only in ethnicity, but also in species.

The concept of ‘animal’ in early modern England had negative connotations, since it helped define what was admirable and good about the human species, and Shakespeare himself assigned animalistic behaviour to certain characters in order to show contrast with their more civilized and rational counterparts. Caliban’s case is, however, particular: while his behaviour is of an animal, something ‘of’ nature, and humans were seen as ‘above’ nature thanks to the widespread anthropocentrism of that era, Caliban is deemed “monster” because by not conforming to anything he ‘refuses’ nature. The way in which Shakespeare shows him in *The Tempest* makes Caliban into something with an incomplete existence in both the human and the animal world, but not without a shape; a character that author and scholar James Seth defines as “a hybrid character whose animalism can be understood through an image of hybridity that appears early in the play, what Ariel calls ‘sea-change.’”⁵²

Sea-change appears to be some sort of transformation that people incur when they dwell in the ocean for long periods of time, the effect of it making them strange and inhuman. Ariel, as said by Seth, sings a song about it in the first act, describing the supposed effects of it on the king of Naples, Alonso:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral made,

51 The other variants that appear in the play are “servant-monster” (3.2.3), man-monster (3.2.11), and “bully-monster” (5.1.258).

52 Seth, p. 87.

Those are pearls that were his eyes
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change,
Into something rich and strange.
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell.
Ding dong.
Hark, now I hear them, Ding dong bell. (1.2.397-405)

The song explains that death itself is no dissolution, but simply physical change, with the sea reshaping the body into its final environment (like a corpse becoming part of the earth after burial). While the song refers to a (not truly) dead man, scholars like Seth believe it contains enough metaphorical potential for the sea-change to possibly apply also to the physiology of living creatures. Keeping such a vision in mind, Caliban becomes the physical manifestation of this bizarre transformation, his body moulded by this closeness with the ocean into a form that is “rich” and “strange”. Through this change Caliban adopts his animality, losing his definition as human and resisting his categorization as what can be called “the natural man, who simply cannot be civilized nor assimilated into culture”.⁵³ Being a product of his environment, it is also no wonder – in this interpretation – that Caliban gets compared with the low life forms of the sea, especially the amphibian ones: not only their behaviour (that he adopts) reiterates his subhuman being, but they also stand as symbols of his being the link between human and animal, walking the ‘shoreline’ between two worlds (human and animal, sea and land).

The first animal Caliban is associated to in *The Tempest* is the tortoise: Prospero gives him that name for his slowness in bringing wood (1.2.316), in an effort to scold him and dehumanize him, as well as to assert his own dominance over him in the same way as a human shows dominance over an animal. In early modern times, hard-shelled animals were envisioned as symbols of sloth, and chief amongst these animal symbols for this capital sin and also for the phlegmatic humour – that is, in simple terms, a type of personality characterized by cold slowness and sluggishness – was the tortoise.⁵⁴ The play reinforces this association straight away, by having Ariel return on stage in the form of a water-nymph, receiving Prospero’s compliment “Fine apparition!”

53 Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 163, quoted in Seth, p. 88.

54 Seth, p. 88.

(1.2.317) and unintentionally forcing a comparison between him, the zestful nymph, and Caliban, the sluggish tortoise.

After Prospero influences both him and the reader with his words – showing his power over language, that he and Miranda have taught to Caliban – one tends to interpret and read Caliban as tortoise-like: slow, sluggard and hump-backed, even his environment and the one thing he is specified to be wearing can be seen as part of these tortoise-like features, since Caliban moves on the coastline and uses his gabardine to lie down and cover himself as protection (a shell) from Prospero’s ‘spirits’, who he thinks are there to torment and punish him because of his tortoise-like sluggishness(2.2.15-17). By covering himself to hide, Caliban changes himself into a ‘tortoise’ fully, and the other characters’ perception of him are warped because of this, leading to the great imagery confusion generated by Stephano and Trinculo, which I already spoke of.

On top of this, Caliban exhibits more characteristic traits of turtles through both his constant punishments and the burdens he carries for higher ranking characters, from the “burden of wood” he carries when he enters the stage in the second scene of Act II (2.2.1), to the garments Stephano and Trinculo give him in Act IV (4.1.251-5): a famous Roman myth in early modern England explained that the shell of the tortoise was a punishment from Jupiter for arriving late to the feast at his wedding celebration⁵⁵. Easy to see in Caliban being in the position of the island’s slave the image of the tortoise forced to carry its home on its back. All these characteristics I have mentioned truly give the idea that Prospero simply calling Caliban “tortoise” practically causes him to really transform (or sea-change) into the animal.

Despite all the tortoise imagery I have explored, the tortoise is not the sole hard-shelled animal Caliban is compared to. Professor Dan Brayton, for example, compares Caliban to a shellfish, based on the idea that sea-change is a human controlled transformation, and not a natural one, because of the great level of control over nature and animals humans – specifically European

55 Seth, p. 90.

humans, colonisers – can obtain in texts like *The Tempest*⁵⁶. According to Brayton, Caliban is like a crab, a creature of both sea and land that almost crawls sluggishly on the sand rather than walking, hardened and made subhuman by both the ocean's nature and the intrusion of Prospero and the other shipwrecks.

The references to crabs specifically are only two in Shakespeare's play: while Caliban does not get called one – ironically Prospero is, while being compared to Miranda by Ferdinand (3.1.7-9) – he is connected to the crustaceans' habitat through his physiognomy and his 'hunter-gatherer' way to survive and know both plants and animals of his territory. There are, of course, doubts about this interpretation, due to the fact that Caliban mentions that the crabs "grow" (2.1.161), but because of the attributes he shares with hard-shelled animals and the word "crabbed" used in the play to refer to a person, it feels safe to accept a vision of Caliban as one who has been transformed into "something of both (water and land)" through language, treatment from other people, and his environment.⁵⁷

Caliban shows similarities, however, also with another creature that deviates from the hard-shelled ones: he is insulted not only for his slowness, but also for the danger that he poses, concealed by his "foul conspiracy" (4.1.139), for which he is called both "beast" (4.1.140) and "a devil, a born devil" (4.1.188). Taking both animal and demonic arguments (which I spoke of in the previous chapter), Seth combines them in a third interpretation of Caliban that makes him out to be similar to a venomous creature, and within this kind of creatures the scholar has chosen the toad as the most fitting to the character: while Caliban is not called a toad directly – the closest name to it in the play would be Prospero's "poisonous slave, got by the devil himself" (1.2.319) – the animal remains one of the most common poisonous creatures that were involved in the devilish rituals of early modern history, and Caliban exhibits similarities to it in both personality and demeanour.

56 Dan Brayton, *Shakespeare's Ocean*, Charlottesville: university of Virginia Press, 2012, p. 54, quoted in Seth, p. 90.

57 Seth, p. 91.

Toads are mentioned in *The Tempest* only once, when Caliban curses Prospero in Act I, wishing he had the same powers as his mother to torment Prospero with “toads, beetles, (and) bats” (1.2.340). Out of all the familiar spirits of Sycorax, the first is the toad, which according to historian Keith Thomas was the most characteristic of the Witch’s familiars, bizarre pets used by witches to cause horror and disgust (toads especially represented disease and filth in the English mindset): Caliban, despite not having inherited Sycorax’s powers, is still presented in the play as a sort of familiar himself, a conduit for satanic worship and dark magic.⁵⁸

Remembering these traits that society attributed to them, many narratives mention toads and frogs as symbols of the bewitching powers of hell, especially *Newes from Scotland* when describing the deeds of Agnis Tompson (accused of collecting venom from a black toad and keeping it in an oyster shell for use),⁵⁹ and King James’ *Daemonologie* (which influenced both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*), a symbolism that carried on even after Shakespeare and of which we can even see the effect in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, in which Lucifer himself is seen “Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve;/ Assaying by his devilish art” (IV.800-1).⁶⁰ Even historical texts of the early modern era mention toads, with Edward Topsell specifying their instrumental use to kill rich men: the toads execute the will of their witches by producing poison, obeying them like devout children,⁶¹ exactly like Caliban does, to the point that he is called “poisonous slave”. The image of the toad to represent evil and deceit was also used by Shakespeare, especially in *Richard III*, where the titular Richard is called “toad” thrice to refer to his hunchback appearance and his treacherous mind: Anne describes him with “Never hung poison on a fowler toad” (1.2.145), while Margaret and Elizabeth call him “poisonous bunch-backed toad” (1.3.246) and “foul bunch-backed toad” (4.4.76) respectively.⁶² The misshapen body and the poisonous personality are characteristics that, as I

58 Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, London: Penguin Books, 1983, p. 40, quoted in Seth, pp. 92-93.

59 *Newes from Scotland declaring the damnable life and death of Dr. Fian, a notable sorcerer (1591)*, pp. 15-16.

60 Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Philip Pullman, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

61 Edward Topsell, *The History of Four -Footed Beasts and Serpents*, London: John E. Cotes, 1658, p. 730, quoted in Seth, p. 93.

62 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III: The Oxford Shakespeare*.

already explained, apply to Caliban as well, including the hunched back which imitates the tortoise, but also the “bunch-backed toad”.

Continuing Seth’s line of thinking, it is likely that possessing a ‘toad-esque’ physiognomy in Shakespeare’s plays is a sign of the influence of Satan, especially in the case of Caliban who appears on the island from both the sea – which I already established was perceived as hell – and a witch’s womb. Accounting then for the fact that Topsell describes how the women of the New World give birth not to children, rather to “little living creatures like frogs” that they abort with herbs, it shows that Shakespeare embraced the biblical Christian metaphor in conjunction with the anxieties the people of early modern times held towards the New World⁶³. Caliban then, born as a sort of ‘hybrid of human and toad’ “got by the devil himself/ Upon thy wicked dam” (1.2.319-20), is portrayed by Shakespeare as a base sea creature that grows more hideous and toxic with age, a mistake of nature that manages to connect witch’s familiars and the hellish space of the ocean of early modern culture. His sea-change into the three creatures (tortoise, crab and toad) shows his ability to adapt to his environment being forcibly changed by others, but also makes him, as Ariel sang, a richer and stranger character: in my opinion, Caliban becomes through Seth’s vision a character of great fluidity, capable to show the limits of human existence by personifying in his being the foggy confine between human and animal.

1.3 Illustrating Caliban and the attempts at inter-textual emancipation

As I already mentioned at the beginning *The Tempest* was subject of many post-Shakespearean rewrites, and one thing that emerged from this process is how Caliban adapted even further, transforming every time into a ‘different’ self yet always representing his ‘otherness’ rooted in Shakespeare’s words that position the character precisely at the brink of being human. This mysterious difference is yet unclear, with some scholars like the Vaughans even attributing a psychological nature to it rather than physical:

⁶³ Topsell, p. 728, quoted in Seth, p. 96

In Prospero's and Miranda's eyes, Caliban was unalterably 'other', probably from the beginning but surely after the attempted rape, and the numerous pejorative epithets hurled at him by all the Europeans throughout the play reflect their assessment of his form and character as fundamentally opposite to their own.⁶⁴

While this could prove a valid explanation to the diverging comments and insults hurled at the character, making his form something more subconscious and unreal, the number of these definitions and Shakespeare's own description of the character suggest a more substantial and material deformity, an otherness unclear yet certainly derogatory. This coupled with all the animal imagery stands at the centre of most art forms, and it was used explicitly and universally to merge all 'otherness' into one single 'bestiality'.

The artistic representations of Caliban begin exactly from this notion of what Daniel Jaczminski calls "polyphonic structure", through which all utterances in the original text "create an open dramatic structure and thus render any final conclusions impossible – at least... as far as Caliban's physiognomy is concerned."⁶⁵ And when an artist decides to represent a character like the son of Sycorax, they all must go through the choice of how and how much to align with the textual reference (or how much to go in opposition with it), a process which always entails omissions, as "If all the suggestions as to Caliban's form and feature and endowments that are thrown out in the play are collected, it will be found that the one half renders the other half impossible"⁶⁶, and that it can be based on basically any principle chosen by the illustrators themselves.

One of such illustrations worthy of note is the 1775 portrait of Caliban by John Hamilton Mortimer, featuring the phrase "Do not torment me, prithee! I'll bring my wood home faster" (2.2.69-70).

64 Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare. The Tempest*, p. 34.

65 Jaczminski, Daniel, "Liberating the Strange Fish: Visual Representations of Caliban and Their Successive Emancipation from Shakespeare's Original Text", in Michael Meyer, ed., *Word & Image in Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures and Culture*, Amsterdam: Brill, 2009, p. 5.

66 Vaughan and Vaughan p. 9.



Fig. 1: *Twelve Characters from Shakespeare: Caliban*; Etched and published by J. H. Mortimer; May 20, 1775 © Rogers Fund, 1962

Despite him being one of the first painters to tackle Shakespeare's play, he distinguishes himself from most others of his time, neglecting most of the text's vagueness and choosing to focus on Trinculo's insult "puppy-headed monster" (2.2.148-9): Caliban appears as a humanoid covered in fur and having "floppy ears, doglike whiskers, long pointed fingernails"⁶⁷, who carries wood while having a look of pleading in his eyes. Mortimer chooses pragmatically to represent only one line of the play, overlooking the native's ambiguity but freeing himself from the confirmation of the

⁶⁷ Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 221

reference's absurdity. This rendition has been criticized by scholars such as Jackzminski as marking an "uncritical way of reading".⁶⁸

After a majority of Caliban's portraits representing him with animalistic characteristics across the XVIII and XIX centuries, the arrival of Darwin's theory of evolution in 1859 begins a large process of artists migrating away from Shakespeare's text and moving towards a representation of the character as the mysterious 'missing link', creating different versions of this concept – going from amphibian to 'human with simian attributes' – that all had in common the abandonment of animality through evolution and artistic deliverance from the play. One such portrait was made by the cartographer Alfred Kubin (1877-1959) in 1918, with his Caliban looking like some sort of dwarfish hairy caveman, with long arms and short legs, a bundle of wood on his back and a medallion around his neck.

68 Jaczminski, p. 9.



Fig. 2: *Shakespeare Visionen*, plate 26: *Caliban*; Litograph by Alfred Kubin; Germany 1918; © The Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies

However Kubin fails to detach completely from the text, showing the limits of this Darwinian emancipation: his Caliban, despite the fundamental humanity shown by posture and visage, still maintains a deformity that ties into his inner flaws, more specifically his lack of intellect, his rebelliousness and his inferiority (4.1.249-50).⁶⁹ Not to mention the fact that Caliban himself, in the text, fears being transformed with his two companions into “...apes with foreheads villainously

⁶⁹ Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 246. The details of note are the low and flat forehead, the stone he is holding, and the small size of the body.

low”,⁷⁰ which demonstrate Kubin’s second limit in his imprecise reading of the text. The islander’s wicked and misshapen form is gone, but his inhumanity remains.

With the birth of Modernism, artists started actively attempting to move away from what some called “textual slavery”, in an attempt to delve inward towards the Freudian realms of human essence. This resulted in another great change in the (now less popular a subject) image of Caliban, who started being depicted through his mental and sentimental pain and anguish through both his pose and his looks: raised arms, sheltering from violence, crying for help and yearning for freedom, or weary and exhausted of his enslavement, often in dark colours or even only black and white to drive the point of his pain, dullness and depression even further, and yet pushing the character into another stereotypical role, the one of the abused slave, which will become more and more popular as time goes on. An impressive example of this new current is the portrait by Franz Marc (1880-1916), completely different from the Kubin one examined before.

70 If Caliban fears becoming such, then he is no ape nor ‘low-foreheaded’, making such a representation inaccurate.



Fig. 3: *Caliban, Figurine für Shakespeares "Sturm"*; painted by Franz Marc; Germany, 1914; © The Yorck Project (2002) *10.000 Meisterwerke der Malerei*

Painted in 1914 in cubist style, it refuses to depict even a shred of realism, using instead geometrical shapes to compose the islander: a large triangle pointing downwards is the head, with a screaming circular mouth and eyes closed in fear; the arms are raised in defence and staving off danger; and the whole body is painted in dark colours with the exceptions of the chin and the forehead, that strongly contrast with the rest of the composition. The circles on his legs recall scales, and three triangles along his torso remind us of a fin, if one chooses to interpret these details as remnants of the animalistic symbolism in the character, and some scholars have advanced theories over this being a valid interpretation or not: while it is almost impossible to tell due to the abstract nature of the painting, one theory suggests that Marc might be trying to parody the ‘bestial

Calibans' of the past, mocking the blind following to the Shakespearean text of past illustrators, by using these schematized beast traits and questioning the possibility of realism in a representation of Shakespeare's world.⁷¹ Marc's focus, as most cubist artists, is a more empathetic vision of Caliban focused on the islander's pain caused by Prospero and on representing the human condition through that anguish. However, despite all this effort in distancing from the original text, the result of illustrations like these is the cornering of Caliban into his same old role of the slave, only now locked under the vision of him as only the victim: deformed or not, savage or not, Caliban remains a slave because he is portrayed as such.

One final interesting depiction of Caliban is the abstract one from 1936, by Hungarian painter László Lakner.

⁷¹ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, London: Methuen, 1985, quoted in Jaczminski, p. 14.



Fig. 4: *Caliban*; painted by László Lakner; Germany, 1985; in Alden T. Vaughan & Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), p. 249; © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2009

This representation is the culmination of the abandonment of all schemes, to the point that the Vaughans have affirmed that “Caliban is an idea more than a form, a mood more than a creature”⁷²: the son of Sycorax appears as a jumble of shapeless dark specks, with his name written above him on top. The only discernible shape is a large triangle pointing downwards, that was read by Jaczminski as the alchemical symbol of earth, which if it was the case would be the one remnant of Shakespeare’s text actually present in the painting, being Prospero’s beckoning Caliban with the words “Thou earth, thou: speak!” (1.2.314). Lakner’s painting represents the last step away from the

⁷² Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 249.

play's words by absolutely decontextualizing Caliban through the artist's opposition to logocentrism in general and his refusal of textual referents, replicating Caliban's own rebellion against Prospero's domination and 'freeing' the slave from the shackles of his slave form, leaving only his name to identify him, and yet to tie him to the text yet again. This is a problem with all attempts at 'inter-textual emancipation', that is also prominent in post-Shakespearean and postcolonial rewrites of the play, of which we will speak further in the next chapter.

2. *The Tempest* and the English colonial culture: native Caliban

As was already established in the previous sections, *The Tempest* was composed during a period of significant historical innovation for England: the first colonies in the New World had just been established, and before the play could be first put on stage in 1611, a number of travel letters and diaries had already reached and were being published in the homeland, and it is most likely that Shakespeare had read at least some of them and had used them as inspiration for his text, to the point that more than a few scholars of *The Tempest* consider it a sort of ‘predecessor’ to what was known as ‘colonial writing’, a genre that was used by the Western World to

Establish its sovereignty by defining its colonies as “others”, with all the accompanying significations of lesser, effeminate, savage, unearthly, monstrous, expendable, which that concept bears.⁷³

And while the play doesn’t explicitly do this, it isn’t complicated to compare how Caliban is shown and given shape and how the natives are seen and ‘painted’ by the colonizers of those years, especially the dynamic of what has happened before the events narrated in the story, explained the glaring and long declaration

This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak’st from me. When thou cam’st 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. (1.2.331-44)

If one is to take Caliban’s words as true, the contact between him and Prospero started with kindness and friendliness, as the islander taught and showed the duke and his daughter how to survive in their new environment, and Prospero’s responses to such teachings were demonstrations

73 Boehmer, Elleke, “Introduction”, in Elleke Boehmer, ed., *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p.xxv.

of love, until suddenly the Milanese ceased with this sentiment when the islander had exhausted his usefulness, revealing his deception and leaving Caliban full of fury and imprisoned like a pig without food (“sty me”, with ‘sty’ referring to a pig’s enclosure; and “in this hard rock”, referring to barren and infertile land).

This dynamic is practically considered by scholars the “stock-in-trade”⁷⁴ of the English colonizer: the natives are described as gentle and welcoming – or even enthusiastic – while the colonizers are shown to be kindhearted in their approach, and this was the used narrative from the beginning, from the very first English colony in the future USA, Jamestown (founded as I said in 1607). After this momentary hospitality, most colonial accounts mention some evil act committed by the natives against the colonizers, who are then ‘forced’ to punish the colonized by stripping them of the land and confining them in unfruitful areas. This is exactly what happens to Caliban, who is punished and enslaved after his attempt to rape Miranda with the forfeiting of his dominion to the Milanese duke and then being “Deservedly confined into this rock,/ Who hadst deserved more than a prison.”(1.2.360-1). The interaction of Caliban with Prospero and Miranda indeed recalls all the stages of standard English colonial storytelling – the narratives used by Spanish and Portuguese colonisers were more realistic and credible – about North America (and the same can be said about the recounts for Australia and New Zealand more than a century afterwards), even the refusal of the Europeans of responsibility for the violent seizing of cropland for British resettling.⁷⁵

One more important aspect is Caliban’s reason for his aggression to Miranda. The islander declares “Thou didst prevent me – I had peopled else This isle with Calibans” (1.2.348-9), therefore by imprisoning him Prospero blocks his objective of reproducing himself, which is always an important factor in British colonialism: settlement was organized based on population disparities, as the perception of Great Britain as ‘full’ led to the belief that it had the right to claim the ‘empty’

74 Seed, Patricia, “‘This Island’s Mine’: Caliban and Native Sovereignty”, in Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman, ed., *The Tempest and Its Travels*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000, p. 203.

75 Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and The Native Caribbean, 1492-1797*, London, 1986, pp. 154-5, 163-4, quoted in Seed, p. 203.

territories of the New World. Caliban's reason for his brutal action mirrors the British need for repopulating, and Shakespeare uses this to make his spectators understand the character's reasons (which were their own ambitions in the new lands), which would have been terrifying for the spectators of those times, since the subjects of colonization weren't perceived as having the same rights as the colonizers.

The two empires' respective 'modus operandi' demonstrate significant differences between British and Spanish colonization: the Spaniards, according to the historical accounts, would 'only' claim the contents of the land for themselves, meaning precious metals and similar resources, while the natives kept both farms and crops (at least in theory, since Argentina and Chile gained such guarantees only after a century of fighting).⁷⁶ The Englishmen, instead, put their claim on the land as a whole and self-servingly justified their deeds with the fact that the Natives were not developing their farmlands enough to turn real profit, thus it would have been wasteful to leave it in their possession, to the point that, Patricia Seed reports, the Natives (of both Americas and Australia) were referred to as "hunter-gatherers" to separate them from the English – as said before, no other colonial empire has ever used such a philosophy to explain the taking of lands – "farmers".⁷⁷ All of this served to justify the colonization process to the people in the motherland, as there was no true European common concept of 'international law' to appeal to, nor was there and any proof that such claims on the land's yield were even remotely true, considering that more than a few of the native populations the English encountered had stable cultivations.⁷⁸ I said before that Caliban can indeed be seen as a sort of hunter-gatherer, and this part of his character is also visible through both the survival teachings he says he has given to the 'colonizers' Prospero and Miranda, to which he showed "all qualities o'th' isle,/ The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile (1.2.337-8), and (maybe even more) through the offers he obsequiously makes to Stephano while venerating him and asking for his alliance to kill Prospero:

76 Seed, p. 206.

77 Seed, pp. 206-7.

78 Seed, pp. 202; 207-208.

I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries; I'll fish for thee and get thee wood enough. ... let me bring thee where crabs grow, And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts, Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee to clust'ring filberts, and sometimes I'll get thee Young scamels from the rock (2.2.154-66)

But Caliban is not only that, nor is the island viewed as empty land being wasted by natives and in need of exploitation by the newcomers, despite Gonzalo's utopian colonial fantasy in Act II (2.1.143-66). Not only Gonzalo dismisses his own fantasy as a result of "merry fooling" (2.1.176), but the 'utopia' he describes also does not align with English colonial ideologies. Although numerous commonalities can be identified, and Shakespeare's portrayal of Caliban embodies both the troubled native and the colonial aspiration for expansion, the character's claim to the island is rooted in his maternal lineage: "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother" (1.2.331).

As I previously wrote, even if Sycorax does not appear in person, a certain amount of information on her remains, more importantly about her peculiar arrival on the island after being exiled for witchcraft from Algiers in North Africa (1.2.265-6), which was in the XVI and XVII centuries homeland to the Barbary Coast pirates, who used to frequently attack European vessels.⁷⁹ Associating Sycorax with the enemies of the English brings into the spotlight the theme of piracy, which raises questions about island occupations in the Caribbeans: in the 1600s, English pirates would, legally and illegally both, occupy small isles left by the Spanish after they had exhausted their gold as safe havens between seasons and attacks, only starting to legalize these occupations decades later and become European political bases, expanding the colonial empires with shipwrecked and buccaneers.⁸⁰ These occurrences are also subtly referenced by Caliban, who says "And here you sty me In this hard rock" (1.2.342-3), which not only nods at the condition the isles were at the time of occupation, emptied of gold by the Spanish who left behind the pigs they used as food because they had no predators, but it also anticipates the segregation of the Native American people by the colonists from both Britain and America on inhospitable lands.⁸¹ Caliban's assertion further emphasizes the depiction of pigs as familiars and confidants of witches, an inheritance that

79 Seed, p. 208.

80 Seed, pp. 208-209.

81 Seed, p. 209.

dates back to the witch of Homer's *Odyssey* Circe, but that is also referenced in *The Tempest* by Shakespeare: Sycorax's name, in fact, may come from the Greek words 'sus' and 'korax', meaning 'pig' and 'raven' respectively⁸²

While the claim of Caliban to the island would have been valid after the first case of a son of a castaway obtaining legal ownership of an island – in 1624, for the island of St. Christopher⁸³ – it would have not worked at the time of the writing of the play, as the laws for such an occasion did not exist until that first case, more than a decade after the play. Furthermore, a second obstacle comes from the fact that the parent from which the islander pushes to inherit is the mother, a woman, which makes this situation exceptional and illegal in the English strictly paternal inheritance procedures of Shakespeare's times, even more so considering that Sycorax is a witch. Because of this, Prospero can find a justification for his overtaking by classifying the monster as a bastard (a devilspawn, as I explained before), and therefore obtaining the island for himself. It feels cruelly ironic to notice that not only Caliban could have made his claim more valid by having it derive from simple prior possession since he was there first, but also that, since Prospero uses Caliban's attempted rape of his daughter to justify his overtaking of the island, one can say that Prospero's claim to the land is itself based on a woman, just like Caliban's.

Prospero's claim for the ownership of the island is justified – in a very distasteful and opportunistic way, in my opinion – as 'reparation' for the sexual assault Miranda has suffered at the hands of Caliban, as he declares in the first act "thou didst seek to violate/ The honour of my child" (1.2.347-8). While the crime is not explored further than the fact that it was only attempted, and not accomplished, and this is made certain by the use of 'seek', and it is unclear how this attempt took place (if force was used or not, or if Caliban threatened Miranda with this intention), it is easy to see the parallels to Prospero's actions and the usual colonial narratives of the British, from Prospero 'using' the crime committed by the 'native' Caliban to cynically obtain control of the island, to

82 Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Tempest*, p. 115.

83 Seed, p. 210.

Caliban's colonial incarceration. Miranda's words "Therefore was thou/ Deservedly confined into this rock,/ Who hadst deserved more than a prison" (1.2.359-61) seem to support the treatment that Caliban is subjected to, as well.

The use of rape as the crime is in itself a parallel to the English colonial narrative: the natives are always a potentially violent and traitorous threat to white women's sexual integrity and, implicitly, also to the men oversea. The dangerous sexual relations between colonizers and colonized stretched across a number of centuries, even metamorphosing from fear of contact between native men and English women to the fear of intermingling between white women and African men, and remained a primary characteristic of the English colonial narrative to often justify the violence the colonizers inflicted on subjugated populations.⁸⁴

All of these colonial influences on the text are bound to age in a world of constant ideological progression, and that is in part the reason for the many rewrites of *The Tempest's* story, especially the more anti-colonialist ones which show Caliban changing gradually from his monstrous status towards a more human and victimized one. In the next sections, I will analyze a few of the new elements that Caliban has acquired in recent years, especially in one of the most famous modern rewritings of Shakespeare's play, Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*.

2.1 The Stigma of Deformity in the Tempest

As I already specified in the foreword, the dramatis personae of *The Tempest* summarily describes Caliban as "a savage and deformed slave", making this deformity known before the actual Shakespearean text and putting it under the spotlight. Caliban is not the first misshapen character in Shakespeare's works, as he is preceded by Richard in *Henry VI* and *Richard III* and by Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*. These characters all play a similar role in terms of function, as they are easily recognizable and irreverent villains who tend to become favourites of audiences. However, they are

⁸⁴ Seed, p. 211.

ultimately defeated by more heroic characters, such as Richard and Caliban, who are respectively slain by the Earl of Richmond (5.7.0.1-2)⁸⁵ and submitted (5.1.294-7) and then left on the island by Prospero.

But it is possible that Shakespeare might have gotten more than that use from these characters. Jeffrey R. Wilson argues that Shakespeare utilizes the three villains I previously mentioned, along with Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice*, Edmund from *King Lear*, and to some extent Nick Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as a deliberate method to depict a variety of stigmas. These stigmas encompass physical deformities, cognitive impairments, racial disparities, illegitimate births, and other deviations from the societal standards prevalent during that era.⁸⁶ Caliban can be interpreted as Shakespeare's final and potentially 'ultimate' stigmatized character, particularly through his physical deformities, monstrosity, and, in some readings, racial otherness, and this portrayal is also applicable to Sycorax (1.2.261). The status of 'ultimate stigma' remains as well in the examination of his moral status as the devil's illegitimate child from Prospero's perspective and potentially even as mentally impaired or disturbed (5.1.290-1).

As I have previously mentioned, Shakespeare attributes Caliban characteristics drawn from both the Renaissance traditions regarding incubi and witchcraft, and from the prodigies of the Protestant Reformation. Caliban's character is influenced by the colonial literature that Shakespeare was exposed to while writing the play, particularly the essay "On the Cannibals" from John Florio's translation of Michel de Montaigne's *Essayes*.⁸⁷ This source, which the play directly references (2.1.145-66), may have played a significant role in shaping Shakespeare's portrayal of Caliban. In fact, many scholars argue that the name 'Caliban' is either an anagram or a derivative of 'cannibal' or 'Carib', reflecting the impact of these colonial writings on the character's conception.⁸⁸ Wilson asserts that "Montaigne's text marks the apex of a skeptical crisis in Renaissance Europe by

85 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Richard III: The Oxford Shakespeare*.

86 Wilson, Jeffrey R., *Caliban's Deformity*, <https://wilson.fas.harvard.edu/stigma-in-shakespeare/caliban%E2%80%99s-deformity> (accessed 06 January 2024).

87 Michel de Montaigne, "Of the Cannibals" *The Essays*, transl. by John Florio, 1603, pp. 100-7, quoted in Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare The Tempest*, pp. 227-237.

88 Vaughan and Vaughan, pp. 26-7.

bringing the body to philosophical import”.⁸⁹ According to the French philosopher, humans can only be certain of the sensation of inhabiting a body that does not always function as expected, which is a universally humiliating experience.⁹⁰ Despite this commonality, people tend to stigmatize any visible differences, disregarding the shared human experience of being "created" in a similar manner.

According to Wilson, Shakespeare took Montaigne’s text as the base inspiration for Caliban’s body, making it dirty, deformed, and unimpressive (a trap for Caliban to inhabit) but not demonic, despite what Prospero says (1.2.319). Furthermore, Shakespeare reinforces Caliban's monstrous nature in Act II, Scene 2, where the word "monster" is mentioned 17 times (2.2): despite acting the same as his companions, Caliban is looked at with contempt and described as a biologically inferior ‘savage’ by the more ‘civilized’ Italians. Shakespeare seeks to illustrate Montaigne's philosophy through Stephano's and Trinculo's insults on stage, prompting the audience to discern between animalistic and inhuman behaviour. This underscores the idea that culture constructs a societal perception of human nature and that each society defines normality in its own unique way. Humans from these cultures then vilify what is different from these normalities and label it as a perversion of the same normalities, and the reason for this is

because the human mind constantly misconstrues alterity, which Shakespeare satirized in *The Tempest* by having the Italians call Caliban “devil” or “monster” even though his behaviour mirrors their own.⁹¹

Caliban’s body, according to Wilson, is a symbol of what is other from the self: interpreted as demonic and monstrous, yet perfectly human as the stigmatic body always is.

In accordance with the ideas of Wilson and Montaigne, the creation and encounter with stigma cause unease for all parties involved: the one stigmatizing, the stigmatized, and those witnessing the stigmatization. This discomfort contributes to the continued perception of Caliban as a devil, humanoid monster, or racial other, rather than simply as a deformed individual. This is what Shakespeare, in a way, satirizes in *The Tempest*, since without an assessment of what is evident,

89 Wilson.

90 Wilson.

91 Wilson.

what is different is greatly exaggerated. The result of this is that all that is complicated to interpret and explain becomes something strange, unnatural, and inhuman.

Shakespeare completes his study on stigma with a modern-era conjecture: the new inspection of the mechanics of human understanding changes the frame for the aberrant body, posing it as an epistemological conundrum after the sceptical crisis that struck the later years of the sixteenth century. When examining the world through a strictly phenomenological lens, any physical deformity should be regarded as natural, regardless of the inclination to perceive it as a significant departure from the natural course of events. This makes deformity and its notion “only useful to the pictures of a universal order invented by reason drenched in desire”.⁹²

In the play’s last scene, Prospero finally concludes by referring to Caliban with the words “this thing of darkness I/ Acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-6). This is the culmination of Montaigne’s ideology, because by accepting and owning the deformed and monstrous (represented by Caliban here), one (in this case Prospero) accepts and owns up to all the deformities humanity displays when set beside the images of normality it generated.

2.2 Colonialism and Anti-slavery Sentiment: the *Tempête*

In the preceding sections, I have discussed the evolving portrayal and analysis of Caliban, both in theatrical performances and in scholarly examinations of the character, over time. Through various adaptations of Shakespeare's play, Caliban has undergone significant transformations. Initially labeled as a "misshapen knave" (5.1.268) and a “demi-devil” (5.1.272) in the original text, his character has evolved into more animal-like depictions, ultimately reaching its peak in Aimé Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, written in 1969. In this particular version, Caliban is depicted as a symbol of the oppressed natives and victims of colonization, embodying something Jyotsna Singh calls “a third world revolutionary”⁹³

92 Wilson.

93 Singh, Jyotsna G., “Caliban versus Miranda: Race and Gender Conflicts in Postcolonial Rewritings of ‘The Tempest’”, in Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan and Dymphna Callaghan, ed., *Feminist Readings of Early Modern*

Upon closer examination of the topic, it becomes evident that numerous deconstructive narratives of colonialism, particularly those pertaining to British colonialism in the 1960s, employ the character of Caliban as a representation of resistance. This is particularly evident in literary works from African and Latin American countries, particularly the Caribbean. Notably, Barbadian author George Lamming, in his 1960 novel *The Pleasures of Exile*, interprets *The Tempest* as "prophetic of a political future that is our present" and identifies himself as "both a colonial exile and descendant of Caliban."⁹⁴ Revisionist research that explores these reinterpretations dates back to Christopher Columbus' exploration of the American continent, calling into question this event in order to reevaluate the history of the interactions between colonizers and the indigenous population.⁹⁵

One of the primary areas of investigation revolves around the term 'cannibal' employed by Columbus, which denotes individuals who consume human flesh. Despite the ambiguity surrounding the correlation between this definition of the term and the actual practices of the Caribs, the association of the cannibalistic image with that of Caliban reinforces the notion of a dichotomy between 'civilized' Europe and the 'savage' New World. According to Eric Cheyfitz, Columbus had no direct exposure to the idea of a cannibal as someone who consumes human flesh. In his travel diary, Columbus claims that a tribe of native Americans called Arawak told him about the cannibals, but this affirmation is countered by his own acknowledgement that natives and Europeans did not speak the same language.⁹⁶ Studies such as this were instrumental in sparking significant interest in the native revisions of colonial history in contemporary times. It is reasonable, in my opinion, to understand why the writers of the 1960s in Latin America and the Caribbean began to advocate the principles of ideological decolonization by aligning themselves with the

Culture: Emerging Subjects, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 191.

94 George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, London: Michael Joseph, 1960, p. 13, quoted in Castells, Ricardo, "From Caliban to Lucifer: Native Resistance and the Religious Colonization of the Indies in Baroque Spanish Theater", *Hispanófila*, 182 (2018), p. 42.

95 Singh, p. 191.

96 Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 42, quoted in Singh, p. 192.

character of Caliban. Cuban poet Roberto Retamar's 1971 essay "Calibán" used the character as a symbol for the Mestizos' aspiration to challenge the colonial dynamics between the United States and Latin America:⁹⁷

Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What can Caliban do but use that same language to curse him... what is our history, what is our culture, if not the history and culture of Caliban?⁹⁸

Numerous scholars have directed their attention towards the section of the narrative in which Prospero and Miranda educate Caliban in their language (1.2.352-4). This aspect is often interpreted as mirroring the colonization processes exhibited by the two characters, as discussed in earlier sections. Lamming himself spoke of Prospero as living “in the absolute certainty that Language, which is his gift to Caliban, is the very prison in which Caliban’s achievements must be realized and restricted.”⁹⁹

Lamming's works have undeniably and significantly influenced post-colonial writers, including Retamar. However, I argue that there is another text that holds equal importance in showcasing the development of Caliban's character. Published in French in 1969 – just after the decolonization – by Martinican writer and founder of the Negritude movement Aimé Césaire, *Une Tempête* was meant to revise the history of the Caribbean. The play was produced initially in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and France with a cast of black actors. It was later translated by Richard Miller in 1985 and performed in New York in 1991 in a politically censored form.¹⁰⁰ Despite the censorship, the play still conveyed the writer's intentions and the goals of the movement he established in the 1930s, which aimed to challenge the political and linguistic oppression experienced by black individuals due to colonialism.

The play’s story, while following the Shakespearean original, is quick to show the different connotations it has. In this version, the island is not merely an uninhabited location where Prospero

97 Castells, p. 43.

98 Roberto Fernández Retamar, “Calibán”, *The Massachusetts Review*, 15 (1973-4), p. 24, quoted in Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 156.

99 Lamming, p. 14, quoted in Singh, p. 193.

100 Singh, p. 204.

is banished due to his magical pursuits, but instead, it is depicted as a colony resembling regions in Africa or the Caribbean. Prospero stumbles upon this colony himself and is exiled there by the Holy Inquisition after being accused of heresy, as revealed in a flashback where a friar reads out the indictment (1.2.35-52) in the play.¹⁰¹ All of this has been ordained by Prospero's enemies, his brother Antonio and Alonso the King of Naples, who also denounced him as a sorcerer in a way that, according to Chantal Zabus, "reeks of Renan": Ernest Renan had also written a rewriting of Shakespeare's play, *Caliban: Suite de "La tempête"*, which had a monk of the Holy Inquisition amongst the characters and focused on revolution and class-bound ideology,¹⁰² which has served as inspiration for Césaire.

After the flashback, Caliban, who in Césaire's *dramatis personae* is described as "a black slave"¹⁰³ and is closer to the role of a protagonist, makes his appearance on stage. The scene immediately shifts focus, centring on his verbal attacks against Prospero's rule over both language and representation, both topics that Césaire is close to. Caliban shows his desire for freedom and independence by greeting his oppressor in Swahili:¹⁰⁴ "Uhuru!" (1.2.98). This angers Prospero, who rants back at him:

"Mumbling your native language again! I've already told you, I don't like it. ... you could at least thank me for having taught you to speak at all. You, a savage...a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, dragged up from the bestiality that still clings to you." (1.2.101-2; 110-2)

Caliban's insurrection extends beyond this point: following Prospero's portrayal as the archetypal colonizer with a 'civilizing' agenda, Césaire directs Caliban's scathing remarks towards the magician's claim of authority in 'naming' by having him denounce, in a deliberate attempt to disrupt the language enforced by Prospero, the wrongdoing of the magician in appropriating Caliban's identity.

"I don't want to be called Caliban any longer. ... Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen." (1.2.168-82)

101 Césaire. Aimé, *Une Tempête*, transl. by Richard Miller, New York: Ubu Repertory Theater Publications, 1992. This is the edition I have used from this section onwards.

102 Ernest Renan, *Caliban: Suite de "La tempête"*, Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1878, quoted in Zabus, Chantal, *Tempests after Shakespeare*, New York: Palgrave, 2002 p. 11.

103 Césaire, p. iii.

104 Singh, p. 204.

Following this interaction, during which Prospero explicitly makes the association of Caliban's name with the word "cannibal" (1.2.178), it becomes apparent that this version of Caliban is actively creating a structured resistance against the colonizer's domain. This is made evident when Prospero informs Ariel that "Caliban is alive, he is plotting, he is getting a guerrilla force together" (3.3.71-2). In addition to this, Caliban showcases himself as the foremost figure in the potential emergence of black independence, a development that Ariel acknowledges in his song:

notes so sweet that the last
will give rise to a yearning
in the heart of the most forgetful slaves
yearning for freedom!
... and the lightened agave will
straighten from my flight,
a solemn flag. (3.5.43-6:55-7)

Ariel, in Césaire's *Tempest*, has also been changed in an interesting way: labelled as "a Mulatto slave", he plays the role of Caliban's 'moderate' counterpart, a member of a mixed race and therefore (historically) higher in the social hierarchy, therefore more willing to accept his more 'limited' oppression.¹⁰⁵ He displays much more sympathy towards Caliban than his Shakespearean counterpart, especially through their dialogue in the first scene of the second act: "after all we are brothers, brothers in suffering and slavery, but brothers in hope as well. We both want our freedom. We just have different methods." (2.1.12-4). Despite this, Ariel's and Caliban's (and therefore Césaire's) ideals cannot work in the same rebellion movement since Ariel's ideals include the sharing of this sentiment of brotherhood with the oppressor: "I'm not fighting just for *my* freedom, for *our* freedom, but for Prospero too, so that Prospero can acquire a conscience" (2.1.46-8). This difference between Ariel and Caliban practically anticipated the issues of black people after this era of independence: according to writer Philip Mason, in fact,

The post-independent Black is in effect either an Ariel—an Uncle Tom, a "good nigger," a "moderate nationalist"—or a Caliban—"the bad native, the nationalist, the extremist, the man who will be Prime Minister after independence".¹⁰⁶

105 Singh, p. 204.

106 Philip Mason, *Prospero's Magic*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 88-89, quoted in Zabus, p. 49.

When compared with Shakespeare's work, Césaire's adaptation maintains the essence of the story while introducing some alterations, such as Prospero resorting to an "anti-riot arsenal" to confront Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo instead of relying on magic. However, the conclusion crafted by Césaire diverges from both the original play's ending and from depicting a clear triumph of the colonized over the colonizer. Instead of Prospero being expelled from the land, Césaire decides to recreate another Hegelian dialectic (which I already presented through the words of Cohen): Prospero decides to remain on the island, declaring both his power over it and a peculiar natural bond with it by calling himself "the conductor of a boundless score ... this isle is mute without me" (3.5.182-9). The play ends with a flashforward, showing Prospero old and tired after fighting against "opossums" and other animals of an "unclean nature" to "protect civilization" (3.5.212-6). Considering the fact that he uses the opossum as an image to describe Caliban (3.5.207), it is fair to come to the conclusion that this battle against nature is a metaphor alluding to an actual civil war against a Caliban-led rebellion.

Césaire's *Une Tempête* is written in such a way as to celebrate Caliban's retaking of what Prospero's power took away: political and linguistic control. Singh expresses herself regarding the rewrite's failure to address or altering the patriarchal establishments of the fight for power the original play showed, an issue that cannot be overlooked and that I will delve into further in the next section.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the significant progress the character of Caliban has made is undeniable: throughout history, Caliban has evolved from being portrayed as a demonic and monstrous creature in the seventeenth century to being seen as the primitive and bestial Darwinian 'missing link' in the eighteenth to nineteenth century. However, with the works of writers such as Césaire, Caliban has transformed into a genuine and acknowledged symbol of the colonial subject, representing the embodiment of any oppressed group. This new image is evident also in the way Sycorax is mentioned in Césaire's play: while Prospero still deems her to be a witch, Caliban's words about her make out quite a different picture, with the witch becoming animals, plants, water,

¹⁰⁷ Singh, p. 196.

and even being equalized with the earth itself, like the true spirit of nature: “I respect the earth, because I know that it is alive, and I know that Sycorax is alive. Sycorax. Mother. ... I see thee everywhere!” (1.2.127-31). It is in nature, in the earth, that Caliban finds his roots after being “uprooted from the ancestral African soil”,¹⁰⁸ something that Prospero cannot comprehend. And because of this, the two characters are locked into a stalemate that escalates, in the end, into violence.

Going back to the ending of *Une Tempête*, it shows Prospero going from threatening Caliban with violence, to a seemingly tame “Well, Caliban, old fellow, it’s just us two now, here on the island...only you and me.”, to which Caliban defiantly answers with his song “FREEDOM HI-DAY, FREEDOM HI-DAY!” (3.5.219-20; 222). Césaire leaves the two main characters imprisoned in a fight for dominance – proposing an example of Hegelian dialectic¹⁰⁹ – that ends up making them the only inhabitants of an island now deserted and growing colder (3.5.218). This battle has been interpreted by Singh as akin to an internal fight, “a natural psychic struggle between Self and Other”,¹¹⁰ which in George Lamming’s terms translates to a Prospero who “knows that his encounter with Caliban is largely his encounter with himself. The gift [of language] is a contract from which neither participant is allowed to withdraw”.¹¹¹

While Césaire’s play is part of the many examples of anti-colonialist rewrites of *The Tempest* that practically reverses the roles of oppressor and oppressed, it is interesting that he does not do away with the struggle for power: breaking the colonial hierarchy changes the relationship between Caliban and Prospero into one of interdependency, in the same way as the black-white chessboard of the US’s race relations: “Blacks and Whites were ‘enemy-brothers’, ‘riveted to each other’ like two convicts dragging the same chain and ball.”¹¹² Even if it has changed, it reflects the interdependency (more direct) that the characters had in the original *The Tempest*, about which

108 Zabus, p. 45.

109 Singh, p. 205.

110 Singh, p. 194.

111 Lamming, p. 15, quoted in Singh, p. 194.

112 L. S. Belhassen, “Un poète politique: Aimé Césaire”, *Le Magazine littéraire* 34 (November 1969), p. 32, quoted in Zabus, p. 52.

Robert Adams said “Without Caliban, Prospero would starve, without Prospero, Caliban might wind up in a Bartholomew Fair sideshow or a fishmonger’s barrow.”¹¹³

2.3 Sexuality in *The Tempest* and its rewritings: the kinship system

One detail that does not exactly catch the eye at a surface reading of *The Tempest*, is how quite a big part of the story revolves around sexuality. Caliban can be interpreted as a representation of sexual colonialism, evident in both his physical appearance and his behaviour. His ambiguous deformity symbolizes the grotesque outcome of the unnatural sexual relationship between a witch and a devil, resulting in a problematic pregnancy exacerbated by his mother's banishment (1.2.269) before she “littered” him on the island (1.2.282). This abandonment leaves Caliban without a clear earthly paternal lineage (1.2.320).

Although I have previously discussed the character's "demi-devil... bastard" (5.1.272-3) nature, it is important to note that stories of witches engaging in sexual rites with the devil were widespread in Europe. These stories became intertwined with racial ideologies, which were supported by ancient texts such as Pliny's *Natural History* (78 A.D.), where non-white skinned people were described as deformed by the environment.¹¹⁴ Additionally, Christian mythology associated dark skin with sin, hellfire, and demonic origins in various texts linked to the Church,¹¹⁵ which served to justify fears of interbreeding with other populations.

This issue of intermingling ties also into Caliban’s actions, specifically his attempted rape of Miranda, but not just in the way one can see superficially: more than just the aberrant act, what causes Prospero’s fear and punishment is the risk of miscegenation (the mixture of races) such a union would imply. I have previously emphasized the significance of the colonizers' desire to outnumber the indigenous population in order to acquire their land. This necessity eventually

113 Robert Adams, *Shakespeare. The Four Romances*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1989, p. 154, quoted in Zabrus, p. 52.

114 Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, AD 77-79, 2.80, quoted in Cohen, p. 10.

115 John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 64, quoted in Cohen, p. 10.

evolved into a fear of native men posing a threat to the sexual purity of white women, which later transformed into a similar apprehension but with African men instead. Caliban's attempt to violate Miranda symbolizes colonial England's anxiety surrounding this issue. This ended up having repercussions on the stage play even centuries later, when Roger Livesey wore black greasepaint in his representation of Caliban in 1934. While this performance did not raise any criticism and was praised for “bringing out Caliban’s pathos and his monstrosity”,¹¹⁶ the opposite can be said for the performance of Frank Benson in 1900, which received a response arguing that his “get-up was good, but his face should have been coloured to match: a pink and white countenance looking out from all that hairiness was inappropriate”.¹¹⁷ What Cohen says about the “geography of the monster”¹¹⁸ shows in this context that Caliban’s body is built and territorialized by historical interpretation of both Shakespeare and race.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, amidst the ongoing discourse surrounding Caliban's identity and transgression, there exists a potential oversight of the victim of his crime, Miranda. Regrettably, in numerous postcolonial reinterpretations, Miranda's significance has diminished, overshadowed by the emphasis on portraying Caliban as a symbol of revolution. In rewrites such as Césaire’s *A Tempest*, Miranda acts as “the object of desire” to define and keep the rivalry between the self (Prospero, the Hegelian master) and the other (Caliban, the rebel slave), a simple “aspect of the Prospero/Caliban opposition rather than ... (a term) of the complex sexual ideologies underpinning colonialism”.¹²⁰ Jyotsna Singh, investigating the relationship between Caliban and Miranda and attempting to explain the real intersections between *The Tempest* and its rewritings, considers that using Caliban as the prototype of a male revolutionary and focusing on him symbolizing decolonization creates a “utopia in which women (Miranda, but also her unnamed mother and Sycorax) are marginalized or missing”.¹²¹

116 Griffiths, p. 175.

117 Griffiths, p. 168.

118 Cohen, p. 7.

119 Cline, p. 714.

120 Singh, p. 194.

121 Singh, p. 194

Numerous scholars in the field of postcolonial studies have raised concerns regarding the portrayal of the New World as a feminine entity in narratives of exploration and conquest. This tendency to sexualize the processes of colonization and subjugation has been criticized for its implications in reinforcing power dynamics. Interestingly, despite the significant role of gender in these discussions, alternative interpretations of Shakespeare's works from non-Western perspectives often overlook the complexities of race and gender intersections. For instance, in some reimaginings of the play, Miranda is reduced to a mere possession of the European colonizer, neglecting the potential for a native romantic partner for Caliban. Even Césaire's work, while it celebrates Caliban's appropriations of Prospero's power, fails at altering the terms of the patriarchy that render the women of the story practically incidental: Miranda is just a tool for Prospero to perpetuate his lineage with Ferdinand (1.2.196-7),¹²² and Sycorax was downgraded from an actual person to a sort of symbolic mother earth (1.2.124-40),¹²³ again founding the story on the marginalization of the female characters.

The discourse of sexuality in *The Tempest* offers Prospero the foundation for his colonial authority, letting him organize the sexuality of his 'subjects' – Miranda and Caliban mostly, and Ferdinand partially – politically, with the same structure early societies would use to exchange women as gifts.¹²⁴ When Miranda first meets Ferdinand (1.2.375), she expresses her desire for him by comparing him to the only two other men she knows (1.2.445-7), before Prospero intervenes to control the meeting, saying:

“Thou think'st there is no more such shapes as he,
Having seen but him and Caliban. Foolish wench,
To th' most of men this is a Caliban,
And they to him are angels” (1.2.479-82)

This demonstrates Prospero's utilization of Caliban as the "less than human other"¹²⁵ to establish gender and racial identity by negation. Additionally, it highlights Prospero's perception of any man

122 Césaire. I must signal this in this section to avoid confusion with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

123 Césaire.

124 Singh, p. 196.

125 Singh, p. 197.

pursuing his daughter as akin to Caliban, unless their intentions are to advance a noble lineage, which is the reason for Ferdinand's desire for Miranda (1.2.448-9). The fact that Caliban is son to a woman like Sycorax reinforces his stigma as an 'other', and allows Prospero to enact his colonialist discourse fully: to produce a continual triumph for what he considers 'civility', he controls the identities of Caliban and Miranda by pressuring them into a continual sexual struggle under his constant surveillance. This is how the discourse of sexuality bolsters colonial authority, with both race and gender conflicts present in a three-way dynamic "within the same system of differences between colonizer and colonized, yet not without some dissonances within the systemic forces",¹²⁶ since Miranda still responds to Caliban like a colonizer, despite being a victim herself as a woman: she is repulsed by Caliban's looks (and villainy) – "'Tis a villain, sir,/ I do not love to look on." (1.2.309-10) – but she still feels the same urge to civilize him – "I pitied thee,/ Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour/ One thing or other." (1.2.352-4) – that the English colonist narrative supports.

Despite how both Prospero and Miranda obstruct and put a stop to Caliban's ambitions to repopulate the island with "Calibans" by gaining sexual access to her, the two do not occupy the same level of authority. Miranda is 'colonially superior' to Caliban, but she is forced into something Singh calls "a kinship system in which all the three males are bonded through their competing claims on her":¹²⁷ a kinship system happens among 'primitive' societies usually through the exchange of gifts as a form of social relationship, especially the gifting and receiving of women (from which the system takes its name of 'kinship'). This gift-giving results in both special solidarity and competitive rivalry amongst the participating factions, but the women gifted do not participate as partners but rather as conduits. This concept is not universally applicable, as numerous anthropologists contend and identify instances where it does not apply: certain societies outside of the western world, especially those that follow a matrilineal descent system, do not

126 Singh, p. 198.

127 Singh, p. 198.

adhere to such practices. Singh references multiple sources, suggesting that the exchange of women is a method to resolve their conflicting status as objects of desire, both personal and external.¹²⁸ And identify exceptions in certain non-Western societies, particularly those that are matrilineal. In light of this, the kinship system serves as the underlying cause of the power dynamics between Prospero and Caliban, particularly concerning Caliban and Ferdinand's claims to sexual rights over Prospero's daughter. In this context, Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand represents the most fundamental form of 'gift exchange'.

Despite being outside the 'kin', Caliban still holds a role in this system of gender differences. His attempt at forcing himself on Miranda can be viewed as an attempt to create a kinship with Prospero, to create a blood tie to him, and to use Miranda to "People ... the isle with Calibans" (1.2.349-50), which is producing male children in his image. Doing this, Prospero responds by controlling his daughter as a sexual gift to Ferdinand. Singh points out that this aspect is integral to a kinship system that encompasses all forms of 'women trade,' ranging from violent and coerced transactions. As previously mentioned, this dynamic can lead to conflict and competition rather than collaboration. Caliban successfully positions himself within this social framework as a competitor to Ferdinand, a status that Prospero validates by recognizing his interest in his daughter, despite his efforts to uphold the hierarchical relationship between himself and Caliban by withholding the gift of a woman from him (similar to a colonizer). This underscores the significance of the kinship system in shaping this struggle for power.

This power struggle (and Miranda's position) is made more complex by Prospero's fear – a very European fear – of monstrous progeny from Caliban, which would connect him to the "damned witch Sycorax" (1.2.263) whose magic, opposite to Prospero's, got her exiled from Algiers. Sycorax (and therefore Caliban) is a physical representation of aberrations of nature in both sexuality (Caliban being the son of the devil) and racial identity (Algiers being her native city

128 Eleanor Burke Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1981, pp. 229-41, quoted in Singh, p. 199.

makes her and Caliban non-European). While there is no way to divide facts about Caliban's nature from Prospero and other characters' insults, the selective inclusion and exclusion rhetoric of Prospero towards Miranda, Caliban, and Ferdinand is built upon this fear of miscegenation. It is noteworthy that the concerns about interracial relationships in the play are specifically directed towards Miranda and Caliban, rather than towards Claribel, Ferdinand's sister, who was married to the King of Tunis (2.1.70). Claribel only receives the quote "That would not bless our Europe with your daughter / But rather loose her to an African" (2.1.122-3) as a direct opposition to her situation being against the social norms, her fate not affecting Prospero's 'happy ending'.

Several modern interpretations of *The Tempest* that came after Césaire's attempted to 'open up' the play to the dissonances of the kinship system. Lorrie Leininger explores the relationship between Caliban and Miranda, finding an affinity in the potential resistance they can oppose to Prospero's power. Her essay "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'" imagines Miranda responding to her father and attempting to disrupt his colonial hierarchy and his kinship system by demanding respect for Caliban's lineage and refusing to be a tool for Prospero.¹²⁹ Hints of such an alliance are also in the original play, but just with Miranda teaching Caliban her language (1.2.362), which can be seen as a colonial allegory of imposing languages of Europe on the natives to control them.

Césaire's *A Tempest*, instead, puts the focus on Caliban, making him the absolute protagonist of the story. He rejects the label of rapist that Prospero forces on him (1.2.154-5), but despite denying any sexual interest towards Miranda, she still describes him as "that awful Caliban who keeps pursuing me and calling out my name in his stupid dreams" (3.1.28-9). After this moment, however, Césaire does not touch on the question of power and sexuality in Prospero, Miranda, and Caliban further: the repudiation of the "dirty thoughts" brings Caliban to become a one-minded

129 Lorrie Jerrel Leininger, "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'", in Gayle Green, Ruth Swift Lenz and Carol Thomas Neely, ed., *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980, pp. 285-94, quoted in Singh, p. 202.

prototype of a “third world revolutionary”¹³⁰. *A Tempest* challenges with its postcolonial vision the representations of non-Europeans as uncivilized and inferior, but it keeps the same kinship system as the Shakespeare original: Caliban’s refusal of Miranda is readable as rejection of a gift, and there is no cooperation of the two against Prospero’s control. Miranda’s role, reduced to a minimum to inhibit the prominent fears of miscegenation in *The Tempest*, becomes a mere plot device for Caliban’s all-male revolution.

It is also important to note that, despite the changes in Miranda’s role, Césaire does not introduce another woman to be Caliban’s “physiognomically complementary mate... as an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire... an alternative system of meaning”,¹³¹ and neither did Shakespeare. Sylvia Wynter provided a critique of Shakespeare's play, which can also be applied to *A Tempest*. In her critique, she proposed that Caliban's woman serves as a foundational element in the social hierarchy of the global order, and that Caliban himself has no necessity for the reproduction of his own species.¹³² In Césaire’s rewriting, the lack of a native woman translates for Singh to Caliban’s revolt having

little impact as long as the absence of a native woman as his sexual reproductive mate functions to negate the progeny/population group comprising the original owners/occupiers of the New World lands, the American Indians.¹³³

As a result, *A Tempest* fails to address the relationship between freedom movements and sexual difference representations, demonstrating that the movements of resistance tend to be founded on specific constructions of women’s sexuality and determinations of kinship systems. The play not only reduces Miranda to a property of a colonizer, but it also moves the sexual and maternal image of Sycorax (a ‘native’ woman) onto the Earth. Other than that, the revolution shown here prevents Caliban from peopling the isle with more Calibans, breaking the credibility of the social movement.

130 Singh, p. 203.

131 Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the Demonic Ground of Caliban’s Woman,” in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savoury Fido, ed., *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990, p. 360, quoted in Singh, p. 206.

132 Sylvia Wynter, “Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the Demonic Ground of Caliban’s Woman,” in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savoury Fido, ed., *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, Trenton: African World Press, 1990, p. 360, quoted in Singh, p. 206.

133 Singh, p. 206.

Summary

La presente tesi si focalizza sulla figura enigmatica di Calibano, che riveste il ruolo di antagonista nella nota commedia *La Tempesta*, redatta da William Shakespeare nel 1611. Questo lavoro letterario è stato concepito in un periodo di significativa importanza storica e culturale, coincidente con la fondazione delle prime colonie inglesi oltreoceano. La trama dell'opera non solo riflette tematiche universali come il potere, la libertà e la colonizzazione, ma mette in evidenza anche (e forse soprattutto) le complesse dinamiche relazionali tra i personaggi, in particolare il contrasto tra Calibano e gli altri personaggi. La mia tesi si propone di esplorare le molteplici rappresentazioni e interpretazioni di Calibano che sono state sviluppate nel corso dei secoli, evidenziando come il suo personaggio sia stato oggetto di diverse analisi e reinterpretazioni in contesti storici e culturali differenti. Queste rappresentazioni variano ampiamente, e spaziano dall'immagine di un selvaggio brutale e malvagio a quella di un personaggio tragico, un essere senziente oppresso e emarginato, simbolo delle ingiustizie perpetuate dalla colonizzazione.

Al fine di semplificare questa analisi, ho organizzato le molteplici interpretazioni riguardanti la sua natura come 'figlio di Sicorace' in due principali 'fasi'. La prima fase si focalizza sull'analisi di Calibano come simbolo di una natura primordiale e incontaminata, in opposizione alla civiltà e alla cultura imposte dagli europei. Questa prospettiva mette in luce le sue doti istintive e il legame con la terra, suggerendo che la sua figura rappresenti (tra le tante cose) una forma di autenticità ormai scomparsa. Per la seconda fase, l'analisi si sposta verso un'interpretazione più sfumata, in cui Calibano viene visto come un simbolo del risentimento e della ribellione contro l'oppressione coloniale. In tale contesto, la sua battaglia per la libertà si trasforma in un forte appello alla giustizia sociale e alla difesa dei diritti delle persone emarginate e trattate in modo impari.

Questa divisione in fasi mira a evidenziare non solo il progresso del personaggio nel corso del tempo, ma anche come la sua rappresentazione possa servire da spunto di riflessione per analizzare le problematiche attuali relative all'identità, al potere e all'oppressione. In conclusione, la

mia tesi intende fornire un'analisi dettagliata e sfaccettata di Calibano, esaminando le sue diverse dimensioni e significati, oltre a evidenziare la sua funzione cruciale nel contesto più ampio della critica alla colonizzazione e delle rappresentazioni identitarie nella letteratura e nella cultura.

Nel dettaglio, la fase iniziale del mio studio, che inizia con il testo shakespeariano, mira a esplorare l'immagine di Calibano, che nei primi secoli venne visto quasi sempre come una creatura intrinsecamente grottesca e orribile. Questa rappresentazione si sviluppa non solo attraverso le sue azioni e le sue parole, ma si manifesta anche nel suo aspetto esteriore, il quale evoca un intenso sentimento di avversione da parte degli altri personaggi. Nonostante Shakespeare non offra una descrizione dettagliata del personaggio, come spesso accadeva nelle opere teatrali dell'epoca, gli insulti e gli epiteti rivolti a Calibano dagli altri personaggi contribuiscono a crearne un'immagine vivida e inquietante. Le espressioni utilizzate per screditarlo mostrano una visione di lui come un essere stravagante, quasi impossibile, tanto da spingere numerosi studiosi a dedicarsi a un'analisi dettagliata della sua figura.

Nel primo capitolo della tesi e nella prima sezione, ho seguito alcune delle molteplici interpretazioni proposte dagli studiosi, cercando di analizzare le rappresentazioni inumane attribuite a Calibano. Partendo dal concetto di 'mostro' elaborato da Cohen e Cline, emerge che il personaggio di Calibano è emblematico di un contesto storico permeato dalla paura e dal razzismo nei confronti dei nativi delle colonie. Calibano, tuttavia, si sottrae a qualsiasi tentativo di essere categorizzato in modo rigido, emergendo come un simbolo complesso e dalle molteplici sfaccettature.

Nelle due sezioni successive della mia ricerca, ho deciso di concentrare l'attenzione prima sui legami intrinseci tra Calibano e il demoniaco, un aspetto accentuato dalla sua discendenza da una madre strega, Siorace. Ho analizzato soprattutto il trattato *Daemonologie* di Re Giacomo I, il quale fornisce importanti elementi per comprendere la demonizzazione di figure come Calibano. La connessione con la stregoneria, inoltre, non solo contribuisce a una migliore comprensione del suo

carattere, ma fornisce anche spunti di più ampia riflessione sulle paure sociali e culturali del periodo. In seguito, ho esaminato le diverse rappresentazioni animali presenti nel testo e utilizzate sia per deridere Calibano, sia per definire la sua identità. Questa gamma di metafore e similitudini animali non si limita a evidenziare il suo ruolo come 'altro', ma aiuta anche a creare un'immagine articolata che esprime sia disprezzo che un certo fascino nei confronti di questa figura selvaggia e primitiva. Questa analisi mette in luce come Calibano non sia soltanto un personaggio emarginato nella narrazione di Shakespeare, ma anche un riflesso delle ansie e delle tensioni sociali del periodo storico in cui è stato scritto.

Dopo un'approfondita analisi di alcune delle diverse rappresentazioni artistiche di Calibano nel corso dei secoli, si può notare chiaramente come tali opere riflettano un'evoluzione culturale e interpretativa. Queste rappresentazioni mostrano un passaggio da immagini chiare, basate sul testo originale di Shakespeare, a interpretazioni sempre più astratte, che si distaccano dalla tradizionale definizione del personaggio per crearne un'immagine più 'vera'.

Nel secondo capitolo, viene delineata la fase successiva delle interpretazioni di Calibano, che si basa su studi post-coloniali. Questi studi offrono una nuova prospettiva, proiettando Calibano sotto una luce diversa e conferendogli una maggiore umanità, il che contrasta con le letture precedenti del Calibano animalesco e mostruoso. All'interno di questo contesto, il capitolo inizia analizzando il concetto di cultura coloniale inglese, mettendo in evidenza le somiglianze tra Calibano e le diverse etnie e popolazioni native che sono state storicamente sottoposte ad oppressione e disumanizzazione. Le prime due sezioni di questo capitolo espongono argomenti che sostengono e motivano tali nuove interpretazioni. La prima sezione si concentra sull'importanza del tema della deformità, che si rivela come un tratto distintivo per il personaggio di Calibano. Questo elemento richiede un'attenta analisi, specialmente tenendo conto dello stigma sociale e culturale legato ad esso durante l'epoca di Shakespeare, un periodo in cui le norme estetiche e comportamentali erano rigidamente definite.

La parte successiva del capitolo analizza uno dei rifacimenti de *La Tempesta*, simbolo a mio avviso delle opere scritte da vari autori caraibici del XX secolo, un'epoca in cui le loro nazioni (tra le quali Barbados e Martinica) stavano combattendo per l'indipendenza e la decolonizzazione. Attraverso lo studio della commedia *Une Tempête* di Aimé Césaire, si evidenzia il cambiamento del personaggio di Calibano in relazione alle nuove ideologie e sensibilità che stavano emergendo in quegli anni. In questa nuova prospettiva, Calibano viene reinterpretato in una chiave completamente nuova: non è più il mostruoso antagonista che si oppone a Prospero, ma diventa invece la vittima di un colonialismo spietato, rappresentando così una figura completamente umana, degna di un rispetto che le viene negato. La sua trama, che nell'opera shakespeariana era un meschino piano per eliminare il mago, si trasforma qui in un potente simbolo delle azioni rivoluzionarie dei popoli oppressi, sottolineando il tema della lotta contro il dominio coloniale europeo. Questa revisione critica non solo dona a Calibano umanità e dignità, ma fornisce anche una significativa analisi sulle relazioni di potere e di resistenza che caratterizzano la storia coloniale.

La parte conclusiva della tesi si concentra sull'analisi di un argomento cruciale ma spesso trascurato, ovvero la sessualità. Questo aspetto, in realtà lungi dall'essere marginale, assume un'importanza fondamentale non solo per la comprensione della commedia in cui si inserisce, ma anche per l'analisi delle dinamiche sociali e culturali nelle colonie. Esempio emblematico del tema è quello appunto di Calibano, il quale è stato ridotto in schiavitù come forma di punizione dopo aver tentato di violentare Miranda. Questo atto, che per il giudizio della società (specialmente per quella del diciassettesimo secolo) riveste un'importanza notevole, evidenzia non solo la disumanità di Calibano, ma anche la percezione delle dinamiche tra colonizzatori e colonizzati.

Nel contesto delle colonie, la sessualità riveste un ruolo cruciale nell'analisi delle dinamiche intercorrenti tra colonizzatori e popolazioni indigene. È quindi di primaria importanza esaminare il modo in cui il concetto di "sistema di parentela" influenzava le relazioni all'interno delle comunità native. Questo sistema aveva un impatto non solo sulle relazioni familiari e sociali, ma anche sulle

divisioni tra le diverse comunità, influenzando il modo in cui le persone interagivano. Esaminare questi legami è dunque fondamentale per comprendere come funzionano le dinamiche sociali nelle società colonizzate e per apprezzare la complessità delle interazioni culturali e sessuali che si verificavano in un contesto di dominio e sfruttamento. In breve, sebbene la sessualità possa apparire come un tema marginale, essa rappresenta di fatto un elemento fondamentale per comprendere le varie sfumature e le tensioni che contraddistinguono il rapporto tra i colonizzatori e i colonizzati.

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