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To the most of men this is a Caliban,
and they to him are angels (1.2.484-85).

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Caliban, at least as represented throughout critical and theatrical history, is not a character conducive to standardized stage portrayals or stabilized analytic interpretations. In The Tempest Shakespeare gives Caliban only 180 speaking lines; yet despite the brevity allotted for his expression, this character has generated multiple and varied reactions. As the complexity of a work such as The Tempest dictates, a thematically holistic treatment of Caliban becomes a rather overwhelming process, so this paper will merely attempt to address a few of the aspects involved with his treatment in the play and with the perceptions that arise as a result. Specifically, it will discuss those issues stemming from the ambiguity of his physical character and the interpretations of his spiritual nature that result, and those involving his interactions with Prospero and the ramifications of their relationship.

The numerous different portrayals of Caliban that have appeared on the stage are evidence of the gap that Shakespeare creates for interpretation of both Caliban's physical state and his allegorical meaning. Alden T. Vaughan discusses in his essay, "'Something Rich and Strange': The Theatrical Metamorphoses of Caliban," the effect the social and political milieu had upon the appearance of Caliban on the stage during

various periods:

In response to changing intellectual fashions, he evolved generally and gradually from drunken beast in the late seventeenth century, to a fishy monster in the eighteenth, to an apish missing link in the nineteenth (138).

Much critical theory and speculation was used to support all of these views during their prominence and afterwards, clearly illustrating the power intellectual trends have in justifications and interpretations.

In Dryden and Davenant's production of The Tempest, an adaptation of 1667, Caliban's role was altered to suit Restoration preferences: "Caliban's lines from the original Tempest are so cut and altered that he becomes the epitome of monstrousness, a non-human symbol of human inequity" (392). This idea of monstrous inequity was continued in the eighteenth century when paranoia about the lecherous side of human behavior led to Caliban's portrayal as a devilish incarnation of immorality and vice. In the nineteenth century, Daniel Wilson was a proponent of the Darwinian conceptualization of Caliban, and he integrated the aquatic references to the monster in The Tempest into the theory of his book, Caliban: The Missing Link, written in 1873: "Wilson noted Caliban's fish-like appearance and related it to Darwin's view that humanity evolved from some sort of aquatic animal" (399).

Gradually the trends shifted to encompass Caliban as

representing the Native Americans that were the victims of Colonialist oppression during the Jacobean period. Then in the 1970's the emphasis focused on the Negro experience of repression and exploitation, and Caliban became a Black American in many productions. Eventually, during the early 1980's the widespread interpretation of Caliban was that he represented any group that had suffered oppression, and this led to a surprising range of performances covering many spectrums of identity: "In New York, he appeared as a punk rocker, complete with cropped hair, sunglasses, and Cockney accent" (404). In short, because of a high susceptibility to varied interpretations due to Shakespeare's ascription of conflicting qualities in him (none of which are definitive), Caliban has become a catch-all for the expression of the subjugated experience of people encompassing many time periods and parts of the world.

In terms of his relationship to Prospero, the colonialist perspective of Caliban becomes most intriguing, as Alden T. Vaughan states in his essay, "Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban": "When Prospero is the emblem of European civilization, and his island is a "New World Arcadia," Caliban's Indianness is almost axiomatic" (146). Paul Brown also explores the effects of the colonialist discourse upon The Tempest in his critique, "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': The Tempest and the discourse of colonialism," only he extends his discussion to include the subjugation of Ireland during the British expansionist period as influential as well.

Citing both Pocahontas and Caliban as "savage others" that are assimilated by the colonizer in order to control aspects of themselves, Brown speaks of the result:

This characteristically produces an encounter with the other involving the colonizer's attempts to dominate, restrict, and exploit the other even as it offers allurements which might erode the order obtained within the civil subject of the body politic (51).

The allurement that Caliban offers to Prospero is a return to the natural state of man, freed from the confines of civilization and its restrictions upon his study. Just as Caliban is in tune with the wonders of the transcendental isle, Prospero also chooses to confront all he abhors in himself in his slave, and longs to make himself master over his own desires. In Caliban, then, it can be said that Prospero encounters aspects of himself that can only be controlled vicariously through the dominance of his slave. This would explain why he would keep a monster who had attempted to rape his daughter in such close proximity at all times.

More specifically Caliban represents the mortality that Prospero seeks to efface through his immersion in books and the magical arts. Caliban is a constant reminder of the material responsibilities that Prospero cannot neglect in order to subsist upon the island, and this awareness is apparent in the magician's comments to Miranda: "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire, / Fetch our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us" (1.2.314-15). Caliban is naturally aware of the need for

subsistence for survival, "I must eat my dinner" (1.2.333), but Prospero displaces this reality upon Caliban and remains instead intent on his books and his masques while the slave fetches the wood.

However, Caliban is not entirely submissive to Prospero, despite his obvious fear of his master's power: "No, pray thee. / I must obey. His art is of such power / It would control my dam's god, Setebos, / And make a vassal of him" (1.2.375-77). The monster lethargically responds to Prospero's commands and he cures the magician, essentially reducing master to slave's level as Prospero replies promptly in kind:

Then he greets the colonizer's with a curse, provoking the master to curse in reply, reducing the eloquent master of civil language to raucous registers of the other (61).

In this sense, Caliban has become the producer of a reaction, although it lacks power as it is spoken in the language of the oppressor. No matter how militant his complaints or threats may be, they will speak of his confinement within the language which is not his own. Yet Caliban persists in venting his discontent, despite knowing full well he would lack the ability or the need to voice torment without the presence of the tormentors and the language they have brought with their oppression: "You taught me language, and my profit on 't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (1.2.366-68).

In terms of the power of language, it is interesting that

Miranda refers to Caliban as "a thing most brutish" (1.2.359), insinuating that the beast requires civilization in order to know himself. Yet Caliban is fully aware of his status, through succession at least, before being endowed with language: "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother" (1.2.334). Even more apparent in his awareness is the fact that he is undeserving of the oppression that he suffers. Although Prospero refers to him as "a devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-189), Caliban recognizes that he was nurturing to Prospero and Miranda upon first meeting them: "And then I loved thee / And showed thee all the qualities o' the isle" (1.2.339-40). Nurture need not stick on Caliban's nature; it is a natural part of his essence, just as his appreciation and wonder of the charms of the island are.

Furthermore, in his essay, "'The Tempest' As Supplement," Julian Patrick applies Jacques Derrida's notion of 'supplementary' to Caliban's nature. First, however, he clarifies what understanding of 'supplementary' he has derived from Derrida's Of Grammatology in a textual note: "the logic by means of which a concept or practice which was first thought to be an external addition to something complete in itself . . . is revealed as necessary to complete what it was first thought merely to 'supplement'" (178). Patrick interprets nurture as supplementary to Caliban, meaning in Derrida's vein (and directly opposing Prospero's assertion) that it is required to complete his character. Thus, Caliban does not indeed suffer from a lack

of nurturing behavior; it is so much an essential part of his nature that he is not complete or whole without it.

Despite dire consequences arising from his last attempts at hospitality, Caliban greets Stephano as the god he once felt Prospero to be, and his nurturing behavior reappears:

I prithee thee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts,
Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble marmoset. I'll bring thee
Young scammels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?
(2.2.164-70).

These offerings parallel those Caliban claims that he made to Prospero and Miranda when they came to the island. Simply substituting one god for another, Caliban gains another master he hopes will successfully supplant the last. D.G. James comments in The Dream of Prospero: "Caliban will be so quick to at a later stage take Stephano for a god that we may fairly assume that he had earlier taken Prospero for one. Thus the Indians in the earlier days had been disposed to view the white man" (110). Whether it echoes the influences of early accounts of Native American peoples or not, it is still a striking commentary upon Caliban's world view when he assimilates Stephano into his perception of the natural world: "I have seen thee in her, and I do adore thee. / My mistress showed me thee, and thy dog, and thy bush" (2.2.149). In addition to creating Stephano as a god, this passage also illuminates some of Caliban's nature. Parallel to

Miranda, Caliban is also a virgin child of the island, as his association with the feminine and chaste principle of the moon might suggest.

This strong association of Caliban as a child of nature juxtaposes him with the other child of the island, Miranda. In turn, Caliban can then also be parallel to Ferdinand, and Prospero's similar treatment of both attests to the potency of their presence as disruptive to his power. Prospero even mentions Caliban when he contests Miranda's partiality towards the prince: "Foolish wench, / To the most of men this is a Caliban, / And they to him are angels" (1.2.484-85). This negative association of civilized men as angels and Caliban and Ferdinand as lesser reveals an inversive relationship that Prospero has created. Knowing full well that civilization brings with it a distinct evil, and by associating Caliban with Ferdinand while citing other men as angels, Prospero controls both the definition and reception of both characters and the world by Miranda.

Yet while he attempts to push Caliban from him, Prospero cannot fail to recognize that in alienation, at least, Caliban is his equal. Just as Prospero seeks to attain a state of transcendence through his knowledge, Caliban seeks to reside in the transcendence he knows exists on the island. Prospero became too immersed in his books to participate in the civil world around him, and Caliban is immersed in his state of sub-humanness, unable to join the civilization whose members

ostracize him. However, Prospero knows that he must rejoin the mundane world and his resentment of Caliban's separateness from that world is another impetus for his refusal to allow Caliban to return to his natural state. Julian Patrick comments on this aspect of Caliban's relationship to Prospero:

Caliban moves him to anger, not because the conspiracy proves any threat to Prospero--it is easily dealt with--but mainly because the movement from absorption in the spectacle of immortality, of a year without death, to confrontation to the stupid and vicious present . . . causes him to be reminded of time and therefore of his own mortality, a reminder perhaps implicit in the movement of emotions from any forgetting to any remembering (175).

Unable to deny the reminder that Caliban presents with his presence, a reminder of that world he is destined to exist in, Prospero instead claims the monster for himself and denies Caliban the happiness of the island that he cannot have. Thus, he states: "This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (5.1.279).

Once denied this happiness that permeates his dream and acknowledgements of transcendence, an awareness clearly apparent in his dream of Act 3.2, Caliban is reduced to leaving behind his existence in a marginal state and being forced into the world of his master. Although he once could enter the dream world of the island, despite its disruption by Prospero, at least by a

subjective experience of its wonders, "that when I waked I cried to dream again" (3.2.144), Caliban now must reject its qualities and cry no more for a dream that in Prospero's mind cannot truly exist: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-58). So Caliban "awakes" also, leaving the dream behind and resigning himself to participate in the world no longer nurturing nor natural, gaining a wisdom for civilization that lacks his inherent understanding of nature: "and I'll be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (5.1.298). Whether or not we view Caliban as an Indian, fish, or primitive man, the loss of wonder that permeates his final lines, and its commentary upon the alienated state of civilized man, can only cause us (for the sake of Caliban, Prospero, and us all) to cry to dream again.

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