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A Post-Colonial Analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Of Shakespeare's extensive and prolific body of work, which includes thirty-seven plays and one hundred fifty-four sonnets, two of his plays stand out as original stories. The two comedies are *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *The Tempest*. The latter of the two stands as his last play that he wrote alone, in either 1610 or '11. Written just around five years before Shakespeare's death – the play has been viewed by many as being one of his most personal and identifiable stories that conflates the magician Prospero with the playwright. Shakespeare allegedly drew inspiration upon the story of the Sea Venture, which was a ship that was wrecked onto the island of Bermuda, on its way to the Jamestown colony in 1609 (Geni 1). Similarly, of the play's premise, it is also set on an island – and involves the wandering of masterless men, in which Prospero conducts the orchestra (that are the players) in such a way that parallels an usurping conqueror. With uses of magic and help from a slave named Ariel and an underling called Caliban - the islands indigenous, are vassals to the foreigner. Mainly through the European characters of Trinculo and Stephano, and the orchestrations by Prospero, the post-colonial analysis of this play regards these men and this isle to be an analogous parallel to colonialism, imperialism – and ultimately globalization. Through which, the motivation is to reform the “natural evil” within the indigenous of the island.

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
 Which thou takest from me. When thou camest first,
 Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give
 me
 Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
 To name the bigger light, and how the less,
 That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
 And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
 The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.
 (1.2.334-341)

These lines delivered by Caliban - who is the central character that embodies the oppressed native – in conjunction with Ariel. To begin, his name is an anagram of cannibal, which stamps the savage quality upon him. Also, he is the son of Sycorax, who was originally from Algiers (banished to island while pregnant with Caliban), and died before the arrival of Prospero at the island. She is therefore not physically present during the play. In Xiana Bouzo's article, she states that "Sycorax is constructed as an 'other' by Prospero, embodying everything that he is not: female, evil, absent. She is therefore not given a voice of her own to define herself, but is defined by others" (188). This is another commentary on the way in which Prospero, asserted himself in multiple ways upon the island upon his arrival. Additionally, when he came to the island, he took Caliban as a vassal and taught him his European ways. This included language that Caliban uses against Prospero in defiance, saying:

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!
 (1.2.366-368)

Caliban's age at the time of Prospero's arrival is ambiguous but it can be asserted that when Ariel was trapped in the tree by Sycorax when he was 12 –

adding 12 more years since Prospero's arrival, would make him at least twenty-four. This makes him a juvenile, fresh from his mother's death when he arrived. Also, it would have made him quite young when he "raped" Miranda. This could be viewed as either a terrible and violent incursion or as a natural and seemingly innocent gesture, in the curiosity of sexuality one experiences at that age. Either way – the impression made against Caliban at the outset, goes in tune with the "savage and deformed slave" description made of him in the dramatis personæ. This is among other harsh names given to him in the play including: "Hag-born", "Whelp", "Demi-devil", "Poor credulous monster", "Hag-seed", and "Strange fish."

Due to this long list of degrading characterization, ultimately – the comparison of Caliban with that of an indigenous culture, such as that of the Native American, is made. This is most poignantly assessed in the encounter with Trinculo and Stephano. When the two drunk men come across Caliban, and they react by questioning if its either "devils", "savages", or "men of Ind". The English colonialist mindset in the early 17th century is explicitly drawn upon. When the two wanderers talk of England, Trinculo defines the mentality when he spots what he think is a fish (Caliban), "they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead indian (2.2.32-33). When they hear him speak, they question how he learned their language – along with Stephano immediately aiming for capture:

...If I can recover him
and keep him tame and get to Naples with him, he's
a present for any emperor that ever trod on neat's
leather.
(2.2.68-71)

The engrained mindset in these European men is to immediately exploit on the native man and to display the “devil” before their culture to view and be entertained by. This is much like the settlers to the Americas – in Virginia as well as in the Caribbean. The Powhatan and Taino/Arawak people were taken before James I of England and Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire to be studied and paraded – and given names very similar to the ones that Caliban was called (Pearson 9). Additionally, in discovering these indigenous cultures – the first deployment of a globalized world became a gradual form of cultural oppression that has progressed ever since. This came mostly in the form of forcefully converting native people to Christianity and Catholicism – as well as devastating cultures with the introduction of alcoholism and indentured servitude, that later became organized slavery (Pons 12).

In *The Tempest*, continuing with the meeting scene with Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban – after toying with their newfound creature, the drunken men aim to relieve him of his “fit” by offering him wine.

He’s in his fit now and does not talk after the wisest. He shall
 taste of my bottle. If he have never drunk wine afore, it will go
 near to remove his fit. If I can recover him and keep him tame, I
 will not take too much for him. He shall pay for him that hath
 him, and that soundly. (2.2.74-79)

Before the alcohol is forced upon Caliban, Stephano continues on saying, “here is that which will give language to you, cat.” The demeaning assertion of the wine upon Caliban is an indicator of the type of treatment that the European exploiters

will employ upon him: to “tame” and control that which is helpless – that which knows no better.

CALIBAN
 (Kneeling) I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy
 True subject, for the liquor is not earthly.
 (2.2.124-125)

Paralleling to the historical indigenous cultures - when the English and Spanish colonists began to formalize their efforts in the “New World”, the European alcohol consumption tendencies made their way into the autochthonous populations through trade, initially. Early traders formed a large demand for alcohol by using it as a means to trade, using it often in exchange for animal skins and other resources (Nelson 26). This formed a dependence from the natives, and traders also discovered that giving free alcohol to the Native’s during trading sessions made the odds of trade happening, much more likely. Ultimately, tribes had “very little time to adapt and develop social, legal, or moral guidelines to regulate alcohol use (27).” Therefore, history may have sown the seeds in causing alcohol abuse in North American indigenous populations – coinciding with the same happenings in the plantation systems in the Caribbean by the Spanish dating back to the early 1600’s.

GONZALO
 Had I plantation of this isle, my lord—
 ...And were the king on 't, what would I do?
 (2.1.146,148)

Among the Italian men stranded on the isle, each group represents a certain colonist ideology. As Trinculo and Stephano embody the self-serving exploiters - most others wish to return to their native country. Of the aristocrats and courtiers -

only Gonzalo (and to a lesser extent, Adrian) gives much serious thought to the prospect of long-term residence on the island. The contrast between Gonzalo and Adrian with between Antonio and Sebastian is the main point of Act Two, Scene one. Gonzalo and Adrian represent the best and most hopeful aspects of human nature. Adrian comments that “The Air breathes upon us here most sweetly,” Sebastian immediately, retorts, “As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.” (2.1.49-50). Gonzalo also becomes the voice of positivity– in either a naïve or wise fashion, he helps the group show a certain favorableness to the island, saying that their “preservation” is a “miracle” (2.1.6-7). In short, Gonzolo, and Adrian, thus resemble precisely the sort of man who might in other circumstances make a good colonist, and who might help establish a successful colony. Gonzalo in particular, is an embodiment of some of the best qualities of Western European civilization (Evans 182). Ultimately, with Gonzalo as the moral compass - they might be the kind of civilized beings who could establish and sustain a good and thriving colony. Additionally, they are the sort of Europeans who might be welcomed by the natives of a new and unknown land – and the kinds of Christians who might win converts through their example and behavior rather than any overt proselytizing or preaching. Fundamentally, they embody the best aspects of a humanity originally created (as Renaissance Christians believed) in the image of God (184).

In comparing the ideologies present in the Europeans characters in *The Tempest*, it is easy to draw parallels to the encomienda (later developed into plantations) systems and religious conversions of the indigenous peoples in the Caribbean and the America’s in the 16th-18th centuries. The First Charter of

Virginia, written by King James I of England in 1606 – gives insight into the motivations behind the monarchy at the time of the colonial enterprises being set forth into the America's, namely in the Jamestown settlement – in regards to the indigenous population, laid out in clause three:

III. We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those Parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government; DO, by these our Letters Patents, graciously accept of, and agree to, their humble and well-intended Desires. (Avalon 3)

One of the main driving forces behind the European colonizing explorations, was to convert the indigenous peoples who had “not experienced the grace of God” – as prophesized in the biblical “Great Commission” in Matthew 28:19: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit.” This motivation to evangelize the world's people – has been taken on by empires throughout the ages through the adoption and practices of religions based upon the teaching of the Bible. Through this widespread interpretation, the literal sense of “discipling nations” became the mode of conversion. It would then be seen as an inevitable occurrence that the world's societies would collide in very dramatic ways – and ultimately lead to the enslavement of many peoples in Africa and the Americas.

CALIBAN

(Aside) I must obey. His art is of such power,
It would control my dam's god, Setebos,
And make a vassal of him.
(1.2.375-376)

Comparatively so, Caliban's enslavement by Prospero, thus can be viewed as the inevitable exploitation of an "uneducated", "God-lacking" being who must be shown the ways of (the European), orchestrated much like Cromwell's western design in the mid 1600's. The objective was for England to take over all of the Spanish territories in the Caribbean for mostly commercial and religious reasons (Pons 4). As Prospero may represent the English colonial machine, the other forces scattered on the island in *The Tempest*, may represent other European colonial forces, such as: the Dutch, French, and Spanish. The Spanish being, the executors of the first mass-produced slave system in the form of plantations, which began as the encomienda system in the Greater Antilles.

The encomienda system was first established in Spain during the Roman period, and was applied on a much larger scale during the Spanish colonization of the Americas. The system rewarded conquerors with the labor of particular groups of subject people. Ultimately, the conquered peoples were considered vassals of the Spanish monarch – (much like Ariel in *The Tempest*, who becomes the guard and enforcer to the conquering "warden" Prospero). Additionally, the encomienda came as a grant, awarded by The Crown to a particular individual. In the conquest era of the sixteenth century, the grants were considered to be a monopoly on the labor of particular groups of Indians, held by the grant holder (called the encomendero), and his eventual descendants. This pervasive institution allowed for the continual subjecting and exploiting of conquered Indian populations - kept in a perpetuity, that later developed into a formal plantation system (Batchelder 1).

The Tempest - as seen through a post-colonial lens, represents many dated ideologies. Most of which have since been ruled against with endless tales of woe from indigenous cultures - who have been oppressed, assimilated and, and made property of larger nations and societies, since the Columbus expedition. The utopic society that the European characters envision for the isle is partly motivated by human nature - and that the hierarchical tendencies are unconscious impulses within them. This ultimately makes the story a very renaissance tale - full of "re-discovery" and also exploitation. The enterprises to reform and utilize the island's indigenous ways are made clear by characters such as Prospero, Trinculo, and Stephano. In a more implicit way - Prospero is a the troubled soul whose divided nature is represented by Caliban and Ariel played as integrated parts of Prospero's psyche. Prospero, once viewed by many as a benign ruler of the isle - is now analyzed as being one of the most imperialistic characters in Shakespeare.

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