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VOICE AND AGENCY
IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST* AND AIMÉ CÉSAIRE'S *UNE TEMPÊTE*

by

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I. Introduction

In both William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aimé Césaire's 1965 adaptation *Une Tempête*, a character's power is directly linked to how much of a voice he or she has throughout the text. Both texts deal very explicitly with power, although Shakespeare focuses more on Prospero regaining his power through a position in European society, while Césaire is concerned with the effects of colonial figures (represented by Prospero) on the colonized (represented by Ariel and Caliban). Césaire explores in depth the character of Caliban who serves as the protagonist, instead of his antagonistic role in Shakespeare's play. Césaire explicitly casts Caliban as a black slave and Ariel as a mulatto slave, bringing the ideas of colonialism to the forefront of the play. While in his play, Shakespeare's Prospero controls all the other characters, often speaking for and over them, Césaire explores how Caliban and Ariel operate and resist, as well as how they view Prospero, giving them much more voice and, thus, more agency and interiority.

When writing about *Une Tempête*, the most common approach is to focus on Césaire's negritude¹ and ideas of identity. For example, Jaques Coursil states that "L'Afrique de Césaire n'est pas un paradis perdu, mais une mémoire lacunaire, un « calendrier lagunaire »." [The Africa of Césaire is not a lost paradise, but an incomplete memory, an "imaginary calendar"²] (Coursil 21). While scholars like Coursil have written about the two plays and about rhetoric and language in the plays, there has not been much exploration of the link between power and voice in these plays. One important

¹ Negritude was first used by Césaire in his novel-length poem "Retour au pays natal". It is a rejection of colonization and Western culture, and an affirmation of black history and

² All translations are my own.

article on power in *The Tempest* is James V. Morrison's "The Struggle for Power in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*", which explores the many different power struggles happening throughout the play, with a focus on how "shipwreck allows for a re-creation of self" (Morrison 59). Morrison describes Prospero as a character who is "reduced in political power [but] rules through magic" (Morrison, 48). While Morrison talks about Prospero as having an explicit supernatural magic, I would argue that it is more of a rhetorical magic.

The Tempest is believed to be the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone, although the exact time it was written is unknown³. The play is divided into five acts, which take place over roughly the course of one day. Prospero, the "rightful duke of Milan", was banished to an island by both his brother Antonio and King Alonso twelve years earlier and has been living there with the help of the spirit Ariel and of Caliban, the son of the last ruler of the island. Prospero managed to bring his books—from which he receives his knowledge and, therefore, power—to the island with him. Before Prospero came to the island, the witch Sycorax and her son Caliban also had been shipwrecked there. Sycorax then began to rule the island and trapped Ariel in a tree (for disobeying her) before dying and leaving Caliban alone on the island. When Prospero arrived, he freed Ariel and taught Caliban to speak Prospero's language, indebting them to him and thereby ensuring that both of them would help him and his daughter Miranda survive on the island. Toward the beginning of the play, Prospero finds out that Antonio, Alonso, and others from Milan are not far from the island, so Prospero and Ariel conjure a tempest to bring

³ *The Tempest* was likely written around 1610-1611, and was first published in 1623.

them to the island⁴. The majority of the play's action is compromised of Prospero—with Ariel's help— seeking revenge on those who have wronged him in hopes of restoring himself and his daughter to their rightful social and political positions. While Prospero is concerned with his revenge, Caliban encounters two men from the shipwreck—the jester Trincolo and a drunk butler Stephano—and believes that Stephano can overthrow Prospero and become a more fair ruler of the island. Ultimately, Caliban is unsuccessful in his escape from Prospero, while Prospero forgives all who have wronged him and is returned to his rightful place in Milan.

Une Tempête very closely follows the plot of *The Tempest*, using the same characters and overall plot, but centers the power struggle on the island instead of Prospero's revenge plot. In Césaire's play both Caliban and Ariel are shown to have more agency and interiority. The endings of the two plays are vastly different, with Prospero choosing to stay on the island with Caliban at the end of *Une Tempête*, suggesting an ongoing power struggle, instead of having Prospero be clearly in control, as he is in *The Tempest*.

Today it is impossible to look at *The Tempest* without noticing the themes of colonialism. Prospero plays the role of the colonizer in the play, as evidenced in the way that he is able to take control of the island from Caliban and Ariel, as well as from other

⁴ *The Tempest* was published at a time when the “New World” was becoming widely known and read about. The Folger's Shakespeare Library edition of *The Tempest* states that the play takes place on an island in the Mediterranean, as the shipwrecked characters were returning to Milan from Tunis (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 2.1). It is speculated that Shakespeare based the play off of true accounts of shipwrecks in the New World. Sebastian Sobecki brings up the “frequent claim that Shakespeare modeled the actual storm on an incident reported in a letter written by William Strachey about the tempest which hit the *Sea Venture* on Monday 24 July 1609” and “Gower's *Confessio Amantis* [which] features a number of spectacular storm passages”(Sobecki, 163).

spirits⁵. During the course of the play, he has to deal with a number of obstacles before he is able to be “set free” by the audience and reclaim his “rightful” position as the Duke of Milan. Ariel and, in particular, Caliban each serve as an “other” for Prospero to lord over on the island. Deborah Willis describes the threat of the “other” in *The Tempest* in this way:

The threatening “other” is used by colonial power to display its own godliness, to insure aristocratic class solidarity, to justify the colonial project morally, and to “further its workings” through the reorientation of desire. But by representing the “other in terms that suggest its disruptive potential, colonial discourse also indicates the inherent instability of the colonial project. Masterlessness, savagism, and illicit sexuality retain qualities alluring to “civil” man, and in the process of representing otherness as a threat, colonial discourse inevitably reveals “internal contradictions which strain its ostensible project” (Brown, p.59)” (Willis 277)

To keep Ariel, Caliban, and the island itself in check, Prospero uses the classical European knowledge he has gained from his books to make himself seem more educated, civilized, and therefore more powerful than everyone else. Caliban believes that Prospero’s power comes from the knowledge gained from these books, stating “without [his books] / he’s but a sot, as I am, nor hath not / One spirit to command” (Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III.ii.101-103). In both Shakespeare’s original play and Césaire’s adaptation, Prospero relies on this powerful image of himself to maintain his colonial

⁵ During the masque (scene 4.1), Prospero asks for Ariel to “Go bring the rabble, / Over whom I give thee power” (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 4.1.40-41) then later describes them as “Spirits, which by mine art / I have from their confines called to enact / My present fantasies” (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 4.1.134-136). Much of Prospero’s power comes from his ability to control Ariel, and then, through Ariel, other spirits.

power over the island, while in reality he is indebted to Ariel and Caliban for his knowledge of the island and how to survive. Prospero's revenge plot, as well as his survival on the island, is reliant on his ability to control these characters.

In Césaire's version, Prospero occupies the same role as he does in *The Tempest*, but he is more obviously threatened by Caliban. Caliban's interjection in Swahili in dialogue with Prospero deeply unsettles him. The fact that Caliban is given more space to speak in Césaire's adaptation allows him the chance to rebel against Prospero and against the way that Prospero views him. This is shown most prominently in the scene in which Caliban renames himself "X" and renounces the image that Prospero has created with the name Caliban. In this way, Césaire uses the character of Caliban to illustrate the ways that colonized countries can use the colonizers' own methods to fight back.

In the first part of this thesis, I will explore how Prospero's power is conveyed through voice in *The Tempest*, as well as how Shakespeare frames the relationship between Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban, primarily in Act 1, Scene 2 of the play. Then, I will explore how in *Une Tempête* Césaire gives a more active role to Ariel and Caliban in and how giving these characters more space to speak gives them more agency and power.

II: Prospero's vocal dominance in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

In Shakespeare's play Prospero serves as a kind of puppet master, dominating most of the text and controlling all the other characters. He is the dominant and guiding voice in the text: he sets up the context for the story and then creates the action through giving orders to Ariel, who then does most of the actual work. His complete control over the action of the story, as well as his control over Ariel and Caliban suggests he is all-powerful; however, his power seems to come simply from his use of language and his classical knowledge, with the true magic and work of the play being carried out by Ariel and Caliban.

Prospero uses rhetoric learned from his books to maintain control over Ariel and Caliban (as well as Miranda), something that is shown most vividly in the second scene (1.2) of the play. The scene consists of "conversations" between Prospero and each of these three characters, that are primarily monologues of Prospero narrating his version of these characters' histories. In her article "*The Tempest: A Modern Perspective*", Barbara Mowat states:

"The second and third scenes of *The Tempest*—that is, 1.2 and 2.1—contain close to half the lines in the play, and close to *half* of those lines are past tense narration. Through Prospero, through Ariel, through Caliban [...] characters in our presence (and our present) tell us their pasts" (Mowat 187)

Prospero is the only character present for the 613 lines of scene 1.2, which means he is in complete control of the dialogue. This scene serves primarily as a narration on the history of the island by Prospero, and introduces all the primary characters that have been

inhabiting the island. In this scene, Miranda learns that she and Prospero are nobles exiled from Milan, Ariel is reminded of the fact that he is indebted to Prospero, and Caliban's status as an unruly but necessary part of the island is confirmed. By having Prospero narrate the histories and statuses of these characters, the audience is given insight into the power structures at play on the island. While all four of the characters speak during this scene, Prospero is undoubtedly the dominant voice and guides the discussion in exactly the way he wants: "All of Shakespeare's story is told from Prospero's viewpoint—or more accurately, when other human characters' perceptions are directly presented, they are enchanted by love or magic, or deceived in the belief that they are the sole masters of their destiny" (Porter, 363). Porter argues here that Prospero is the only characters with any real agency or full control over his own destiny. This scene of the play is thus vital in setting up the power dynamics of the island, and Prospero quickly emerges as the dominant voice.

When Prospero and Ariel's conversation in 1.2 of the play begins, Ariel focuses on describing all the work he has done for Prospero, which highlights the differences between Prospero's words and his actions. The description by Ariel lays out in clear terms all of the physical work that Ariel has done to help Prospero. When Prospero responds that there is still more to do, Ariel replies: "Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains, / Let me remember thee what thou hast promised, / Which is not yet performed me" (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.287-289). The contrast of "promise" and "perform" illustrates where Prospero's power lies in opposition to characters like Ariel and Caliban. Actions never back up Prospero's words but his goals are still achieved because Ariel and Caliban are there to act for him.

In these first 70 or so lines of the exchange between Ariel and Prospero, the characters are on even footing, and Ariel actually has more lines than Prospero. After Ariel asks for his freedom, however, Prospero dominates the conversation, and Ariel is reduced to giving one-line answers to direct questions that Prospero asks him. Prospero then retells the history of the island and how he saved Ariel from the witch Sycorax, Caliban's mother. This asserts Prospero's dominance and power over Ariel, and educates the audience to the history of the island.

Prospero: Thou, my slave

As thou report'st thyself, wast then [Sycorax's] servant;

And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate

To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands,

Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee,

(Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.323-327)

Prospero's use of the line "As thou report'st thyself" (line 324), shows that he learned the story from Ariel and is simply repeating what he heard before. While this line makes it seem as though the story is a simple repetition by Prospero of what Ariel has told him, it is clear that Prospero has developed his own spin on the story since hearing it, telling it in a way more likely to keep Ariel in line. Prospero has constructed his own history for Ariel, in which Ariel is labeled a servant and as delicate. Prospero's suggestion that this story comes directly from Ariel, along with the repetition of "thee" and "thou" shows both Ariel and the audience that Ariel is entirely to blame for his situation. This idea that Ariel was unable to take care of himself—"thou wast a spirit too delicate" (line 325)—helps illuminate the reader as to why Ariel, a being whose actions suggest he has greater

physical power than Prospero, has been convinced that he needs Prospero's help to obtain his freedom, even if that process requires his servitude to Prospero.

Prospero does use the threat of violence to keep Ariel in line as well. After re-telling the story of Ariel's imprisonment, Prospero threatens to imprison Ariel again if he does not do as he is told.

Prospero: Thou best know'st

What torment I did find thee in.

[...]

It was mine art,

When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape

The pine and set thee out

Ariel: I thank thee, master

Prospero: If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak

And peg thee in his knotty entrails till

Thou hast howled away twelve winters

(*Tmp.* 1.2.340-351)

The language in this scene subjugates and reminds Ariel of how Prospero once saved him. Prospero says that he "must / Once in a month recount what thou hast been, / Which thou forget'st" (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 1.2.314-316), which shows that this is a conversation that is repeated often, supporting the idea that this type of narration of Ariel's history is a rhetorical tactic for Prospero. These stories of Prospero's power and promises of eventual freedom seem to condition Ariel to do as Prospero wishes, so it is likely that this exact conversation is something that Prospero uses anytime Ariel won't do what Prospero

wants. Prospero threatens Ariel with what happened to him when he angered Sycorax and, in doing so, Prospero sets himself up on the same level as Sycroax to make himself seem more powerful than he really is.

While his conversation with Ariel shows that Prospero has a vast amount of control over the island's narrative, it also highlights the fact that Prospero would be ineffective without Ariel. Prospero spins the history of the islands so it seems as though Ariel needs him, while in reality, as J.A. Bryant has shown, the subjugated "other" is the more powerful of the two:

He has commanded, rebuked, and sometimes threatened his spirit slave [...] all the while taking pains to issue only orders that the slave can and will obey; for it is clear that Prospero would be hard put to do without him. Throughout the play Ariel is presented as essential to Prospero's effectiveness, a fact that is crucial to any comprehensive interpretation. (Bryant, 236)

Ariel is the key to the play's narrative. While Prospero is the one deciding what will happen, Ariel is the one who actually performs these actions. Ariel moves between the different storylines, making sure that what Prospero commands happens, and Ariel is the one who brings the characters together at the end of the play. W. Stacy Johnson called Ariel "the sole agent of Prospero's magic in *The Tempest*" (Johnson, 205). Prospero's success on the island is completely dependent on Ariel remaining loyal, and Prospero does reward this loyalty at the end of the play, when Ariel is finally given his freedom as Prospero returns to Milan.

Like Ariel, Caliban is vital to Prospero's success on the island. During their exchange in the scene 1.2, the audience learns that Caliban was responsible for teaching

Prospero about the island when he and Miranda first arrived. Prospero and Miranda both dislike Caliban, calling him a villain, but Prospero states: “We cannot miss him. He does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us” (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 1.2.373-375). Before Caliban is introduced, we hear this description from Prospero, as well as Miranda referring to him as a villain, and a few lines about how he is the son of the witch Sycorax. This introduction by the other characters sets Caliban up as an unsympathetic character, and one who has a less civil relationship with Prospero.

Prospero and Caliban begin their first scene together by continually insulting each other. The dynamic between these two characters is clearly more hostile than the one between Prospero and Ariel which is almost affectionate by comparison. Towards the beginning of his appearance in the play, Caliban offers a counter-narrative to Prospero’s history of the island:

Caliban: 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 that I did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you (*Tmp.* 1.2.396-405)

Caliban uses Prospero's language to his own benefit in these lines, using "thee" and "thou"—like Prospero used in his conversation with Ariel—to show Prospero and the audience that Caliban's position is not his own fault, and showing that he does have some agency as a character. This supports the idea that he is more rebellious than Ariel. This passage shows that there was an exchange of knowledge, and therefore power, when Prospero arrived on the island. Caliban taught Prospero essential practical knowledge to survive on the island, while Prospero and Miranda shared some of the theoretical knowledge from Prospero's books with Caliban. This exchange of power made Caliban love Prospero, but Prospero and Miranda intentionally only gave Caliban enough of their knowledge to be able to communicate with and serve them. Even though Caliban was only given some of this form of knowledge, it's shown that he is able to use it to his advantage.

Ariel and Caliban are both servants to Prospero, but have vastly different terms of service to him. Ariel only truly interacts with Prospero, without other characters even realizing that Ariel exists. Because Prospero is the only one that interacts with Ariel, Caliban believes himself to be Prospero's only servant:

Caliban: For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; an here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me

The rest of the island (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.408-411)

Caliban's belief that he is "all the subjects that [Prospero has]" suggests that Caliban is performing all the visible labor on the island. Ariel's presence and power are witnessed by the audience, but appear to the other characters as either the work of Prospero or

supernatural occurrences. Ariel and Prospero have more of a constructive dialogue in their relationship, while Prospero only issues orders to Caliban and does not listen to him speak. Furthermore, Prospero promises that he will free Ariel once he is no longer needed, which Prospero does indeed do in the final scene of the play. Prospero does not, however, promise Caliban's freedom and doesn't give him any way to achieve it.

Even though Ariel and Caliban have different relationships with Prospero and different roles on the island, he uses the same strategies to ensure they continue serving him. Prospero uses his rhetorical power to keep Caliban and Ariel in line, a power that is backed up by the classical knowledge he and his books represent. When Prospero and Miranda arrived on the island, Miranda taught Caliban how to speak in their language:

Miranda: I pitied thee,

Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour

One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,

Know thine own meaning, wouldst gabble like

A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes

With words that made them known (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.424-430)

But while Miranda and Prospero believe that Caliban should be grateful to have learned their language, Caliban makes it very clear to them that that is not the case: "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" (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.437-439). Caliban understands that the main reason he was taught their language was so that he could serve them, but Caliban also uses the knowledge they have given him against them with his cursing. This

cursing does seem to have any visible effect on Prospero, but it allows Caliban to vent his frustrations in a way that Prospero can understand.

While Miranda uses the knowledge that comes from language to keep Caliban in line, Prospero actually uses physical threats in his relationship with Caliban. It is never proven whether or not Prospero himself has the power to do this, but Caliban clearly believes he does: “I must obey. His art is of such power / It would control my dam’s god, Setebos, / And make a vassal of him” (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 1.2.448-450). The fact that Prospero controls the narrative of the island allows him to cast himself as more powerful and threatening to Caliban, specifically by setting himself up as having a much or greater power than Sycorax. Sycorax is a character who is never given a voice in the play, but whose story Prospero uses in his relationships with both Caliban and Ariel. It is unclear how well Caliban knew his mother, and Prospero did not know her at all, but the fact that she was able to imprison Ariel in a tree for twelve years shows that she does have magical power that has real, material effects. Because Prospero is the one who narrates the history of the island, he is able to craft himself more powerful through the story of Sycorax.

During the conversation in 1.2 between Prospero and Caliban, there are instances in which Prospero threatens Caliban with actual violence through his power. First, he threatens Caliban with “cramps / Side stiches that shall pen thy breath up” (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 1.2.389-390) and then brings these cramps up later in the scene: “If thou neglect’st or dost unwillingly / What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps, / Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar / That beasts shall tremble at thy din.” (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 1.2.443-446). From this threat, we see that Prospero—or perhaps Ariel—has a way to

give Caliban these cramps, as it is suggested that Caliban has suffered from them before. Not only does Prospero threaten Caliban with physical violence here, but the idea that the cramps will “pin [Caliban’s] breath up” and “make him roar” also shows how this physical violence will manifest in a way that will rob Caliban of his voice as well. Prospero’s physical threats to Caliban are different than his threats to trap Ariel in the tree. Prospero’s threats to Ariel rely on Prospero’s rhetoric power while the threats to Caliban have been physically manifested.

At the end of the play, Ariel does gain his freedom from Prospero, however, the fate of Caliban is unknown. In the final scene, Prospero takes responsibility for Caliban, stating: “This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine” (Shakespeare *Tmp.* 5.1.330-331) Caliban’s fate is then decided by Prospero, though not explicitly revealed to the audience:

Prospero: [...] Go, sirrah, to my cell.

Take with you your companions. As you look

To have my pardon, trim it handsomely

Caliban: Ay, that I will, and I’ll be wise hereafter

And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass

Was I to take this drunkard for a god,

And worship this dull fool (Shakespeare, *Tmp.* 5.1.348-354)

These lines serve as a stark contrast to the way that Caliban spoke and behaved in the rest of the play. Caliban spends most of the play plotting against Prospero with Stephano (the “drunkard” and “dull fool” who Caliban thought could replace Prospero) and the jester Trincolo, so the fact that Caliban so quickly accepts his fate at the end of the play seems out of character and as though he now sees himself the way that Prospero does. The

ending also suggests that Caliban never truly had a chance to change anything:

“Caliban’s revolt is only a secondary disturbance of the social nexus, destined to be set right as are all such disturbances in Shakespeare’s plays” (Porter, 363). Caliban’s attempted revolt with Stephano and Trincolo does nothing to impact the others on the island and they are even forgotten by Prospero until the very end. His story is the least resolved out of any in the play. This exchange is the last the audience sees of him, and it’s not ever mentioned whether he will remain under Prospero’s power or be allowed to stay on the island.

From this ending, it is clear that in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the rhetorical power gained from classical knowledge is what allows Prospero to be so successful, both during his time as a colonizer on the island, and in being restored back to his “rightful” place as the Duke of Milan. Characters like Prospero and Miranda get the ending that they “deserve,” and the other European characters are pardoned and also receive their happy ending. Ariel is rewarded because he listened to Prospero, while Caliban’s long resistance and refusal to conform to whom Prospero wants him to be continues to leave him at the mercy of Prospero.

While the audience is given an in-depth look at the power dynamics on the island, Caliban’s power struggle is reduced to a comedic side plot to Prospero’s larger revenge plot. *The Tempest* makes it clear that, like Shakespeare, much of Prospero’s power comes from his use of language. It is through his rhetoric power that Prospero is able to control Caliban, Ariel, and the island itself. By giving the audience a brief glimpse into these power structures at the beginning of the play, Shakespeare shows that it is Prospero who is in charge, and that his rhetorical and epistemic power trumps all.

III: Caliban's vocal resistance in Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête*

In 1969, Aimé Césaire wrote *Une Tempête*, a postcolonial retelling of Shakespeare's play, for "un theatre negre" [a black theater]. While Shakespeare's play was written when the "New World" was recently discovered and European countries were beginning widespread colonization. Césaire's play was written during the period of "postcoloniality," when many countries began declaring their independence. Lilian Pestre De Almeida describes the way that the adaptation as a whole plays with the colonial ideas in *The Tempest*: "En partie une puzzle poétique et ludique ou Césaire joue, jongle, avec les situations, scènes, vers shakespeariens, crée de nouveaux jeux de mots empruntant l'esprit même du *whit* élisabéthain" (De Almeida 184) [in part a poetic and playful puzzle where Césaire plays with and juggles situations, scenes, Shakespearian verses, [and] creates new word games in the spirit of Elizabethan wit]. Most of the action in *Une Tempête* is the same as in *The Tempest*, but Césaire plays with Shakespeare's language and ideas to expand upon his ideas from "Cahier d'un retour au pays natal" and "Discours sur le colonialisme" expand, which was published 14 years earlier. Caliban especially embodies the importance of accepting an African history and heritage.

Caliban affirms his own power through his use of Swahili intermixed with French. Through the character of Caliban, Césaire uses interjections of Swahili to bring about the ideas that his heritage still remains and is remembered. While there is a clear power struggle between Caliban and Prospero carried out in their conversations, Césaire is also making a statement with the language of the play. While the play is in French, it is critiquing colonialism as a whole and the European countries that practice it. Caribbean

authors and scholars⁶ like Confiant have critiqued Césaire for “an assimilationist politics that does not live up to his revolutionary poetics” (Sarnecki 277), but Césaire’s use of the French language with interjections from Swahili draws attention to the way that French and other European languages were forced upon the colonized. Just like Caliban, “Césaire’s most powerful tool seems to be paradoxically, the very language he was taught by those who would control him.” (Sarnecki 276).

While the central conflict of *Une Tempête* is between Caliban and Prospero, Ariel also plays a significant role in this conflict. Caliban and Ariel are both in service to Prospero, but the difference in their services is openly explored both in the list of characters, and in a scene where Ariel visits Caliban to talk about their differences. Ariel and Caliban are immediately shown to be central characters—even before the play begins—with Césaire’s “Personnages” (list of characters), which reads:

Ceux de Shakespeare. [Those of Shakespeare]

Deux précisions supplémentaires [Two supplemental details]

Ariel: esclave, ethniquement un mulâtre [Ariel: a slave, ethnically a mulatto]

Caliban: esclave negre [Caliban, a black slave]

Une addition [one addition]

Eshu: Dieu-diable negre [Eshu: a black devil-god]” (Césaire 7)

This list of characters immediately sets up Ariel and Caliban as central figures in the play and shows that notions of race will be at the forefront of the adaptation. This list of characters also shows that Ariel and Caliban are the only characters whose roles or

⁶ Sarnecki lists Confiant, Chamoiseau, and Bernabé as scholars who have critiqued some of Césaire’s work, and states that “they refuse Césaire the status of a truly Caribbean or Creole author” (277).

presentation Césaire is changing; therefore, audiences can assume this to be an otherwise direct adaptation. The sole addition to the cast of characters is Eshu, a trickster god of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. He mirrors the way that Caliban will interject Swahili words into his speech.

Following the list of characters, is a scene where the “meneur de jeu” [master of ceremonies] allows the actors to cast themselves in roles: “A chacun son personnage et a chaque personnage son masque” (Césaire 9) [To each person his character and to each character his mask]. This scene further differentiates the play from Shakespeare and connects more directly with the audience. It forces the audience to think about their own roles and masks.

The most important scene in terms of understanding the dynamics between the characters is the scene in Act 2 where Caliban and Ariel discuss their views of each other and of Prospero. Even though this scene focuses on their differences, it also acknowledges their commonalities: they are both striving for freedom, and call each other brother at the end. There is no such scene in Shakespeare’s play where Ariel and Caliban speak to each other. This scene especially invites analysis of how Césaire allows his characters to interact without Prospero there to monitor and dominate the scene.

The scene begins with Ariel visiting Caliban’s cave and the two acknowledging their different methods of striving towards freedom. They are not characters who agree on much, and there seems to be some underlying animosity between them due to their different methods. On Caliban’s part, Ariel has come to the cave to warn Caliban to be on his guard, because Prospero is unhappy with him and thinking of ways to punish him. Ariel then reveals that he has been promised his liberty and that Caliban should follow

his method of “ni violence, ni soumission” (Césaire 37) [neither violence, nor submission], which reiterates Ariel’s status as the “good” servant.

Ariel’s actions in *Une Tempête* are defined by the fact that he views himself and Caliban as brothers. Ariel further believes that Prospero can be a brother to them as well if he and Caliban are able to teach Prospero to have a conscience. Ariel’s ultimate dream is that the three of them can live and work together to create a better world:

Ariel: J’ai souvent fait le rêve exaltant qu’un jour, Prospero, toi, et moi, nous entreprendrions, frères associés, de bâtir un monde merveilleux, chacun apportant en contribution ses qualités propres : patience, vitalité, amour, volonté aussi, et rigueur, sans compter les quelques bouffées de rêve sans quoi l’humanité périrait d’asphyxie (Césaire 38)

[I’ve often had the wonderful dream that one day, Prospero, you, and I, we would work to build a wonderful world, as brothers, each contributing his own qualities : patience, vitality, love, will-power also, and rigor, without forgetting the dreams without which humanity would be smothered]

In this passage, Ariel lays out his dream for the future to Caliban and the audience. This passage comes just after Ariel and Caliban have discussed whether Prospero has a conscience and can be saved. Caliban believes Prospero does not have a conscience and never will, while Ariel believes that he and Caliban can work and teach Prospero to have one.

While this scene explores the differences and disagreements between Caliban and Ariel, it also cements them as brothers; they do have a sort of respect and understanding for each other, coming from the idea that they are in similar positions. The scene ends

with both Caliban and Ariel acknowledging their differences but still calling each other brother:

Ariel: Chacun de nous entend son tambour. Tu marches au son du tien. Je marche au son de mien. Je te souhaite du courage, mon frère. [Each of us hears his drum. You walk to the sound of yours. I walk to the sound of mine. I wish you courage, my brother]

Caliban: Ariel, je te souhaite de bonne chance mon frère [Ariel, I wish you good luck, my brother] (Césaire, *Une Tempête*, 38)

This exchange shows that these two characters are humans with agency. Neither Shakespeare's Prospero nor Césaire's Prospero sees Ariel and Caliban as humans deserving of basic rights. In Shakespeare, neither Ariel or Caliban are treated as humans, Ariel is a spirit and Caliban is constantly described as beastly and monstrous. This conversation *Une Tempête* is important because it reaffirms their humanity, their agency and control over their own lives.

While the dynamics between Ariel and Caliban mark an important and plotline in the play, the main conflict of the play is between Caliban and Prospero. From the very first scene in *Une Tempête*, Caliban is able to infuriate Prospero, by using words that Prospero cannot understand. Sarnecki has noted that:

The Caliban Césaire creates speaks a language that, like Creole, is pieced together from fragments that reveal the violence done to Africans forced into slave ships and carried far from their homeland. Caliban's "creolization" of the French language, furthermore, reveals a mastery that unsettles Prospero to the point of madness (Sarnecki, 227)

Caliban does speak in French throughout the play, but interjects Swahili words into his speeches and songs. The first word he speaks in the play is “Uhuru”, which means “freedom”. Césaire’s introduces Caliban in this way to allow the audience to see that Caliban wants to remain true to his history and that the concept of freedom is his central concern. As Caliban is exclaiming “uhuru” when he comes onstage, Prospero demands that he stop, revealing how much this use of Swahili unsettles him:

Prospero: Encore une remontée de ton langage barbare. Je t’ai déjà dit que je n’aime pas ça. D’ailleurs, tu pourrais être poli, un bonjour ne te tuerait pas !

(Césaire 24)

[Yet again a return to your barbarian language. I’ve already told you that I don’t like it. Anyway, you could be polite, a hello wouldn’t kill you.]

The fact that Prospero begins with words like “encore” and “remontée” shows that this is something that happens often. Caliban knows that his interjections unsettle Prospero because they represent a body of knowledge that Prospero does not have access to. Prospero tries to discredit these interjections by saying that they are barbarian.

The second scene in *Une Tempête* directly mirrors the scene in Act 1, Scene 2 of *The Tempest*. Once again, Prospero has conversations with Miranda, Ariel, and then Caliban that educate the audience about the power dynamics and history of the island. While Prospero still dominates in his conversations with Miranda and Ariel, there is more of a dialogue between Prospero and Caliban. The difference in Césaire’s version of the scene is that it is very aggressive. Exclamation marks are used at the end of nearly every sentence, which helps to create heightened emotion. Caliban blames Prospero for his situation on the island, specifically his frustration that the island should belong to Caliban

because it belonged to his mother. He further castigates Prospero because Caliban helped Prospero and Miranda when they first arrived, only to become their slave.:

Caliban: Au debut, Monsieur me cajole: Mon cher Caliban par ci, mon petit Caliban par la! Dame! Qu'aurais-tu fait sans moi, dans cette contrée inconnu? Ingrat! Je t'ai appris les arbres, les fruits, les oiseaux, les saisons, et maintenant je t'en fous... Caliban la brute! Caliban l'esclave! (Césaire 26)

[At the beginning [Prospero] made a fuss of me: My dear Caliban here, my little Caliban there! Dame! What would you have done without me, in this unknown land? Ungrateful! I taught you about the trees, the fruit, the birds, the seasons, and now you don't care about me... Caliban the brute! Caliban the slave!]

Like in Shakespeare, Caliban helped Prospero and Miranda learn how to survive on the island when they first arrived. He gave them an essential practical knowledge, only for them to turn on him and make him their slave. The way that Caliban describes how Prospero paid attention to him at the beginning illustrates that Caliban is aware of the way that Prospero is able to manipulate with rhetoric. In the following lines Caliban talks about how he has been exiled to the ghetto, to which Prospero fires back that it wouldn't be a ghetto if Caliban took better care of it. This entire exchange is almost violent.

This scene also explores how Caliban views himself compared to how Prospero views and treats him. Caliban brings up all the ways that Prospero has referred to him, bringing up “la brute” [brute], and “l'esclave” [slave], Caliban responds that he would be a king if Prospero had never arrived. Then in what is perhaps the most important instance of Caliban using his voice in *Une Tempête*, he tells Prospero “J'ai décidé que je ne serai plus Caliban (Césaire 27) [I've decided I'll no longer be Caliban]”. Caliban is the name

that Prospero gave him, a play on the word “cannibal”⁷ and a name that echoes Prospero’s view of him as a barbarian. Caliban’s rejection of this name is also a rejection of all that Prospero believes him to be. While Caliban cannot change the way that Prospero sees him, he can choose not to see himself in the same way. Caliban then takes it further by naming himself:

Appelle-moi X⁸. Ca vaudra mieux. Comme qui dirait l’homme sans nom. Plus exactement, l’homme dont on a *vole* le nom. Tu parles d’histoire. Eh bien ca, c’est de l’histoire, et fameuse ! Chaques fois que tu m’appelleras, ca me rappellera le fait fondamentale que tu m’as tout vole et jusqu’à mon identité ! (Césaire 28).

[Call me X. That would be better. Like a man without a name. More specifically, a man whose name was stolen. You speak of history. Well that’s history, and famous. Each time that you call me, it reminds me of the fact that you have stolen everything, even my identity!]

This refusal to respond to the name Prospero gave him is also a refusal to accept Prospero as his master and a refusal to be defined by Prospero. In naming himself, Caliban is able to construct his own identity and create his own narrative, instead of being subjected to Prospero’s version of history.

At the end Césaire’s play, in contrast to the ending of Shakespeare’s, Prospero decides to stay on the island, not because he wants to build a new world with Caliban and Ariel, but because: “Sans moi, cette ile est muette / Ici donc, mon devoir” (Césaire 90)

[Without me, this island is silent/So here is my work]. Prospero sees the island as a

⁷ The name Caliban, and other aspects of Caliban’s character are believed to have come from Michel de Montaigne’s “Des Cannibales”.

⁸ That fact that Caliban chose the name “X” is a reference to Malcolm X, who changed his surname from “Little” to “X”.

colonial project, and believes he can not leave Caliban alone. By stating that the island is silent, Prospero is showing his belief that anyone who already inhabits the island is not worth listening to. He then describes himself as “le chef d’orchestre d’une vaste partition” (Césaire 90) [the conductor of a large division] and asks “Sans moi, qui de tout cela / saurait tirer musique?” (Césaire 90) [Without me, from all of that, who could make music]. This likening of the island to chaotic sounds shows that Prospero believes that only his rhetorical power and knowledge can manage the island, and Caliban in particular. The idea of Prospero needing to control the sound of the island contradicts the idea that it is a silent island, and instead shows that Prospero thinks there is nothing worth listening to without his supervision.

In the final pages, Prospero and Caliban begin speaking in the mix of prose and the poetic form used in *The Tempest*. Even though this scene seems to fit into Ariel’s idea of the three of them living and working together, Ariel is forgotten, and Prospero mentions that only he and Caliban are left on the island. Time passes and Prospero continues to talk about his colonial project while Caliban is given the last words of the play “LA LIBERTÉ OHÉ, LA LIBERTÉ” (Césaire 92) [Liberty ohey, liberty] These final words are especially powerful because they mirror the way that Caliban entered the play with “uhuru”.

IV. Conclusion

In both Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Césaire's *Une Tempête*, voice is the single most defining factor in the power dynamics between the main characters. In Césaire's adaptation, however, it takes center stage. Prospero's dominance in Shakespeare's play leaves little room for power dynamics. By giving Caliban and Ariel voice and a space to speak, Césaire grants them agency and is able to fully explore these ideas of power and colonialism.

In his essay "Discours sur le Colonialisme", Césaire writes that colonialism has never been about improving the lives of the colonized and that colonialism is racially violent. He believes that it is the colonizing nation that is a sick and barbaric one. His essay has been viewed as a sort of declaration of war. Césaire represents these same ideas in through his Caliban, especially in his discussion with Ariel about how to resist Prospero.

The power structure in the play is shown through different types of knowledge, specifically Prospero's educational knowledge and Caliban's practical knowledge. The way that knowledge is used and shared, therefore, becomes the true power on the island. While Prospero's education from his books gives him knowledge and power, he needs characters like Ariel and Caliban who possess a different type of knowledge to help him survive on the island. In Shakespeare's play, the fact that Prospero is able to narrate others' history sets him up as an educator to Ariel and Caliban. In allowing Ariel and Caliban to have their conversation in Scene 2 of his play, Césaire allows Ariel and

Prospero to step into the role of the educator, shown through Ariel's belief that he and Caliban can teach Prospero to have a conscience.

In these plays, rhetoric is used both by Prospero (the colonizer) to gain and enforce his power, and by Ariel and especially Caliban (both representing the colonized) to resist. First, Prospero is set up to be a great sorcerer; however, his power is never explicitly shown through actions, only brought up in conversations. Next, through Prospero's conversations with Ariel and Caliban, especially in Scene 1.2 of the play, the audience sees how Prospero is able to manipulate other characters. Prospero narrates others' history in ways that benefit him and he uses these versions of their histories to craft a more powerful version of himself. In Shakespeare's play, Prospero describes Ariel's time with Sycorax to prove that Ariel is "a spirit too delicate" (Shakespeare, *Tmp*, 2.1.325) and that Ariel is indebted to and reliant on Prospero. Prospero and Miranda also shape the audience's assumptions about Caliban before he is able to speak for himself, casting him as a "villain" and "poisonous". Césaire's version, however, allows Caliban to throw off these assumptions when he refuses the name Prospero has chosen for him. Moreover, Césaire uses Caliban's injections of Swahili into his French to show how the colonized can defiantly retain their heritage and use it to unsettle the colonizers. Both Shakespeare and Césaire cast Caliban as someone who is able to resist Prospero with the very language Prospero taught him.

Caliban is shown to be resistant and have some agency in Shakespeare's play, but his character is not viewed as human by Prospero or Shakespeare. Caliban's place in the comedic side plot of the play also suggests that his resistance is not something to be taken seriously. In centering Caliban, Césaire changes the tone of the play. Instead of a play

about an magical island, Césaire uses the play to bring up real issues in the institution of colonialism. *The Tempest* is a play that can be and has been interpreted in many different ways, but *Une Tempête* is most specifically a critique of colonialism and an exploration of how it affects all those involved. Césaire successfully accomplishes this through giving voice to Caliban and Ariel. Caliban is able to resist Prospero with the very language (indeed rhetorical magic) that Prospero taught him.

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