

## **Occupying the Isle; or, Which Monster—and Which Island—Are We Talking About?**

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The literature makes constant references to itself as somehow participating in Europe's overseas expansion.

... An immense wave of anti-colonial and ultimately anti-imperial activity, thought, and revision has overtaken the massive edifice of Western empire, challenging it, to use Gramsci's vivid metaphor, in a mutual siege.

-Edward Said

This is some monster of the isle . . . Where the devil should he learn our language?

-William Shakespeare

In a previous work (2001), I named “Calibanesque” the discourse that characterizes a great variety of movements of identity and resistance which a few decades ago began problematizing the scheme of European understanding (and domination) of the world.\* “The Western tradition has made of [Caliban] the symbol of the most radical alterity,” I argued; “instead of being identified by a specific differential trait, it is characterized by the

*absence* of everything tied to Western epistemology and axiology” (321). To put it in Hernán Vidal’s terms,

The negation of historical identity denounces the Latin American as a monstrous being that, in its creative capacity, only has the option of an infinite “game” of the “modification” and “distortion” of the originals . . . “Europe” seeks to discipline and to subdue the Latin American, preventing it from intruding into its own space in its complete monstrosity, dressing it up, trivializing it to the point of changing it into an “invisible” or “simply nonexistent” entity. (205)

As a matter of fact, Calibanesque discourse would prove that this “only option” reveals itself to be of significant importance with respect to “historical identity.” Calibanesque discourse indeed proceeds with a one hundred and eighty degree turn to become the perception of the unrepresentable “savage and deformed Slave”—the “monstrous being,” the undesirable “intruder”—to make it the very representation of “peripheral” challenge of Western epistemic violence or, to focus on the particular case which I am about to analyze, to make this “half a fish and half a monster” (Trinculo, *The Tempest* 3.2) the most accurate symbol of Latin America. Caliban’s “creative capacity” indeed implies—though it certainly is not limited to—a great deal of “modification” and ‘distortion’ of the originals.”

Caliban (the “brand new” Caliban of Calibanesque discourse) remains a “complete monstrosity.” The difference is that henceforth “it” is proud of the fact. It is particularly proud of the hybridity which characterizes monsters. It is precisely Caliban’s hybrid condition—to be “half a European,” “half” . . . something else—which makes it extremely significant for challengers—and, as we shall see, “intruders”—of Western hegemony.

### From *The Tempest* to *Une tempête*

The teaching of only European literature means that our students see how Prospero sees Caliban and not how Caliban sees Prospero; how Crusoe discovers and remakes Man Friday in Crusoe’s image, but never how Friday views himself and his heroic struggles against centuries of Crusoe’s exploitation and oppression.

-wa Thiong’o Ngugi

In the late 1960s, Aimé Césaire writes *A tempest* (*Une tempête*), an adaptation “pour un théâtre nègre” (for a black theatre) of the almost-namesake Shakespearean piece. Through this play, Césaire joins the ranks of African and Caribbean intellectuals who “seized upon *The Tempest* as a way of amplifying their calls for decolonization within the bounds of the

dominant cultures” (Nixon 558; see also Cartelli, Sparrow, and many others).

“Within the bounds of the dominant cultures”: that is the fundamental and perhaps insurmountable constraint Césaire and other “Calibanesque” intellectuals are facing; I will call this constraint, freely paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, their monstrous “emphatic mimicry.” If “to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English” (128; his emphasis), “to possess [Prospero’s] books” (*The Tempest* 3.1), as Caliban aspires to, does not necessarily make Caliban a “new” Prospero: he is *also* something else, probably thanks to his “monstrous”—hybrid—condition. That is his strength. That is his weakness.

What Caliban and the peripheral intellectual s who identify with him are stating is the following: we speak your language and we certainly refer to a world built from your symbolic-referential framework; yet, unlike our predecessors, we do not aim to simply be “assimilated” into your language and your world, but rather to subvert them in order to make them *our* language, *our* world. It is, or at least it tries to trigger, a revolt against the certainty displayed by Prospero, in which “Language”—in the broad sense of the term—“which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban’s achievements will be realized and restricted” (Lamming 110).

I will discuss below how Caliban (*A Tempest*’s Caliban) intends to break out of this “prison of Prospero’s language, by converting that language to his own needs of self-expression” (Jahn 242). But first, let us explore briefly why *The Tempest* became the target of Calibanesque authors.

The reason is quite simple: *The Tempest* was one of the first “weapons” used by Western colonialist discourse to take possession of “the Isle.” This play indeed depicts the unequal confrontation between Prospero the colonizer and the native Caliban: the monstrous, the unrepresentable, the hybridized being resulting from his contact with Prospero’s “world.” It is not a coincidence that in 1950–1960, promoters of the then-called Third-World independence movement “occupied” the Shakespearean masterpiece, more or less in the contemporary political meaning of the word “to occupy”: they “intruded” on the until-then exclusive space of their oppressors (see Sitrin and Azzellini).

Let us note that this “space”—be it Wall Street, the Spanish Parliament, or “the massive edifice of Western empire” (Said 195)—is not necessarily problematized by its occupation: in principle, “to occupy” a place does not mean “to destroy” it, not even “to transform” it. It is quite the opposite: strictly speaking, the “place” must “be there” to make it possible to be “occupied.” The question that arises, then, is how to occupy a hegemonic space without becoming—for instance—a trader, or—in our case—another “Prospero.” Or, to put it in Spivakean terms: the question is: can “peripheral” authors speak both “inside and outside of the epistemic violence” (283) imposed by Western culture and imperialism?

In a very different, if not opposite way to the one suggested by Spivak, I am tempted to answer this question in the affirmative. Focusing on *A Tempest*, I will try to demonstrate that this play, and particularly Caliban, succeeds in “occupying” the Western episteme—in the broad sense of the term: the imaginary and ideological system of knowledge establishing which “reality” can be conceived and, thus, how it could be constructed. Most importantly: he is able to do so without abandoning the outside space, i.e., problematizing this very “epistemic violence” to which this “intruder” remains subject in a large measure.

How can one achieve this *tour de force*, which defies logic or, at least, *tertium non datur* Aristotelian logic? I want to argue that Caliban’s very “monstrous” (hybrid) condition is precisely (emphatically) what allows him to be *at the same time* in and out, oneself and someone else, “European” and “non-European.” It is probably not by chance that an author such as Jorge Luis Borges—who was so fond of oxymorons, that figure of speech which allows the combination of contradictory terms—claimed to be more “European” than European authors themselves, precisely (emphatically) because he was Argentinian. It is equally not by accident that he reread and rewrote Western tradition through deforming glasses, problematizing the sacrosanct Western fetish of “authenticity.” Once authenticity is no longer the solid and indisputable criterion it once was, “modification” and “distortion” of presumed “originals” are suited to become effective tools to “violate” Western epistemic violence.

Parody is undeniably the hybrid (monstrous?) literary practice *par excellence* to achieve this “violation.” A good example, in my opinion, lies in the title itself of Césaire’s play: *A Tempest*. The simple switch (distortion, modification) from “the”—a definite article—to “an”—an indefinite one—suggests that Shakespeare’s story is not unique: the same story is likely to be told differently, that is, from other perspectives: for example, from the perspective of the other, namely Caliban’s. The story will remain the same . . . while becoming a totally *other* story, the one of the excluded other.

At this point, some clarification of the structure and function of parody in general, and of Calibanesque parody in particular, is warranted. Repetition with the critical distance characteristic of parody (see Hutcheon) proves to be an excellent textualization of the phenomenon that I called, following (and perhaps “distorting”) Bhabha’s words, the “emphatic mimicry” of Calibanesque authors. The case of *A Tempest* is exemplary in this regard: Césaire rewrites *The Tempest* in order to attack the very foundations of the last avatars of the traditional colonialist discourse: the critical function specific to parody indeed mostly tackles the colonialist “pedagogy” used by Césaire’s contemporary Metropolitan “educators” of *The Tempest*, such as O. Mannoni.<sup>1</sup> It is that colonialist pedagogy which is the real target of *A Tempest*. Césaire considers *The Tempest* “a great work of art [which] belongs to all humanity,” and which can be exposed to “as many

reinterpretations as do the myths of classical antiquity” (qtd. in Belhassen 176).

Herein lies the dual function of *A Tempest*: firstly, to recognize—and appropriate—the original text and, by ricochet, the Western literary canon; secondly, to ironically and axiologically invert colonialist ideology in order to produce a “disarming but effective literary vehicle for social satire” (Hutcheon 44). This dual functionality tries to resolve the paradoxical situation any parody has to tackle: to presuppose “at one and the same time, authority and its transgression” (69). If, as Hutcheon argues, any parody is an ironic imitation, we can conclude that, in *A Tempest*, imitation is placed on the side of respect of the original text, of its veneration even—as well as that of the Western canon which has consecrated it—whereas irony looks to corrode the increasingly ruinous construction of colonialist discourse.

This distinction “work of art/colonialism” reminds one of the dichotomy “civilization vs. colonization” put forward by Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (10–12). This allows him to reject European imperialism without leaving behind his admiration for—and without fully participating in the elaboration of—Western culture.

It is certainly tempting to embrace the idea of “two irreconcilable worlds,” civilization and colonization, responsible respectively for all the world’s happiness and all of its ills. The argument was probably very effective in 1955, when the main goal was the end of colonialism: Western humanists—the main addressees of the *Discourse on Colonialism*—had no choice but to opt in favor of civilization, implying at the same time their categorical rejection of the colonial system still in place. Nowadays, to defend this position would prove to be extremely problematic (see, for instance, Said 14).

If *The Tempest* is unanimously considered one of the most “emblematic of the founding years of English colonialism” (Hulme 90) and, more generally, of the entire colonial period, it is due to the fact that links between culture and imperialism, so “important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences” (Said xii), are particularly obvious in this play. But beware: we perceive these connections *today*. Let us not be seduced by simplistically qualifying *The Tempest* as “imperialist.” At the time of its publication, *The Tempest* is not strictly speaking “imperialist” since the very notion of “imperialism” and—most importantly—the notion of “anti-imperialism” were simply inconceivable in the Shakespearian world.

*The Tempest* should indeed be interpreted today as a model of colonialist discourse; however, we should first make it clear that the play is less indicative of the beliefs, after all insignificant, of the individual empirical person named William Shakespeare, than of the European collective imaginary of the period. In the historical setting of the production of the work, the absolute inferiority of everything colonial is indisputable. In that context, Caliban can only be “a savage and deformed Slave,” as

characterized in the play's *Dramatis Personæ*, namely a secondary author whose "revolt" can only fail; otherwise, *The Tempest* would have been entirely inadmissible at the time and place of its representation/publication: the mere possibility of Caliban's "revolt" exists because it appears from the very beginning as ridiculous.

We must bear in mind that Caliban's story is no more than a passing episode—and, therefore, perfectly eradicable or replaceable—in Shakespeare's play. This comic subplot of Caliban has the same humoristic function as, for instance, John Falstaff's actions and comments in *Henry IV*. The only "serious" actions in *The Tempest* are the ones realized by Prospero, "the rightful Duke of Milan." The fact that "disorders" caused by Caliban (as well as the ones attributable to his master) are fully controlled by Prospero is not fortuitous: far from bringing real problems to the colonizer, their function is precisely to stress his intrinsic superiority (Brown 58–59).

"Disorder" is a fundamental "threat" to the perpetuation of the colonial system. In the case of modern Western colonialism, it is particularly useful to neutralize what constitutes its main aporia: how to subjugate entire nations while promoting a humanist teleology based upon universal emancipation. Following is an example extracted from *The Tempest*: Prospero accuses Caliban of trying to rape his daughter, which constitutes a recurrence of the stereotype of the lasciviousness of "the savages." Caliban, far from rejecting this accusation, uses it in order to assert his rebellious character: "O ho, O ho! would it had been done! / Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans" (*The Tempest* 1.2). This threat, as unrealistic as it is unrealizable, justifies Prospero's decision, *rigorous but necessary*, of retaining Caliban in a cave under miserable conditions... Disorder, once neutralized, fulfills its function of legitimating—naturalizing—the existing order.

But this disorder, so well controlled by colonialist discourse at least until the late nineteenth century, is the seed from which peripheral voices will construct the discursive practice of dissension. It is certainly a mimetic practice: its starting point is colonialist discourse. It is a revolutionary emphatic mimicry nevertheless, since this distorted "imitation" aspires to turn this "domesticated" threat into a *real* one. This emphasis may follow one of two paths which are at the same time antagonistic *and* complementary: 1) vehemently stressing the threatening image of the colonized subject, and 2) denying it with the same furiousness. What implicitly remains in both cases is a charge against the colonizers of the "faults" they were supposed to "correct" in the "savage" colonized people; in both cases, what is at stake is the destabilization of the double image so comforting to the master: he, right, virtuous, wise, generous... in a word, civilized, and his slave, wild and therefore vicious, irresponsible, lazy.

In this vein, *A Tempest* systematically undermines the image Prospero has of himself, i.e., the one he has imposed on the rest of the island's

inhabitants. Several discursive strategies are also implemented in order to provide Caliban and Ariel (that is, all non-Western collectivities marginalized during the colonial period) with a discourse of identity and resistance allowing them “dérang[er] l'image que l'homme blanc se faisait de l'homme noir” (Césaire, *Discourse* 103) (to disturb the very image the white man had of the black man). These strategies are displayed in plain language, in contrast to the hermeticism which characterizes Césaire's poetry. This transparency is inextricably related to the pedagogical function with which Césaire wants to impregnate his dramaturgy. Let us look into some of the most relevant identity and resistance strategies at work in Césaire's play.

*Challenging the exclusive role held by Prospero as a legitimate enunciator.* This is undoubtedly the basic strategy of resistance. The monopoly of the narrative, as we know, is fundamental to the preservation of colonial power: as Brown rightfully argues, the production of narrative is, in this play, always related to questions of power (59).

In *A Tempest*, History, i.e., the Western historiography of Enlightenment, as allegorized in Prospero's words, becomes a partial and biased version of the past. Prospero's legitimacy as unique maker and interpreter of a unique history is seriously problematized, to the point where, according to Césaire, “the slave is always more important than his master—for it is the slave who makes history” (qtd. in Bellassen 176).

A comparison of a fragment of *The Tempest* with its parodic reprise will allow us to better understand this strategy of delegitimizing an enunciator until then considered unique. When, in the Shakespearian masterpiece, Ariel asks his master to keep his promise to release him, an outraged Prospero reminds him of the circumstances of their first meeting:

PROSPERO: Dos't thou forget  
From what a torment I did free thee?  
ARIEL: No.  
... PROSPERO: Thou liest, malignant thing! Hast thou forgot  
The foul witch, Sycorax, who, with age and envy,  
Was grown into a hoop? hast thou forgot her?  
ARIEL: No, sir.  
PROSPERO: Thou hast: Where was she born?  
speak; tell me.  
ARIEL: Sir, in Algier.  
PROSPERO: Oh, was she so? I must,  
Once in a month, recount what thou has been  
Which thou forget'st. This damn'd witch,  
Sycorax,  
For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible  
To enter human hearing, from Argier,

Thou know'st, was banished; for one thing she did,  
They would not take her life: Is not this true?

ARIEL: Ay, sir.

PROSPERO: This blear-eyed hag was hither brought with child,  
And here was left by the sailors: Thou, my slave,  
As thou report'st thyself, wast then her servant:  
And, for thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhor'd commands,  
Refusing her grand 'hests, she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers,  
And in her most unmitigable race.  
Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
Imprison'd, thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years; within which space she died,  
And left thee there: where thou didst vent thy groans,  
As fast as mill-wheels strike: Then was this island,  
(Save for the son that she did litter here,  
A freckled whelp, hag-born,) not honour'd with  
A human shape..

ARIEL: Yes: Caliban her son.

PROSPERO: Dull thing, I say so; he, that Caliban,  
Whom now I keep in service.

. . . When I arriv'd, and heard thee that made gape  
The pine, and left thee out.

ARIEL: I thank thee, master . . . Pardon, master:  
I will be correspondent to command,  
And do my spriting gently.

PROSPERO: Do so; and after two days

I will discharge thee.

ARIEL: That's my noble master!

What shall I do? say what? what shall I do? (1.2)

It is especially in this second scene of the first act of *The Tempest* that Prospero stands as one of the only authorized enunciator of the history of the island, first before Miranda, Ariel, and Caliban, and, at another level of representation, before the audience (spectators, readers). He is the historian, as well as the only authorized educator of all the characters capable of being educated, i.e., Miranda and Ariel: "I must, / Once in a month, recount what thou has been." Regardless of the concrete diegetic content of his narrative, what is important is the fact that Prospero is the only subject capable of relating past events from his own point of view, in order to legitimize the present situation of domination. Regarding Caliban, he is considered a lost case, which is why Miranda fails in her attempt to "civilize" him.

Let us note that, as a good student of the colonial educational institution, Ariel (*The Tempest's* Ariel) never utters a single word of his own to Prospero: he limits himself to confirming the master's version. Nor does the "new" Ariel, the one of *A Tempest*, deny the facts reported by Prospero. There is however a significant difference: he now starts questioning the supposedly beneficial effect of Prospero's actions:

ARIEL: Master, I must ask you to spare me this kind of labour.  
 PROSPERO: (*Shooting.*) Listen, once and for all! I have a job to do, the methods employed don't concern me!  
 ARIEL: You've promised me my freedom a thousand times, and I'm still waiting.  
 PROSPERO: Ingrate! Who freed you from Sycorax? Who rent the pine in which you were imprisoned and released you?  
 ARIEL: Sometimes I almost regret it . . . After all, perhaps I would have become a tree in the end . . . Tree: there's a word that fires me! I've often dwelt on it: Palm tree! A nonchalant bursting out on high, full of an elegant, octopus swaying. Baobab! Monsters's soft entrails! Just aske the calao bird mewed up there for a season. Ceiba! Unfurled under the proud sun, bird! Your talons fixed in the living earth! (18)

*Axiological reversal of the binomial nature/culture.* Against all odds, Ariel claims what the colonized should "be ashamed of": his belonging to nature, ergo (according to the colonialist perspective, of course) his inveterate barbarism. Indeed, nature has been understood by modern colonialism "selon les termes d'une épopée du progrès technologique qui reléguerait l'aborigène du côté de la sauvagerie, le pensant comme une force récalcitrante devant être apprivoisée" (Readings 427) (in the terms of an epic technological progress which would relegate the aboriginal to savagery, conceived as a recalcitrant force which has to be tamed).

We shall see below how *A Tempest* neutralizes two *topoi* directly related to the binary schematization "nature vs. culture": the one of the "noble savage," as well as the one of the lack of culture—and even of language!—of "savages," be they "noble" or not.

All natural elements evoked with nostalgia by this "new" Ariel—and thus radically foreign to Prospero—refer either to the African continent (the baobab, the hornbill bird), the American one (the ceiba) or to both (the palm tree). *A Tempest* implies that whereas Prospero might consider overseas colonies as his own "property," in fact his "real homeland" is somewhere else, in the metropolis.

*Claiming territorial rights.* If the land rightfully belongs to someone, it is to Caliban; or rather, he belongs to the land. Unlike both Prospero and Ariel, Caliban is the one "who is still close to his beginnings, whose link with the natural world has not yet been broken" (qtd. in Bellassen 176). And

in this sense, the extremely cultured Césaire, deterritorialized from what he considers his ancestral land, “Mother Africa,” is much closer to Ariel than to Caliban.

In his remarkable work on *A Tempest*, Thomas A. Hale synthesizes very well the dichotomous perception of nature which has the colonial master as colonizer and the colonized, as slaves: Prospero sees nature as a foreign element, and Caliban as a “weird beast”: a monster. Even if Prospero is, at first, able to control the tempest, i.e. a natural phenomenon, he is unable to turn nature against Caliban, as his slave is an integral part of nature (27).

When, as happens in *The Tempest*, the “new” Caliban proclaims himself the new king of the island (let us remember he is the bastard and “monstrous” son of its first occupant, the witch Sycorax), Prospero states that “there are genealogies which it is better not boast. A ghoul! A witch with, thank you God, death hath delivered us!” Unlike the original Caliban, the new one, far from remaining silent or from merely insulting Prospero, replies: “Dead or alive, she is my mother, and I wont’ deny her! Besides, you can only think she’s dead because you think the earth itself is dead . . . What would you have done without me in this strange land? Ungrateful!” (20).

*Negation of the “Civilizing Mission of the West”: The [Good] Savage and the Lack of Culture.* *A Tempest’s* Caliban will never accept that “his [Prospero’s] art is of such power, / It would control my dam’s god, Setebos, / And make a vassal of him” (*The Tempest* 3.2). He will no longer be fooled by the colonialist procedure of belittling the colonized subject. The fact that he defines himself as belonging to nature does not imply his acceptance of the conceptual dualism “nature vs. culture”—a dichotomy which, as we know, denies the very fact of cultural diversity (see, for instance, Lévi-Strauss 20). Western colonialist discourse has too often defined otherness “par rapport à un manque: manque d’évangélisation (chrétienne) ou manque de civilisation (occidentale)” (Gómez-Moriana 31) (in relation to a deficiency: lack of [Christian] evangelization or lack of [Western] civilization). The “lack” of evangelization gave rise to the myth of the “noble savage,” while the “absence” of civilization justified the “education” of the “barbarians” as well as their extermination.

The *topos* of the noble savage contemplates the existence of an Other “mythique, idéalisé . . . dans une altérité radicale qui apparaît comme l’inversion des insatisfactions et des frustrations attachées à la culture d’appartenance” (Ladmiral and Lipiansky 139–40) (mythical, idealized . . . in a radical alterity that appears as the inversion of dissatisfaction and frustration attached to the culture of belonging). The “noble savage” introduced by Columbus, built upon by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, and “secularized” by Rousseau and other European intellectuals of the Enlightenment, implies a misunderstanding of another equally pernicious notion, at least potentially so, that of the *topos* of the savage *tout*

*court*, upon which the entire concept rests. After all, there is no “noble savage” if there is no “savage.”

As a matter of fact, the adjective “noble” highlights the intrinsic negativity and inferiority related to the noun “savage” and, consequently, its pragmatic positioning as a simple object, a “non-person” defined in relation to the Western subject, the only legitimate enunciator: the one who has the right of gaze and, most importantly, the exclusive right of speech. It is not by chance that Columbus, the founder of the *topos* of the “noble savage,” wrote to the Catholic Monarchs that he was bringing six savages “para que deprendan fablar” (Journal of the first voyage, October 12, 1492) (so they will learn how to speak). This seemingly innocuous phrase may be considered the quintessence of imperialist-colonialist logic: the irrefutable (doxic) conviction of our own superiority allows, or rather *compels* us, to take possession of this land and its inhabitants *for their own good*.

In *The Tempest*, there are many references to the civilizing-evangelizing “mission” Europeans have so “generously” given themselves:

PROSPERO: Abhorred slave;  
 Which any print of goodness will not take,  
 Being capable of all ill! 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, but wouldest gabble like  
 A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes  
 With words that made them known: But thy vile race,  
 Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures  
 Could not abide to be with: therefore wast thou  
 Deservedly confined into this rock,  
 Who hadst deserved more than a prison.  
 CALIBAN: 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)

I will not dwell further on the fact that, in *The Tempest*, the intractability of Caliban, his domesticated “disturbance” of Prospero's orderly world serves perfectly his master's interests: should his civilizing mission have triumphed completely, that is, should Caliban have become the perfect replica of Prospero, how could the latter justify his hegemonic status? Should there be any doubt, Caliban himself—the Caliban of *The Tempest*—acknowledges his total dependency on his master: if he can curse him, it is because Prospero has taught Caliban his language!

Under the same circumstances, *A Tempest's* Caliban reacts very differently: “You haven't taught me anything at all! Except of course to jabber away in your language so as to understand your orders . . . You

selfishly keep all your knowledge for yourself alone, sealed up in big books like those" (19).

That is not all: the new Caliban masters a language which is his alone. He will use it as of his very first appearance on the scene, despite the determination of the colonizer to eradicate it through a repressive education:

CALIBAN: Uhuru!

PROSPERO: What did you say?

CALIBAN: I said, Uhuru!

PROSPERO: Yet another return to your savage tongue. I've already told you, I don't like it. (18–19)

"Uhuru" is a Swahili term which literally means "freedom." "Uhuru" was a very popular word both in Africa (decolonization movement) and the United States (Black Power) when *A Tempest* appeared. Let us add to this the African songs and references to African and Afro-American deities such as Shango or Eshu, the "Negro god-devil" who serves as a counterweight to Western culture, represented by the Greek gods and spirits invoked by Prospero. Eshu's appearance casts serious doubts on the monopoly of power previously exercised by the master: "Could there be something grating in my magic?" (45). It is Eshu, in fact, who causes the desertion of the Greek (i.e. Prospero's) deities: Ceres, Juno and Iris. They are outraged by his obscene singing, but above all, by Propero's inability to expel him from what the former calls "this noble gathering." The conclusion that Prospero draws from this unexpected episode (obviously nonexistent in *The Tempest*) exposes his powerlessness: "There! He's gone. But alas, the harm is done. I am perplexed. My old brain is troubled. Power! Power! . . . My power is cold" (47).

If Caliban, who makes no concession to Prospero and is proud of his African cultural heritage, "represents the growing rebellion of the blacks, indeed of all exploited peoples throughout the world" (Belhassen 176), how can we not bemoan the servile behavior of a character such as Ariel, the Europeanized, who "from Caliban's perspective is a colonial collaborator, a political and cultural sellout who . . . is reduced to negotiating for liberty from a position of powerlessness" (Nixon 573)?

*The Tempest*. Prospero: master, civilizer; Caliban: an Other dominable but not civilizable; Ariel: an Other both dominable and civilizable / *A Tempest*. Prospero: colonizer; Caliban: rebel colonized, proud of his origins; Ariel: colonized, submitted, acculturated. A simplistic analysis of *A Tempest* could end here since all significant elements of the text have already been identified, analyzed, classified: dealt with once and for all. The fact that the text is openly anti-colonialist simplifies the task because it is obviously a systematic inversion (system: a beautiful, reassuring word) of colonialist discourse. However, *A Tempest*—as is the case of *The Tempest*, colonialist

and anti-colonialist discourses themselves—is less coherent (more opaque, unstable) than first appears.

In the first scene of the second act (the only part of the play which does not copy a fragment of *The Tempest*, distorting it), Ariel visits Caliban in his cave—in Shakespeare's play, Caliban and Ariel never talk to each other. Caliban mistrusts his interlocutor as of the very beginning of the scene; how could it be otherwise?

ARIEL: Hello, Caliban. I know you don't think much of me, but after all we are brothers, brothers in suffering and slavery. Brothers in hope as well. We both want our freedom, only our methods vary.

CALIBAN: Hello to you. But you haven't come to see me just to make that profession of faith. Come on, Alastor! The old man's sent you, hasn't he? A fine job: carrying out the lofty thoughts of the Master!

ARIEL: No, I've come on my own account. To warn you. Prospero is planning appalling acts of revenge against you. I felt duty-bound to give you fair warning.

CALIBAN: I am resolved to face up to him.

ARIEL: Poor Caliban, you're doomed. You know well that you aren't the stronger, that you'll never be the stronger. What use your struggle?

CALIBAN: And you? What good has your obedience done you, your Uncle Tom patience and all your toadying! You must see the man grows more despotic and demanding by the day.

ARIEL: Nevertheless, I've achieved one thing, at least: he's promised me my freedom. In the long run, I don't doubt, but it's the first time he's promised.

CALIBAN: Idle talk! He'll promise you a thousand times and betray you a thousand times. Besides, tomorrow doesn't interest me. What I want is (*Shouting.*) 'Freedom now!' (26–27)

The reader/spectator who uncritically identifies with Caliban can only meet Ariel's words with incredulousness. As Caliban himself, the reader will doubt Ariel could, of his own initiative, have made Caliban aware of the terrible punishments Prospero has in mind for him, convinced as he is that the master will never set Ariel free. Ariel's assimilationist views portray him not only as an odious character but also as a naïve one.

Are these suspicions to be confirmed later, as expected? Nothing is more uncertain, as nothing in the entire play suggests that Ariel has merely obeyed his master one more time; quite the contrary. As for his release, Caliban's and the reader's misjudgment is even more striking since at the end of the play, Prospero keeps his promise . . . Nevertheless, let us not prematurely anticipate the conclusion of the story; let us instead return to the previous quote—especially to the last two words spoken by Caliban: "Freedom now!" (in English in the original version) fulfills a catalyzing and

mythical function similar to “Uhuru!” (in Swahili in the original version) uttered by Caliban when he first appeared on the scene. It is a slogan used repeatedly by civil rights activists in the United States in the 1960s and refers to the Black Power Movement in North America. It is no coincidence that in another, later part of the play, Caliban identifies himself with Malcolm X:

CALIBAN: . . . I've something important to tell you.  
 PROSPERO: Important? Well, spit it out.  
 CALIBAN: Just this: I've decided I'll be Caliban no longer.  
 PROSPERO: What kind of bilge is this? I don't understand.  
CALIBAN: As you like; I'm telling you that, as of now, I'll no longer be answering to the name of Caliban.  
 PROSPERO: And whence sprang this pearl?  
 CALIBAN: Well, because Caliban isn't my name. It's simple!  
 PROSPERO: It's mine, I suppose!  
 CALIBAN: It's the nickname your hatred attached to me, whose every utterance is an insult.  
 PROSPERO: My, how sensitive we've become! Well then, suggest another... I must call you something. What will it be? Cannibal would suit you well, but I'm sure you wouldn't want it! Let's see... Hannibal! Why not! They all like historical names!  
 CALIBAN: Call me X. That's best. Like a man without a name. Or, more precisely, a man whose name was stolen. (21–22)

According to Césaire, “on n'a qu'à lire Malcolm X, pour voir l'influence, l'impact qu'a eu sur le Noir américain le phénomène africain” (qtd. in Kesteloot and Kotchy 202) (one has only to read Malcolm X, to see the influence, the impact of the African phenomenon on Black America). This link between African decolonization and “le réveil de l'Amérique noire” (the awakening of Black America) through which “c'est fini l'époque des oncles Tom,” (Kesteloot and Kotchy 202) (the Uncle Tom era is over and done with) is in fact the assumption upon which *A Tempest*'s North American reading lies. Following this premise, one is likely to conclude that Ariel is playing the unenviable role of “the last Uncle Tom” . . . at least, if one adopts uncritically Caliban's perspective, that of the most radical Malcolm X—the one before his trip to Africa, i.e., before having repudiated the “racist racism” of the Nation of Islam.<sup>2</sup> Readers/spectators adopting a more critical perspective, however, will realize that the new Ariel is no longer fully under the power of Prospero—in any case, no more than Caliban himself. To the radical and illusory separatist proposal of his “brother in suffering and slavery,” Ariel counters an egalitarian project of integration which would affect not only both of them but Prospero as well by endowing the latter with a conscience: “I'm not just fighting for my freedom, for our

freedom, but for Prospero too, so that a conscience can well up inside him. Help me, Caliban" (27). The "dream" of another African-American leader coetaneous with Malcolm X, namely Martin Luther King Jr., assassinated by the time *A Tempest* makes its appearance, resonates intertextually in Ariel's words:

ARIEL: You drive me to despair. I've often dreamt a rapturous dream that one day Prospero, you and I would set out as brothers to build a wonderful world, each contributing his own qualities: patience, vitality, love, will power too, and rigour, not to mention the eddying dreams without which humanity would suffocate to death. (28)

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. (King 219)

I have a dream that one day men will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers. (King 114)

Caliban would thus represent Malcolm X, separatism, violence against the oppressor, while Ariel would personify the paradigm of Martin Luther King Jr., that is to say that of integrationism, moderation, nonviolence. The portrait seems perfect: it is comprehensive and fits well with the dualistic picture of the U.S. Black Power Movement favored by the media and U.S. historiography since the 1960s. The problem is that this image is a reductionist one. It simplifies a much more complex and ambiguous discursive reality:

While whites frequently said that Martin and Malcolm were like "oil and water" with "little if any common ground," blacks often said that they were, as John Killens put it, "kind of a team." When M. S. Handler of the *New York Times* asked about the possibility of "cooperation between Malcolm X and Martin Luther King," Clarence Jones, a friend of both, acknowledged their complementary roles by saying that "it was not beyond the realm of possibility that in the building of a coalition within the Negro freedom movement, Dr. King and Malcolm X might find a common basis of action."

Because of Martin's and Malcolm's profound mutual respect and the tremendous impact that each had upon the other's thinking, James Baldwin claimed that "by the time each met his death, there was practically no difference between them." (Cone 259)

The views reported in this quotation, including all the generalizations like "whites said" or "blacks often said," obviously do not have a value of

certainty. They are rather an indication of the uncertainty that the personalities of Malcolm X and King raised since their appearance in a political scene in North America which they shared with other mythic figures, such as John F. Kennedy. This fertile uncertainty excludes simplistic oppositions between the two black leaders and does not take into account, for example, either their mutual influence or the progressive coalition of their positions. James H. Cone, to cite just one example, demonstrates very convincingly that, rather than competing, Malcolm X and King complement and correct each other (244–72).

The simplistic dichotomy with which some analysts dismiss any link between Ariel and Caliban (the traitor and the hero; the martyr and the collaborationist; the assimilated and the indomitable) reduces the play to a vulgar pamphlet, and Calibanesque discourse to a monochrome thesis. Does the text *really* give all the honors of the liberation struggle exclusively to one of the characters? Are not these two symbols, Ariel and Caliban, actually less in opposition to one another than they appear? Are not both of them telling us, from two opposed *and* complementary positions, that their people were and still are victims of oppression on the part of Prospero's heirs? Are not both of them reaching for the same goal: an end to submission and the launch of an era of freedom for their people?

I dare assert that the plans of both Ariel and Caliban (Caliban's and Ariel's of *A Tempest*) are equally valid, each of them representing one facet of, or a necessary step in, the struggle for liberation. As a matter of fact, *A Tempest* makes it difficult to accept the simplistic identification of the two characters in the play (Caliban, Ariel) with their correlates in the “real world” (Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr.). In this respect, one example is highly significant: Ariel claims in his first and only encounter with Caliban, that “only our methods differ” (35). Against all odds, the intertextual link of this fictional statement is not related to King, but to Malcolm X:

What you [King, *in absentia*] and I are for is freedom. Only you think that integration will get you freedom; I think separation will get me free. We've both got the same objective. We've just got different ways of getting at it. (qtd. in Cone 247)

Unlike Caliban's, Ariel's ambivalent figure represents both King and Malcolm X, as well as both the centripetal and the centrifugal tendency of the North American Black Power movement. This ambivalence stresses the irrelevance of a binary vision of this movement. King and X themselves fail to accommodate the dualism imposed by the U.S. discursive hegemony which, in the 1960s, is—let us remember—that of the “liberal” North of the U.S. This hegemony exercises control over the entire U.S. Calibanesque discourse in that it legitimizes its more “moderate” faction, the one headed by King. The problem is that King himself will progressively abandon this

subaltern place the “liberal” wing of U.S. hegemony political discourse has “granted” him, in order to gradually move toward the radical position of Malcolm X (see Cone 232–35).

*A Tempest* is a “realistic” play in the less commonplace meaning of the term. It does not try in vain to “reflect” the world “as it really is”: rather, it transcribes the uncertainties and contradictions of African-American Calibanesque discourse—and also of the francophone Négritude movement. Most importantly, to a large extent, it succeeds in doing so not necessarily through the unequivocally resisting Caliban, but perhaps through the ambivalent Ariel.

### Conclusion: *Ich bin ein Monster*

One of the first tasks of the culture of resistance was to reclaim, rename, and reinhabit the land . . . The search for authenticity, for a more congenial national origin than that provided by colonial history, for a new pantheon of heroes and (occasionally) heroines, myths, and religions—these too are made possible by a sense of the land reappropriated by its people.

. . . [Nevertheless, to] accept nativism is to accept the consequences of imperialism, the racial, religious, and political divisions imposed by imperialism itself. To leave the real historical world for the metaphysics of essences like négritude, Irishness, Islam, or Catholicism is to abandon history for essentializations that have the power to turn human beings against each other.

. . . A more interesting commentary on the nativist tendency—and the rather naive fundamentalist ideology that makes it possible—is provided in such accounts of creole or *mestizo* culture as in Rodó’s *Ariel* and by those Latin American fabulists whose texts demonstrate the manifest *impurity*, the fascinating mixture of real and surreal in all experience. As one reads “magic realists” like Carpentier, who first describes it, Borges, García Márquez, and Fuentes, one vividly apprehends the dense interwoven strands of a history that mocks linear narrative, easily recuperated “essences,” and the dogmatic mimesis of “pure” representation.

-Edward Said

How am I to return to non-European roots? If it means that Caribbean writers today should be aware that there are emphases in their writing that we owe to non-European, non-Shakespearean roots, and the past in music that is not Beethoven, that I agree. But I don’t like them posed there in the way they have been posed *either-or*. I don’t think so. I think *both* of them. And fundamentally we are a people whose literacy and æsthetic past is rooted in Western European civilisation.

-C. L. R. James

What if the monster, this hybrid creature who is half a European colonizer, half a non-Western colonized subject be Ariel rather than Caliban—or *both*? What if Prospero himself is *also* a monster, what if *we all* are?

Let us visit again Hernán Vidal’s quote with which I started this work: European “negation of historical identity denounces the Latin American as a monstrous being that, in its creative capacity, only has the option of an infinite ‘game’ of the ‘modification’ and ‘distortion’ of the originals” (205). What if Ariel problematizes both “entities,” i.e., “Europe” and “Latin America”? What if he is the one who shows us that both “the European King” and his resistant “subject,” are naked or, better still, are both “simply nonexistent” entities?

It is easy, too easy, to conclude that Ariel, “a Mulatto slave” according to the *Dramatis Personae* of *A Tempest*, limits himself to mimetize “Prospero’s world.” However, even if the god Eshu is radically alien to Ariel and if he will never utter the word “Uhuru,” his progressive rapprochement to Caliban (and, in the U.S. reading of the play I have sketched above, his twofold identification with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.) prevents the reader from simply assimilating himself to either of the characters, neither to the absolute hegemonic Prospero nor to the no less absolute subaltern Caliban.

Ariel is suspicious of the intentions of Prospero and condemns Caliban’s intransigence; he is an accomplice of the slave negro and executes the orders of the white master “en tous points” (*A Tempest* 29) (in all respects). Well aware of the inability to abolish the binary machine “either colonialist or anti-colonialist,” Ariel occupies both “worlds” that this machine presents as the only two possible. In doing so, Ariel deconstructs the *either-or*, this fallacious barrier according to which these two “entities” are mutually exclusive.

What Ariel’s ambivalent character may be pointing out, by the very fact of his ambivalence, is that “Prospero’s world” is not “Prospero’s world” anymore. The same could be stated about “Caliban’s world.” That does not mean that all “frontiers” have suddenly disappeared, but that they are much more diffuse than they pretend to be. Nowadays “postcolonial” times have certainly not headed toward the expiration of coloniality: the “darker side of Western modernity,” to borrow Mignolo’s concept, persists in our modernity, perhaps exhausted but so far, it seems, insurmountable.

So long as there are relationships of domination (and it is difficult to imagine their disappearance), there will always be places, physical as well as symbolic, which the so-called monsters will rightfully aspire to occupy; this because self-proclaimed “legitimate enunciators” will continue to claim for themselves the right to speak as well as to look down at the “monsters” they will have previously created in order to try and maintain their power over these “islands.” Against such abusive pretension, let us remember that the interdependence of all kinds of variables (economic, cultural, identitarian,

and so on) resulting from the globalization process initiated in 1492 makes all of us (Prosperos, Calibans, Ariels, multitudes, elites) “impure,” hybrid monsters in that one “island” we all share, like it or not.

## Notes

- \* This work would not have been possible without the thorough reading by Louise Sheils. The author thanks her for her linguistic review as well as for her insightful comments.
- 1. “Besides treating a classic sacrilegiously, it implicitly lampooned the educational practice, so pervasive in the colonies, of distributing only bowdlerized versions of Shakespeare, of watering him down ‘for the natives.’ *A Tempest* can be read as parodying this habit by indicating how the bard might have looked were he indeed made fit reading for a subject people” (Nixon 573).
- 2. Towards the end of his autobiography (written in collaboration with Alex Haley), Malcolm X states the following: “One of the major troubles that I was having in building the organization that I wanted—an all-black organization whose ultimate objective was to help create a society in which there could exist honest white-black brotherhood—was that my earlier public image, my old so-called ‘Black Muslim’ image, kept blocking me . . . My friends today are black, brown, red, yellow, and white!” (Malcolm X and Haley 297–98).

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