

“There would this monster make a man”: Colonial power in the 1993 RSC production of *The Tempest**

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Abstract

Taking on assumptions about oppression, identity and representation as they are developed in contemporary postcolonial theory, this study proposes the analysis of the 1993 theatrical production of William Shakespeare’s The Tempest by The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). It aims to discuss the role of Caliban’s monstrosity in the production and how it pertains to issues such as power relations and spectacle. The main benefit of doing an analysis of a performance of a Shakespearean text seems to be the possibility of seeing the play’s meaning as contingent, as a result of a series of elements (actor’s body, visual clues, the theatrical institution, spectatorship) that release it from the burden of being considered as the work of a single, universal, non-contradictory mind that contemporary criticism has pointed out as the ‘Shakespeare Myth’. I conclude that the 1993 RSC production presents a Tempest that, in many ways, reinforces traditional positions about the legitimacy of Prospero’s dominion over the island.

Keywords: The Tempest; Caliban; power; postcolonial; performance.

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There is theatre without words and there are words for the theatre which are never staged or which, once printed and consecrated in literary canons, are considered as objects of study *per se*. William Shakespeare's texts are often an instance of the latter case: from the Romantic tradition of the nineteenth century to approximately the 1970s, they were analyzed almost exclusively as autonomous works *of* and *for* the printed page, and their significance was hardly ever associated with the circumstances of their creation and the stage performance.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1999) oscillates between comedy and tragedy as it tells the tale of Prospero, former Duke of Milan, who has his dukedom usurped by his brother Antonio, with the help of Alonso, King of Naples, and his brother Sebastian. Prospero and his daughter Miranda are put to sea and eventually land on a distant island, which was once ruled by the witch Sycorax and is now inhabited by her son, Caliban, and Ariel, a tree spirit. Using his magical arts and knowledge of the occult, Prospero dominates the island while planning his revenge. When Alonso and Sebastian are sailing close to the island, Prospero summons a storm and causes a shipwreck. The shipwrecked travelers are separated by Ariel, following Prospero's orders. Ferdinand, Alonso's son, meets Miranda, and they fall in love. The King of Naples tries to find his son while Sebastian plots to kill him and steal the crown. Meanwhile, a drunken butler, Stephano, and the jester, Trinculo, meet Caliban, who manages to persuade them to kill Prospero. Ariel, however, through magic and mischief, manages to create dissent amongst the plotters. After inflicting a series of tests to check Ferdinand's worth, Prospero is convinced that he is a suitable match for Miranda. Prospero then organizes a masque celebrating chastity and marriage, but is distracted from the celebration when he remembers Caliban's plot. As Ariel brings Prospero's enemies to his presence, the former Duke of Milan magnanimously forgives the treasons and unifies the Kingdoms of Milan and Naples by marrying Ferdinand to Miranda. Prospero eventually frees Ariel, and is now ready to return to Milan as its rightful Duke.

The relevance of a specific study about Caliban is acknowledged by many authors, including Dirk Delabastita, for whom the large body of readings of *The Tempest* "turns out to bring the character of Caliban into focus as one of its central

interpretative cruxes” (1997, p. 1). This article proposes an analysis of the performance of the playtext and the implications of the figure of the monster in the 1993 Royal Shakespeare Company’s (RSC) production of the play; such investigation includes a critical study of the idea of monster as a site of social, sexual, cultural and political tension and proceeds to discuss how the character of Caliban – often portrayed as a non-human entity– is developed in the RSC production.

This article is rooted in the context of studies of performances of William Shakespeare’s dramatic texts, more specifically, theatrical productions of *The Tempest*. Such studies resist the predominance of textual literary studies, that is, the long tradition, in the theatre, of the scene being subjected to the written word (SERÔDIO, 1996). The present analysis of a dramatic performance, moreover, will take on assumptions from Cultural Studies, specifically in respect to the study of monsters and its relations to themes such as colonization, representation and subjectivity. Monsters are, according to Sérgio Bellei, “always and paradoxically near and distant from the human, which they must delimit and legitimize” (BELLEI, 2000, p. 11). It is, thus, on the convergence of performance analysis and Cultural Studies that this work scrutinizes Caliban’s character, specifically in the 1993 RSC production of *The Tempest*, directed by Sam Mendes.

W. B. Worthen (1997) reasons that performance is not merely the repetition of a text, as if text and performance were versions of the same work. What Worthen tries to debase is the idea of ascendancy, the hierarchy that places the text in an overlying position in relation to the performance and vice-versa. He argues that whatever the case, there is always an urge to authenticate a text or a performance by means of resorting to an authority. This problem is even more serious in the context of Shakespeare’s plays texts (often put in the centre of the Western canon), which remain the ultimate source for the legitimization of a performance. The dramatic text, is, however, *one* of the many elements that constitute a performance and it is realized in a process called “concretization” by Patrice Pavis, an operation where “signifier (literary works as things), signified (aesthetic object), and Social Context [...] are variables [...] which can be more or less reconstructed” (1992, p. 27). It is possible to unveil in the process of concretization what James

C. Bulman calls "the radical contingencies of performance – the unpredictable, often playful intersection of history, material conditions, social contexts, and reception that destabilizes Shakespeare and makes theatrical meaning a participatory act" (1996, p. 1). These radical contingencies have their culmination at the very moment a performance is taking place, and because performances are, by nature, ephemeral and very hard to apprehend for analysis, it is preferable, in the context of this article, to employ the term *production*, which refers to the set of scenic elements used for the analysis. Hence, this text does not deal with a specific performance of *The Tempest*, i. e., a singular theatrical event that took place in a specific date, but with a number of performances directed by Sam Mendes for the RSC in 1993, a broader experience than a performance of the play.

In order to account for the complexities of analyzing a production of a Shakespearean text, some methodological implications must be observed. Jay L. Halio (1988) proposes a methodology for production analysis which includes an analysis of the play text, paying close attention to what cuts and interpolations may imply, and the process of construction of a character and the interactions among characters in the play (encompassing the discovery of the subtext, the undercurrent of thoughts and feelings of the characters, and the scrutiny of the language in the plays).

Halio's scheme can be complemented with Pavis's checklist for the analysis of spectacles. This includes the cross-examination of various elements, such as general characteristics of the *mise-en-scène* (relations between scenic systems, coherence, contextualization), lighting, props, costumes, make-up, actors' performance, music, rhythm (HALIO, 1996, p. 37-8). Both Pavis and Halio indicate the need to identify the rationale for the set design, which means to assess how the visual elements of the play may distort or distract instead of emphasizing relevant perspectives.

Another important proviso that needs discussion is the established idea that an actor is simply a channel for releasing Shakespeare's voice, as Bulman asserts, "much like a ventriloquist's dummy" (1996, p. 7). This idea bears the burden of the belief that there is an immanent meaning in Shakespeare's texts which productions should try to disclose, the actor being but a sort of priest in charge of rendering the

deity's words. Hyperbolic as the comparison may seem, it brings to light postcolonial implications, as Shakespeare's texts may become, for the actor, objects of imperialistic domination, their bodies "colonized" by Shakespearean authority.

Both José Roberto O' Shea (1996) and Sérgio Bellei (2000) allude to the polarized debate between idealist and (post) colonial interpretations of *The Tempest*. The idealist reading grounds traditional performances, rendering the play as an instance of magic, remission and benevolence, in which magnanimous Prospero is able to pardon the miscreant slave. The fallback of this interpretation lies in the close-knit relationship between enslavement, barbarism, and civility. Frank Kermode's Preface to the Second Arden Edition of *The Tempest* (1999) illustrates the case in point by employing the Aristotelian idea of Caliban as a *natural slave*, a being that, because of its *natural* inferiority, should be kept, for his own good, under the dominion of the *naturally* superior man – in this case, Prospero, the white European with his *white* magic. Bellei contends that Kermode's argument disguises an imperialist logic in that it tries to essentialize the existence of lords and slaves and justify the order of things as being natural (2000, p. 54). Bellei, citing Malcolm Evans, urges for a critical effort that destabilizes Kermode's assertions, revealing the hidden ideological project embedded in idealist interpretations.

The publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism* (1978) and the advent of Cultural Materialist and New Historicist criticism have opened spaces within Cultural Studies that have empowered, in more specific grounds, contention about idealist readings of *The Tempest*. In the new light shed by the critics responsible for this paradigmatic shift, Shakespeare's play becomes "not simply a reflection of colonialist practices but an intervention in an ambivalent and even contradictory discourse" (BROWN, 1985, p. 48). In this perspective, *The Tempest* can be understood as the expression of the construction of a fundamentally threatening *other* that is permeated by contradictions as well as a work open to oppositional readings.

Peter Hulme and Francis Barker highlight the interestingly ambiguous setting of *The Tempest*, which has as a source the chronicles that travelers and explorers brought back from the American continent in the early period of colonization in the

sixteenth century. Hulme and Barker (1986, p. 108) suggest that "the island is the meeting place of the play's topographical dualism, Mediterranean and Atlantic". The dual character of the island has led critics to read the play from the perspective of post-colonialism, that is, examining what it can tell us about Renaissance attitudes toward European colonization of the Americas and Africa. Caliban, according to Hulme and Barker, is in the very core of this debate, as he is

similarly the ground of these two discourses [Mediterranean and Atlantic]. As "wild man" and "wodehouse" with an African mother whose pedigree leads back to the *Odyssey*, he is distinctly Mediterranean. And yet, at the same time, he is, as his name suggests, a "cannibal" as that figure had taken shape in colonial discourse: ugly, devilish, ignorant, gullible and treacherous. (HULME; BAKER, 1986, p. 108)

Jeffrey J. Cohen analyzes the monstrous body as a metaphor for the cultural body, as a symbolic expression of cultural anxiety. Such anxiety works both as a way to "name that which is difficult to apprehend and to domesticate (and consequently disempower) that which threatens" (1996, p. 7). By incorporating that which is considered inappropriate for human beings, the monster sets the boundaries of the self, working as an inverted mirror. As Cohen (1996, p. 7) points out, "in its functions as a dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond". In this sense, the abnormal is a way to legitimize the normal, in sexual, political, social, and national terms. The representation of the natives as monsters is an operation of naturalization of the subjugation, that is, a construction of a "self-validating, Hegelian master/slave dialectics" that establishes the dominion of "one cultural body by another, by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous" (COHEN, 1996, p. 11).

Representations of Caliban are varied, from tortoise to the missing link, from fish to Native American or Caribbean cannibal. Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan claim that, "unlike other Shakespearean characters, Caliban's identification as a beast has been applied literally rather than figuratively" (1991, p. 14), hence the central role his monstrosity plays in the understanding of the character. Caliban was described as a "savage" in the list of roles and the label "savage

and deformed slave” identified Caliban with *uncivilised* peoples whom early modern English subjects were beginning to *discover*.

It can be argued that the figure of Caliban in the twentieth century, after a period of serious politicization and objection to imperialism, became a mishmash of representations of subaltern groups in which the character would stand for any group and, thus, stand for none. There may have been a trivialization of the role, whose image might have become worn out like old soldiers’ boots that, after too many battles, tend to merge with the mud from the battlefield. Therewith, it seems that on most Western stages, in special after the mid-1980s with the conservative political turn in the USA, with Ronald Reagan, and in Britain, with Margaret Thatcher, *The Tempest* has been performed in a digestible way for upper middle-class audiences who, after all, are responsible for great part of the funds necessary to maintain professional theatre in Western countries¹.

The importance of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) for the existence of what could be called ‘mainstream Shakespeare’ is acknowledged by Robert Shaughnessy (1994, p.12) when he states that “the unique aspect of the RSC, as it was originally constituted, was that it took the tradition of modeling Shakespeare for the present, and visibly institutionalized it, making it a conscious, conspicuous policy”.

Founded in 1879, as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, the RSC was renamed in 1961, when Peter Hall was appointed artistic director. His project for the recently established company was “to raise [its] stature from mere ‘shrine’ filled with stars to an ensemble company of high quality” (ENGLE; LONDRÉ; WATERMEIER, 1995, p. 476), an undertaking that in many ways would parallel Bertolt Brecht’s Berliner Ensemble, not only in terms of structure but also in its initial resolution to present a theatrical practice that was left to the centre and intended to present Shakespearean plays that were relevant. The association of a relevant Shakespeare, in tune with contemporary issues, with the authority of Shakespearean tradition was, early on, a hallmark of the RSC. Since then the company’s importance rocketed as it has established a standard in acting and staging and has promoted a number of famous British actors and directors.

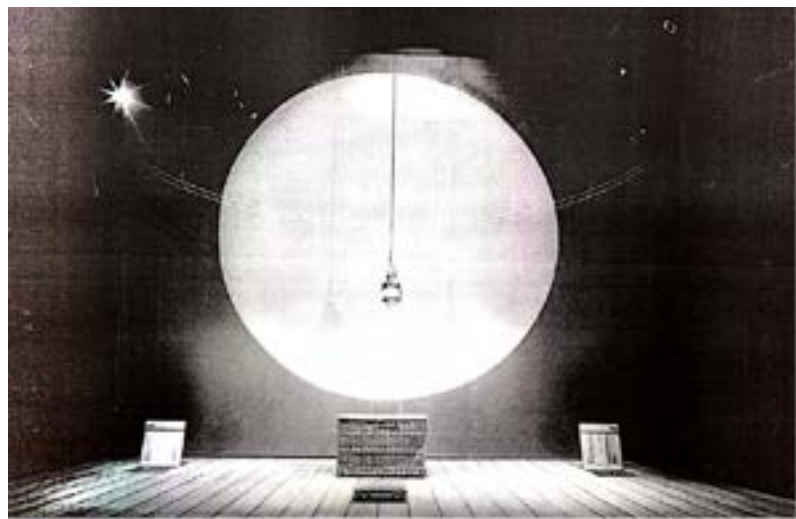
¹ Contrastively, the asset of the Caliban metaphor to peripheral countries persistently presents an element of identification between marginalized peoples and the Shakespearean character. Fernando Retamar, Aimé Cesáire, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, and Octave Mannoni are some of the authors who have appropriated Caliban to denounce instances of colonial domination. These appropriations reveal the efforts of colonized countries to express a culture that, after being dominated, reshaped, controlled, repressed and influenced by the colonizers, is eager to assert its independence.

The 1993 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Tempest* was director Sam Mendes's debut with the RSC. Mendes was twenty-six years old at the time, an accomplishment that earned him the epithet "theatre's wunderkind" (*The Times*, Nov. 28 1997) and was hailed "the best debut since [Adrian] Noble's own" (*The Guardian*, Aug. 13 1993). The "wonder boy's" first RSC production took place during a transitional period of British history. By early 1993 Margaret Thatcher's eleven-year-old administration had given place to John Major's lighter version of Thatcherite conservatism. Throughout the 1970s Britain had been subjected to a chain of strikes, and high inflation. In the first few years of Thatcherism, spending decreased in housing, energy, and education, whereas it increased in more than 2 billion pounds in defense (HARVEY; JONES, 1995, p. 31). Thatcher's policies were, in short, aimed at privatizing industries and dismantling the welfare state. Nevertheless, by 1993 a slight demand for change could be felt, for example, in the open and skeptical reaction of some Conservative MPs to the Maastricht Treaty, which established the basis for the European Union. Moreover, the trite afterglow of the Gulf War (1991), in conjunction with the stock market crisis known as Black Wednesday on 16 September 1992 —when Britain was forced to pull out of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism—, contributed to the decrease of Major's popularity. It can be argued, then, that even though the neoliberal credo was being put to the test in early 1993, it was still in force. Taking up a meteorological analogy, it can be said that there was some electricity in the air, not enough, however, to start a true full-blown tempest.

In this context of transition and of reorganization of political and social forces, the 1993 RSC production offered a rendering of *The Tempest* which did not challenge traditional readings, but which, by emphasizing, in many ways, the fusion of magic and spectacle, especially by means of self-reflexivity, catered for a conventional audience's demand for entertainment. The art-magic of Prospero was equalled with the illusionistic effects of the theatre to produce a *Tempest* for the eye and for the I. In other words, as the production obscured many of the playtext's difficult issues by decorating them, it created comfortable amusement for the middle-class audiences of the time.

Magic and illusion are elements that abound in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1993). The character with the most lines is Prospero, a magician who uses the knowledge of the occult as a means to get what he wants. Although the Folio names it "Art" (capitalized), this knowledge is essentially *technological*, i.e., it aims at specific ends without questioning their validity or morality and the illusions it creates are means to reinforce Prospero's dominion. This problematic, however, is not taken on by the 1993 production, which does not oppugn the nature of Prospero's magic and its visions.

Fig. 1 - The sets of the initial scene (RSC archive)



Illusions are present from the very first scene. Initially, nothing but a trunk decorates the stage (see Fig. 1), and then Ariel pops up and starts the tempest, which is presented by means of light and sound effects. The minimalist sets designed by Anthony Ward (piles of books and a ladder stand for Prospero's study, for example), symmetrically distributed across the stage, imply a sense of order and harmony which is rarely disputed. Spatially, the vision is indeed "harmonious charmingly"².

Furthermore, the sets conceal an intricate game of curtains and screens that allow characters to appear and disappear. In act 1 scene 2, to cite an instance, when Prospero is telling the story of his life to a rather bored Miranda, as he mentions the

² These are the words employed by Ferdinand (act 4, scene 1) to describe the fantastic vision summoned by Prospero of the spirits he called to perform his whims.

characters' names, they appear from behind a screen, perhaps as an attempt to familiarize the audience with the actors and their roles, but also with a strong link to the circus practice of presenting the performers to the public. A further implication of this presentation may be that it indicates a tendency to treat the audience as passive consumers, spoon-feeding them as if they were not capable of constructing the narrative relations by themselves. Indeed, there seems to be a hierarchy in the play that puts spectators in a position of subordination in relation to the director/playwright/Prospero figure.

The production's self-reflexivity purportedly exposes the stratagems of the theatrical discourse and, in a way, empowers the audience with the knowledge of how things work in the theatre. Ariel and the spirits, for example, working as stagehands subtly highlight the manipulation of props and sets. A more complex example of the working of self-reflexivity can be found in Prospero's character. Usually associated with the role of the director of a play, since his skills entail the creation of illusions and the command of actions, Prospero is a very ambiguous character for contemporary audiences, as actor Alec McCowen, who plays the part in the RSC production, said to the *Sunday Telegraph* (Aug. 8 1993): "The fascination with Prospero is that he is such an emotional jigsaw puzzle, lovable one minute, hateful the next". If Prospero shows a degree of compassion for Ariel and is capable of forgiving his enemies, he is, concomitantly, put in a position of power that oppresses characters and audiences alike. Such a structure is present, for example, in the problem with the meta-theatrical treatment, also prevailing in this production. The question raised here is that this treatment undermines the politics of colonialism and raises Prospero to an unthreatened position of the omnipotent puppet-master.

Jacques Rancière, critical of the stultifying relationship with the spectator, questions: "Why identify gaze and passivity, unless on the presupposition that to view means to take pleasure in image and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre?" (RANCIÈRE, 2009, p. 12). Following Rancière's provocations, it can be said that Mendes's strategy to reveal the "workings" of the theater, instead of "emancipating" spectators about the

illusions that cover up power relations, reinforces the role of Prospero as a *metteur-en-scène*, foreclosing meaning and emphasizing an asymmetrical relationship with the audience.

If Prospero is the director/dramatist, a powerful Ariel, played by Simon Russell Beale, is his stage manager, responsible for the use of the stage during the presentation. His costumes, similar to a bellboy's, indicate his position of subservience to Prospero. His posture, however, "proud and haughty" (*What's On*, Aug. 18 1993), reveals a certain disdain for everyone, including Prospero and Caliban. A reviewer went so far as to state that "not often you get *The Tempest* starring Ariel rather than Prospero" (*Spectator*, July 23 1994). This is an overstatement with a degree of accuracy, for Ariel re-characterizes the play by conferring aggressiveness and resentment to the magic.

Moreover, in the end of the first scene, when Ariel has stopped the tempest, Prospero stands in front of him, making the air spirit disappear. This can be read as a fusion of the two characters, the servant dissolving into the master. The servant is, in fact, the master's hands and eyes: Ariel moves the pieces for Prospero, from sets and props to characters; he is also present throughout the scenes, even when he has no lines. However, his relationship with his master is not unproblematic. Christine Dymkowski (2000, p. 47), for instance, argues that "Mendes's subversive Ariel epitomized the wrongfully imprisoned male spirit". The 1993 Ariel is not happy to serve and eventually reveals his discontentment towards Prospero.

Beale emphasizes the character's anger in act 4, when Ariel responds to Prospero's line "Say again, where didst thou leave these varlets?" (4, 1, 170-171)³. Here, Ariel responds with a long pause after "sir" in "I told you, sir, they were red-hot with drinking". This pause seems to reveal Ariel's impatience and unwillingness to continue serving. A few moments later, when freed by Prospero, Ariel turns to him and spits at his face. This takes place immediately after Ariel has locked Caliban in the trunk, the slave having given a sorrowful cry. The spitting may be understood as a reaction to the abuse Prospero has made Ariel impinge on Caliban and, on more general grounds, a vindication of the abuses Ariel himself has suffered. Peter Holland (1994, p. 204) states that the spitting

³ The numbers following quotes from Shakespeare's playtext indicate the act, scene and lines.

aims at "pinpointing the patronizing nature of our assumption that the perfect servant enjoys serving and that Prospero's treatment of him is not in its own way as brutal and humiliating a servitude as Sycorax's". The reception of this interpolation was ambivalent. Generally, reviewers did not like it, considering it a "disastrous slip" (*Sunday Times*, Aug. 15 1993), "a shocking moment, underlining, perhaps too heavily, the darkness of the play" (*Daily Telegraph*, Aug. 16 1993). One hypothesis that can be drawn from these reactions is that the spitting bothered so many people because it was not in tune with the overall thematic stance of the production, which downplayed the issues related to power relations. The spitting introduced a problem in a production that tried to embellish such relations with magic and illusion. Consequently, the stage business was cancelled for the London season, indicating an anxiety to conform to a *standard*, unproblematic view of the play.

As mentioned before, Ariel is Prospero's stage manager, carrying out the task of moving the pieces as on a chessboard. Interestingly enough, several of Ariel's interventions are actually interruptions of the action. In *The Tempest*, "interruption is the expression of power. It is Prospero, directly or via Ariel, who effects all the interruption in the play [...] interruptions – even scripted ones – are exciting, tantalizing, because they put the dramatic illusion at risk" (GIBBONS, 1994, p. 391). In the 1993 production, for example, during the first scene, Ariel stops the lantern (and, therefore, the tempest) so that the audience can hear the lines spoken by the characters on the ship. This could be thematically relevant because, after all, this first scene sets the topic of inversion of power relations: here, as the Boatswain says, "what cares these / roarers for the name of king?" (1, 2, 16-7). Nature imposes its might over men, and Ariel is empowered with the ability to concede speech to the people on board. A further instance of interruption that conveys meaning is the moment the interval is given. The performance stops with Prospero saying, "they now are in my power" (3, 3, 90). Surely the stress lies on the fact that, at this point, Prospero's schemes are working according to what he predicted. It can be argued that the selection of this moment reveals a concern to bolster Prospero's power and control, reinforcing the production's strict hierarchy.

Finally, it is necessary to comment on the masque, as it was presented in the 1993 production. According to Francis Barker and Peter Hulme, the masque is the most important moment of the play. They argue that Prospero's discourse, always trying to legitimize itself as an authority, reduces Caliban to a supporting role in the *magus'* plot to recover his duchy. Even if, eventually, this stratagem works to confirm the *natural* treachery of the native (and, therefore, justifies his dispossession), Caliban's rebellion proves singularly troublesome to the untroubled outcome of Prospero's plans. The moment that epitomizes the predicament Caliban causes Prospero is the masque. Here, according to Barker and Hulme (1986, p. 202), Prospero's disproportionate reaction when he recalls Caliban's conspiracy is an indication that "only for a moment, the effort invested in holding Prospero's play together as a unit is laid bare".

In the 1993 production there is a stark contrast between the minimalism of the sets and the ornately painted Victorian toy stage with twirling mechanical dolls used to present the masque. Because masques are extremely iconographic exhibitions, their allegorical nature reveals many of the themes that pervade the production. At first, a more obvious implication is the fact that, in the production, the characters in the masque are presented like puppets, dolls controlled by string. As mentioned before, there is a controlling figure on top of the stage, and that is Prospero, the puppeteer, the creator of illusion and the ultimate producer of the masque. The subject of the masque is marriage, since it is being enacted in honor of Ferdinand and Miranda. Nevertheless, Prospero does not allow space for considerations about the joys of sex. On the contrary, as one may recall, he hastily censors the young he hastily censors the young couple, imposing chastity and purity (4, 1, 51-7).

The most meaningful instance of interruption comes at the end of the masque, when Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano appear as puppets to remind Prospero of the conspiracy. The abrupt apparition of the three characters implies that Prospero's control is not as absolute as he might expect. Their intervention satirizes the masque, as they appear as grotesque version of the dolls. Actually, they will parody the

masque once again in act 4, scene 1, lines 194-255, when they frolic with Prospero's robe and are interrupted by the spirits. The masque represents an empowerment of Caliban and his sidekicks, since they are able to destroy Prospero's order. Instead of having Prospero be reminded of the conspiracy out of the blue, the physical presence of the three characters vehemently actualize the menace they represent to the order and the hierarchy of that fictional universe. The celebration of power structure and chastity ends in the frightful appearance of a character that symbolizes sexual appetite and revolt against domination: Caliban. As Barker and Hulme (1986, p. 202-3) point out, "Prospero's difficulties in staging his plays are themselves 'staged' by the play we are watching, this moment presenting for the first time the possibility of distinguishing between Prospero's play and *The Tempest* itself". In addition, it is possible to return to the previous discussion about illusionism to argue that the cardboard pop-up picture book that is used to introduce the masque demonstrates, once more, the way illusion leads to illusion in this production. From the book, to the toy stage, and then to the actual stage, images reflect each other as in a mirror, and the spectator loses track of the reality that initiates the whole process.

Caliban is actually connected with much of the violence and brutality of Shakespeare's play, which he both suffers and commits. In the 1993 production, however, Ariel's resentment is too strong for Caliban to compete. Ariel being so cold – lighting for Ariel is blue and for Caliban is red, accentuating their different natures, air and earth, respectively – rendering such an air of superiority, it can be argued that it is easy to empathize with Caliban.

Visually, David Troughton's Caliban does not present the signs of monstrosity one might associate with the character. The only eccentricities are sharp teeth and a small deformity in the left hand (which could be useful in digging out pignuts⁴). He wears but black trousers, rolled up in the shins. His voice is husky and his speech quite erratic, as if he is not completely accustomed to using *that* language⁵. He bends a little when walking, but not so much as to immediately refer to chimpanzees or missing links. He is, actually, a striking figure on stage, with his strong white body and bald head. The 1993

⁴ In act 2, scene 2, lines 159-160, Caliban says to Stephano "I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow. And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts".

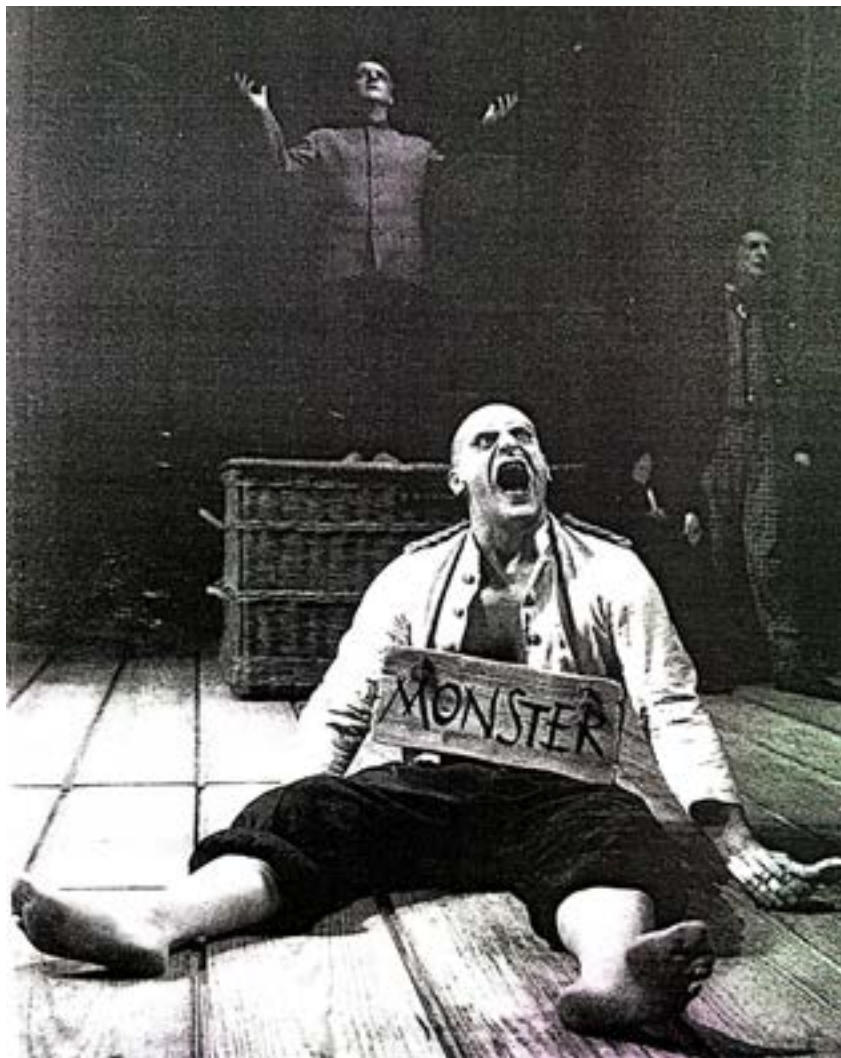
⁵ One of Caliban's most poignant speeches is his curse on Miranda and Prospero: "You taught me language, and my profit on 't / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language!" (1, 2, 437-439).

production does not present a devilish Caliban in visual terms. When Trinculo, played by David Bradley, for instance, sits on the slave and says “he smells like a fish, a very ancient and fish-like smell, a kind of -not the newest- Poor John” (2, 2, 25-7), he waggles his hand in front of his nose, denoting that the fish-like smell does not refer so much to Caliban’s appearance, but to the native’s lack of hygiene. Also, the delivery of the “This isle is full of noises” (3, 2, 135-43) speech is done with a voice that is not hoarse and that is clearly articulated, expressing a sensibility that is not at all distinctive of beasts. In this sense, one incongruity that can be identified in the presentation of Caliban refers to his relationship with Miranda. Caliban can be seen as a monster of prohibition, whose abnormal body serves to control the girl’s sexuality. In this production, his corpulence is indeed rejected by Miranda, who hides from him under Prospero’s table in their first scene together (after all, he had tried to rape her)⁶. However, Caliban’s threatening temperament is not so evident, inasmuch as Miranda confronts him at the “Abhorred slave” passage (1, 3, 352-63). Her assertiveness and straightforwardness notwithstanding, she is led to consort with Ferdinand, as to maintain Prospero’s lineage *pure*. It can be said, thus, that Caliban does represent sexual interdiction to Miranda, but not because of his monstrous body. On the contrary, it is because he is human that he represents an even greater menace to Prospero’s plans, for it is easier for Miranda to justify an unexpected desire for Caliban if his body does not hold evident signs of difference. Monstrous, then, becomes a term to refer to a divergent sexual behavior; in this case, *any* sexual desire at all, since it would damage Prospero’s puritan and colonialist plans for Miranda’s marriage.

Caliban’s only visual sign of monstrosity is, literally, the sign Stephano puts on him (Fig. 2), a sign that inscribes a quality that seems to be much more related to his role as a disrupter of order than to his physical attributes. Although Prospero says “... Then was this island / (Save for the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born) / not honoured with / A human shape.” (1, 2, 281-5), without a pause after “hag-born”, thus indicating that “not honored with a human shape” refers to Caliban and not to the island, the production as a whole presents a human Caliban.

⁶ Caliban’s sexual attack against Miranda is a difficult issue in readings that tend to be over-sympathetic with the character because of his being a subaltern. It can be said that his attack represents a radically antagonistic reaction to the colonial power which denies any possibility of interlocution. Nevertheless, I believe this is not a valid justification. In *The Tempest*, Miranda is also a subaltern in relation to Prospero and Caliban’s violence against her reveals a dark disposition in the native’s temperament that has to be considered. The danger, thus, is to reduce Caliban to a champion of peripheral cultures without acknowledging the ambiguity that is present in the playtext.

Fig. 2 - Caliban (RSC archive)



The visual inscription of a signifier that does not correspond to the way the character is actually rendered can be understood as an attempt to impute a characteristic that may help justify the inequity of the treatment given to him. As said before, the production's emphasis on magic and self-reflexivity does not yield much space for the politics underlying the playtext. By doing so, it reduces the relationship between Prospero and Caliban to a natural fact. It does not complicate issues such as dispossession, slavery, or otherness, once it presumes that Prospero is naturally superior to Caliban, hence the latter ought to obey. A moment that discloses this perception

is Prospero's rendition of "this thing of darkness I/acknowledge mine" (5, 1, 275-6), which, given in a nonchalant tone, does not at all portray the acceptance of Prospero's own darker side, but conveys "the master's reaction towards a creature who will always need rigid control" (BEYENBURG, 2000, p. 208).

The control over Caliban is exerted in many ways. One of the most intelligible forms of control is the character's entrances and exits. In the production's season at the Barbican Centre in London, prior to the Stratford season on which the present analysis is based, Caliban disappeared through a trap. However, at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, Caliban entered from and exited through a basket, usually pushed by Ariel. He is entrapped in the trunk as if he had no individual will, being transported to and fro according to Prospero's desire.

An instance of containment that is even more emblematic is Caliban's "Freedom high-day" song (2, 2, 181-2), which is sung by himself, Stephano, and Trinculo. The song, supposedly a celebration of Caliban's potential liberation from Prospero's control, ends when the three characters return to the trunk, implying that Caliban's act of emancipation is suppressed in his return to the basket.

The use of the trunk originated a necessary interpolation: "Go, sirrah, to my cell" (5, 1, 292) becomes "Go, sirrah, to *thy* cell", the cell, of course, being the basket that stands for Caliban's dwelling. Prospero's harshness towards Caliban can also be perceived in the cutting of "As you look / To have my pardon, trim [the cell] handsomely" (5, 1, 293-4), which leaves Caliban with no alternative for pardon, as he is denied the possibility of doing some housekeeping in return for forgiveness. Caliban is then locked back in the trunk with a sorrowful cry. His participation finishes with no actual forgiveness, but with Prospero's realization that he failed with these creatures.

Caliban and his fellow conspirators, Trinculo and Stephano, comprise a trio of misguided underdogs. Stephano, played by Mark Lockyer, is a drunken butler with an inclination for vulgar language and behavior –he urinates on the trunk that Ariel uses to bring him to stage– and Trinculo resembles a ventriloquist, with a talking dummy as his sidekick. In the production, Caliban firmly believes in the jesters. He kneels

before them, acting like a puppy, licking Stephano's shoes. Because Stephano is a parody of Prospero, with his dream of power and property, his treatment of Caliban does not differ from the way the *magus* acts towards him. Stephano's bottle, a bottle of 'spirits', which serves to control Caliban in approximately the same fashion Prospero's own spirits do, is also an allusion to Prospero's books, as Stephano tells Caliban to "kiss the book" several times throughout act 2, scene 2. Likewise, in act 3, scene 2, lines 34-5, Stephano strokes Caliban tenderly when saying "The poor monster is my subject, and he shall not suffer"; he then pauses and says "indignity", kicking Caliban. This attitude mirrors Prospero's betrayal of Caliban's trust as the later laments in "When thou cam'st first/thou strok'st me and made much of me" (I, 2, 333- 4). Similarly, if Stephano wears Prospero's robe, as an attempt to usurp his power, Caliban wears Stephano's butler outfit. Caliban becomes, thus, the servant's servant. The pattern of repetition, therefore, points at no freeing from oppression, since the hierarchical structure is maintained at all levels.

The 1993 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *The Tempest*, directed by Sam Mendes, is a spectacle for the eye. It is aligned with traditional readings of Shakespeare's play as a magical comedy instead of exploring themes that are more pertinent to the contemporary world. In relation to Caliban's character, it is noteworthy that he is, to an extent, isolated from the other characters. Other underlings such as Ariel, Stephano, and Trinculo do not partake in his revolt. Caliban's alterity is not recognized by "proud and haughty" Ariel, and is mocked by Trinculo and Stephano, who have dreams of greatness that repeat the pattern of domination exercised by Prospero. There is little space for a political *Tempest*, since the politically pregnant moments are downplayed by spectacle. Only the masque offers a fresher perspective, but then it can be argued that, in the same fashion that Prospero's play is disturbed by the thought of usurpation, Sam Mendes's production is aggravated by the physical presence of the three characters, indicating that *The Tempest* resists attempts at closures. Furthermore, the eventual elimination of the spitting reaffirms the anxiety to purge any problematic issue from the production.

Moreover, the production is attractive not only for the eye, but also for the *I*, since it grants the audience a product

that is easily consumable. By placing Prospero as the stage director, it pacifies contestation and evokes the perpetuation of the *status quo*. Interestingly, the transitional moment Britain was undergoing during the production's seasons demanded support for John Major's administration, which was then being panned by defiant voices. The cultural product that the Royal Shakespeare Company offered then did not prompt a critical response to its times.

This strategy is marked, however, by a strong ambiguity, in which Prospero's dominion has to be constantly strengthened by means of force. It is not, therefore, a *natural* power essentially connected to his persona, the white European colonizer, but an authority that is produced through violence (verbal and physical) and the construction of an *other* who is not entitled to the property of the land. Such a reading of *The Tempest* (1993) allows locating in Caliban's body a site of contestation of the oppressive forces represented by Prospero. By trying to make explicit the mechanisms that tyrannize Caliban, it may be possible to offer an alternative to understanding *The Tempest* (1993) that does not replicate or aggravate –even if at an unconscious level– the legitimization of Prospero's domination.

In addition, if one takes seriously the identification of Prospero with the playwright, it may be possible to draw an analogy between Prospero/playwright (Shakespeare)/dramatic text and the performance of that text. The dramatic text has, for a long time, exerted its authority over performances, creating the following false paradox: if a production tries to be Elizabethan, it fails because it is impossible to reconstitute the lived experience of past times; on the other hand, if it tries to *update* or *recreate* Shakespeare it is no longer *Shakespeare*.

The trajectory of Caliban on stage illustrates the ambiguous interaction among text, performance, and cultural milieu. Vaughan and Vaughan (2000, p. 76) highlight that *The Tempest's* malleability made possible a great number of recreations, including the non-dramatic media, where Caliban has experienced outstanding metamorphoses. From the representative of vices that need be eradicated to a postcolonial hero, the character stages the changing notion of the *other*. Virginia Mason Vaughan (1985, p. 405), in a solo article, muses that “as we ourselves change, our perceptions of Caliban –our own darkness– change. In the evolving image of Caliban we

see a reflection of Anglo-American intellectual history". From a non-Anglo-American point of view this notion is still valid since peripheral cultures can see in hegemonic renderings of Caliban the image the centre has of the character, and, at the same time, present their own version of Caliban, through appropriations.

Contemporary criticism, under the light of postcolonial theories, has pointed out that certain images represent the centre of a dominant narrative and they impart a justification of this domination by means of revealing a sequence of effect and cause that prevent the emergence of counter narratives, as Edward Said explains in "Identity, negation, and violence" (1988, p. 58). The image of Prospero holding his staff, involved by his robe, and surrounded by his books evokes the centre of a narrative that puts him as the righteous controller of the island, as he stands for political power (the "royal" robe), religious control (the staff like the Pope's) and scientific knowledge (the books).

By seeing Prospero as the subjugator and Caliban as the enslaved native, it is possible to perceive the operations of the encounter of cultures and the production of an *other*. Caliban is given a cruel treatment by Prospero and Stephano, his grotesque master, suffering physical and verbal abuse: he is referred to as "monster", "thing of darkness", "mooncalf", "poisonous slave", and constantly mistreated by the *magus'* spirits. The language and the abuse are an attempt to efface his humanity and, thus, legitimize the possession of the land by Prospero.

"There would this monster make a man", says Trinculo. There, in England, the figure of a monster, because it is eccentric (etymologically, out of the centre), may be converted into a commodity that can generate profit to one who knows how to capitalize on it. Monsters are easily turned into a spectacle for the *eye* and for the *I*, as is the 1993 RSC Caliban.

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Resumo

“Lá este monstro faria um homem”: poder colonial na produção de A Tempestade de 1993 pela RSC

Partindo de discussões sobre opressão, identidade e representação desenvolvidas na teoria pós-colonial contemporânea, este estudo propõe a análise da produção teatral de 1993 de A tempestade pela The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). Tem como objetivo discutir o papel da monstruosidade de Caliban na produção e como ela se refere a questões como relações de poder e espetáculo. O principal benefício de fazer uma análise da produção teatral de um texto de Shakespeare parece ser a possibilidade de ver o significado da peça como contingente, como resultado de uma série de elementos (corpo do ator, pistas visuais, instituição teatral, espectadores) que a libertam do fardo de ser considerada como o trabalho de uma mente única, universal e não contraditória que a crítica contemporânea apontou como o “Mito de Shakespeare”. Concluo que a produção da RSC em 1993 apresenta uma Tempestade que, em muitos aspectos, reforça posições tradicionais sobre a legitimidade do domínio de Prospero sobre a ilha.

Palavras-chave: A Tempestade; Caliban; poder; pós-colonial; performance.