

## THE TEMPEST

It is impossible, in fact, preposterous even to think that one can read **The Tempest** without a haunting sense of secondary meaning. Caliban, Miranda, Prospero, and Ariel have been interpreted from many points of view. The error of critics as a rule is in diminishing rather than expanding the significance of this great work. We cannot view or read this play as a delightful fairy tale. If **The Tempest** is read as a simple story, we are all bound to arrive at deceptive conclusions, for, unless we see in Prospero an image of divine power and Miranda as incarnate purity, we must agree that Prospero is a loquacious, doting old man, and Miranda a flirtatious, shallow-brained young girl.

Some critics of **The Tempest** have been inspired to beautiful flights of imagination. They agree that there is much more to this play than meets the eye. The over simple pigeon-holing of Caliban for the flesh, Prospero for the mind, Ariel for the spirit, and Miranda for the incarnation of innocent beauty, has been elaborated in a thousand ways. There is no question that the play deals with these and other themes which transcend time: the use and abuse of power; the search for freedom, etc.

In the limited space provided here, we will only deal with the idea of power and freedom.

### Caliban and Ariel: Angel and Beast

The appearance and character of both the sub-human and the supra human servants of Prospero is tartly contrasted. Ariel has in him in every way the airy tint that gives him his name, and we notice throughout that Miranda is never brought into contact with Ariel, least the natural and human qualities of the one and the supra-natural of the other should tend to neutralize each other. Caliban, on the other hand, all condensed and gross in feelings and images has yet the dawning of understanding without reason or the moral sense. It is the achievement of knowledge of the brute animal devoid of intellect.

At the opposite pole from Miranda, yet equally with her linked with nature, stands Caliban; the natural savage, or wild man of the woods: we shall see later that this does not exhaust the description of Caliban, but it is undoubtedly one aspect of him. And in connection with this, Shakespeare has thrown in an effect of a very special kind, almost a flash of prophecy. In a single dialogue between Prospero and Caliban we have painted the whole history of the relations between savage races and civilization, especially wherever civilization has not been reinforced by the elevating power of religion. First, the wrongs of the savage and his dispossession by the white man:

This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou takest from me.

(I, ii, 331-2)

Next, we see the early and pleasant relations between the two; the white man pets the savage like an animal:

When thou camest first,  
Thou strokest me, and madest much of me; wouldst give  
me

Water with berries in't; and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee.

(I, ii, 332-6)

At the same time, he is the useful slave who is ruthlessly exploited. But Caliban does not complain of being exploited; he complains rather of being betrayed.

There is an interchange of good offices: education on the one hand: on the other, reverence and gifts of natural riches:

(Thou wouldst) teach ne how . . . .  
And show'd thee all the qualities o'th' isle,  
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.

(I, ii, 334-8)

But now

. . . you sty me  
In this hard rock, while you do keep from me  
The rest of th' island.

(I, ii, 342-4)

Soon, there appears a moral gulf between the two that forbids equal intercourse:

. . . . But thy vile race,  
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures  
Could not abide to be with.

(I, ii, 358-60)

Caliban has fallen to the resentment which succeeds the breakdown of dependance. Prospero tries to justify himself: did not Caliban try to violate Miranda?

. . . . till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.

(I, ii, 347-8)

It is a justification of hatred on grounds of sexual guilt, which is often at the root of colonial racialism. The only apparent solution to the problem is the forced domination of the white man:

... therefore wast thou  
 Deservedly confined to this rock,  
 Who hadst deserved more than a prison.  
 (I, ii, 360-62)

So the gift of civilization is turned into a curse:

**You** taught me language; and my profit on't  
 Is, I know how to curse.  
 (I, ii, 363-64)

It is not that Caliban has savage and ineducable instincts or that he is so evil that even good seed would bring forth bad plants, as Prospero believes. The real reason is given by Caliban himself:

When thou camest first . . .  
 Thou strokest me, and madest much of me . . .  
 And I loved thee.  
 (I, ii, 332-6)

and, Caliban might have added, "then you abandoned me before I had time to become your equal . . ." In other words. "You taught me dependance, and I was happy; then, you betrayed me and plunged me into inferiority." It is indeed in some such situation as this that we must look for the origin of the fierce hatred sometimes shown by "evolved" natives; in them, the process of civilization has come to a halt and has been left incomplete.

A later scene (Act II, scene II) completes the analogy and exhibits civilization introducing one undeniably new "gift" into savage life—the gift of intoxicating drink. In this way, Caliban presents the aborigines of nature crushed beneath the advance of artificial life. Yet, the dramatist finds an attractiveness even for him. Beside Caliban, the dregs of natural life, he places the drunken sailors, the dregs of civilization: and as Caliban kneels to Stephano, we feel that the savage is the nobler of the two, for he has not lost the ability to revere.

The tragedy of Caliban is likened to the daily fall of man. Prospero agrees to trust him as a servant, not as a friend, but Caliban's rebellious nature refuses the leadership of reason.

Caliban is then worse than the beast; he is the primitive who renounces and falsifies the teachings received. His malice is not the beast's; it is the malice that resists discipline. Shakespeare uses Caliban to give a criticism of social life. Prospero has a perfect right to take the island where Caliban has been king. It is the right of reason against the blind passions, of authority against anarchism, of power that brings Prospero back to reality and realization of his past.

Here, therefore, are four beings who will be influenced by **The Tempest** Prospero and Ariel, who create it; Miranda, who will find love through it; and Caliban, who will take advantage of it to plunge himself further into the degradation of his being.

The identification of Caliban and his antithesis, Ariel, is too detailed to be fanciful. The very name of Ariel is borrowed from air and he is directly addressed: "Thou, which art but air." (V, i, 21). The identification with fire is not less complete: when describing the lightning, Ariel does not say that he set the ship a-fire, but that the ship was all a-fire "with me". (I, ii, 212).

Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,  
I fumed amazement. Sometime I'd divide,  
And burn in many places. . . .  
(I, ii, 197-99)

He has the qualities of air and fire. He is invisible, but as the lightning, he can take shapes as he acts. Like air and fire he can penetrate everywhere, treading the ooze of the salty deep, running upon the wings of the north wind, doing business in the veins of the earth when it is baked with frost. His natural speech is music, or waves of air. His ideas are the ideas associated with the atmosphere—liberty and omnipresence; to be "free as mountain winds", to fly on the bats back merrily, couch in the cowslip's bell, live under the blossom that hangs on the bough. Like the atmosphere he reflects human emotions without feeling them.

Ariel: If you now beheld them, your affections would  
become tender.  
Prosp: Dost thou think so, spirit?  
Ariel: Mine would, sir, were I human.  
(V, i, 17-19)

The analogy extends to character. Even a character can be found for the atmosphere. "The wind bloweth where it listeth". So Ariel is full of moods. The quarrel between Prospero and Ariel takes coherence if we see in it Prospero governing the incarnation of caprice by out-capricing him; there is an absence of moral seriousness throughout and a curious irony, by which Prospero, under the guise of invective, is bringing out Ariel's brave indurance and delicate refinement. A single passage is sufficient to connect Ariel with upward tendencies of human nature:

For thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthly and abhorred commands,  
Refusing her grand hests. She did confine thee,  
By help of her most potent ministers  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine.  
(I, ii, 270-77)

It is clearly painted in these lines the instincts of light oppressed by the power of darkness until the deliverer arrives—in this case, Ariel imprisoned by Sycorax, delivered by Prospero.

Over against Ariel, an Elemental Being of the higher order, is set an Elemental Being of the lower order, Caliban. Caliban approaches near enough to humanity to stand, as we have seen, for the natural savage. But his origin from the Devil and the Island Witch forbids us to rank him as a human. He is directly addressed by Prospero as "Thou, Earth, thou:" and terms like "monster", "mooncalf", "disproportioned shape", so constantly applied to him are associated with the Earth-gnome. The connection with water is also obvious from the perpetual attaching of the idea **fish** to his personal appearance. The sight of him provokes exclamations of "fish" and doubts whether he is a fish or a man. "Fish-monster", "debased fish," are common epithets. When Trinculo calls him "half-fish and half a monster," the identification with the Elemental Being of Water and Earth is complete. The words describing his birth sufficiently suggests his animal nature:

Save for a son that she did litter here,  
A freckled whelp hag-born—not honoured with  
A human shape.

(I, ii, 282-4)

He not only indulges in the lowest passions but actually gloats over them:

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness will not take,  
Being capable of all ill!

(I, ii, 352-54)

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Prospero is the artist, Ariel the art. Ariel personifies the poetic spirit of Shakespeare, he has power over everything under the command of Prospero. He is the agent of good, of grace. All the good will be performed by him. He promotes good and destroys evil. Caliban, on the other hand, personifies all that is evil, all the ugliness in man, the animal nature of man. Yet, there is a redeeming feature in Caliban: he is innocent in his animality. He is not responsible for it. He is the material counterpart of Ariel's spiritual essence. Air, Fire (Spiritual Elements), Earth, Water (Material Elements): all four elements compose man. Hamlet and Prospero are too much concerned with one specific part. We must join Caliban and Ariel in order to have a complete man. Too much of one element creates disorder. Hamlet and Macbeth have too much earth. They each kill a king. Ariel has no earth or water; but Caliban has some fire and air, enough to appreciate music and be converted. Three other passages come to mind when referring to the four elements.

Hor. He was a goodly king.  
Ham. He was a man, take him for all in all.  
(Hamlet, I, ii, 187-8)

A combination and a form indeed  
 Where every god did seem to set his seal  
 To give the world assurance of a man.  
 (idem. III, iv, 60-62)

The third, memorable by the actual mention of the elements, is found in Julius Caesar and applied to Brutus.

. . . . The elements  
 So mi't in him that Nature might stand up  
 And say to all the world, This was a man!  
 (Julius Caesar, V, v, 92-4)

As Caliban is half beast, Ariel is half angel. Found by Prospero imprisoned in a cloven pine, and freed, Ariel becomes the instrument of his magic; Ariel is the servant as Caliban is the slave. Therefore, on the one hand, he is superior to his master because he can perform tasks impossible to Prospero and, on the other hand, he is the servant thankful for his liberty:

Thou best know'st  
 What torment I did find thee in; thy groans  
 Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts  
 Of ever-angry bears: it was a torment  
 To lay upon the damn'd, which Sycorax  
 Could not again undo: it was mine art,  
 When I arriv'd and heard thee, that made gape  
 The pine, and let thee free.  
 (I, ii, 286-93)

Ariel, then, has a triple significance: he is, first, the pure power of the spirit and of reason against brute force. He cannot serve Sycorax.

Thou was a spirit too delicate  
 To act her earthly and abhorr'd commands . . .  
 (I, ii, 272-73)

He is, second, the supernatural force used by man to redeem fallen man. Finally, Ariel is the imprisoned grace freed by the goodwill of man, serving him and yet asking for the liberty of Paradise.<sup>11</sup>

In Ariel is personified all humanity, redeemed by Christ, free to obey God, but not free to do evil. The ultimate freedom will be the final discarding of "this mortal coil" in death, the eternal possession of the Author of Life and freedom.

(Hamlet, III, i, 67)

Ariel: Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,  
 Let me remember thee what thou hast promised  
 Which is not yet performed me.

Prosp:           How now! moody?  
                   What is't thou canst demand?  
 Ariel:           My liberty.  
   (I, ii, 242-5)

Even Caliban—under the influence of wine, a new and damping innovation in his life suddenly springs into an outburst far from comic, but senseless, raging, ungovernable, demanding his liberty:

. . . . 'Ban, 'Ban, Cacaliban  
 Has a new master—Get a new man.  
 Freedom, heyday! Heyday, freedom! Freedom, heyday,  
 Freedom!  
   (II, ii, 188-191)

Freedom! Caliban yearn for the freedom to destroy; Ariel sees the freedom of song, the freedom of the pure of soul.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now  
 Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.  
   (V, i, 93-94)

Ferdinand and Miranda discover a freedom in loving; and Gonzalo, a profound one in finding:

. . . . all of us ourselves  
 When no man was his own.  
   (V, i, 212-3)

Prospero is free of an accomplished task, free to say:

. . . . I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book.  
   (V, i, 54-7)

This freeing of the spirit we must give to the last, in some sense the loveliest, the most profound and the most eminently Christian of the plays.

Shakespeare lays down his wand, satisfied at the sight of the last world of his creation, a world so sublime that it intrudes into the celestial dwelling of the magnificent magician, the Master of the Universe.

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