

# PROSPERO, ARIEL AND CALIBAN IN SHAKESPEARE'S *The Tempest*

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## Abstract

*If Prospero is to be regarded as the protagonist in Shakespeare's The Tempest, the ruler or lord of the island, who enforces his will through domination and control, Ariel and Caliban are then his two most useful instruments through which such domination and control have been executed to catch 'authority'. But Prospero does not use the same means to bag 'submission' from them. Or it may be said that the play does not allow him to establish his authority very smoothly. The present paper examines Prospero's overt colonial strategy and the subtle undercurrents of resistance and sometimes defiance from his subordinates. The conclusion once again reiterates that Prospero's story is not the whole story of the Tempest.*

**Keywords:** Prospero, dominance, submission, servitude, resistance, Caliban, Ariel.

If Prospero is to be regarded as the protagonist in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the ruler or lord of the island, who enforces his will through domination and control, Ariel and Caliban are then his two most useful instruments through which such domination and control have been executed to catch 'authority'. This becomes clear particularly in his relationship with Ariel whom from the beginning Prospero introduces as his possession and as such repeatedly uses the possessive pronoun 'my':

- Approach my Ariel. Come! (1, 2, 187 – 88)
- My brave spirit (1, 2, 207)
- Why that's my spirit. (1, 2, 215)
- My quaint Ariel. (1, 2, 317)
- my industrious servant. (4, 1, 34)
- my Ariel! (4, 1, 83)
- my dainty Ariel! (5, 1, 95)

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- my tricky spirit! (5, 1, 227)
- my diligence (5, 1, 241)

The reason behind this frantic need to affirm his masterly position in relation to subjugated Ariel is twofold. First, like Caliban, Ariel also originally belonged to Sycorax. In comparison to Caliban and Ariel, Prospero is but a new comer in the island. True, he has become the lord on it, but his 'becoming' is neither unchallenged nor beyond suspicion. On one hand, Caliban makes his rebellious declaration:

The Island is mine, by Sycorax, my mother

Which thou takest from me.

On the other, both his subjects on the stage and audience in the auditorium doubt that had Sycorax been living and had she not died three years before his arrival to the island, it would not have been so easy for Prospero to capture this new found island. Himself aware of this, Prospero therefore, leaves no stone unturned and makes an all out attack on Sycorax and her black magic, standing on the vantage point of a favourable condition with no one to challenge his 'colonial narrative'. Caliban, he has put in side his pocket, with the thrashing charge of 'attempted rape' and uninterrupted threats of endless cramps and torture. But his fear in Ariel sticks deep. Hence from the very beginning he strives to keep him under pressure, using three tactics. First, he reminds Ariel from what pain he has released him, and in this context he 'weaves' his colonial narrative, speaking whatever befits his colonial agenda of othering Sycorax and ensuring an approval to his version of the story by Ariel who is bound to supply a mere 'Yes' to everything coming from his master's voice. Second he gives Ariel a nasty warning for further imprisonment, following the terms and conditions of Sycorax's prescription verbatim, almost in a copy – paste manner. Prospero's reason for this may be that 'this has worked well', but the text ironically challenges his failure to devise even a new punishment for Ariel as nothing but an 'essential' weakness that confirms that Prospero is no magician ( already confirmed in Milan, where he failed to defend his authority against his brother Antonio and was in fact, driven out of the Kingdom, along with his baby daughter, into the deep blue sea where the salt water drops from his eyes melted to register his helplessness) or appears as such, only in 'borrowed robes'. Third, he has already offered a bait of full one year's freedom for Ariel and he repeats it time to time, so that Ariel too, does not revolt like Caliban. His target is to arrest not only Ariel but Ariel's loyalty to him, by hook or by crook.

But the greater and more desperate need to keep Ariel under 'firm control' stems from Prospero's original crisis, that he is in fact, no magician, he does not have any command or power upon the universe and its natural or human elements. Had he really mastered some magical power, he could have installed at least some

resistance ( as did Caliban against him in the island) in Milan itself, he could have devised some way to ensure safety in the sea voyage by boat or could have reached a better land or country than the desolate island. To Miranda's question, "How came we ashore" (1, 2, 158) his secret gets revealed:

**By Providence divine.**

Some food we had and some fresh water that a noble Neapolitan, Gonzalo,  
Out of his charity, who being then appointed  
Master of this design, did give us, with  
Rich garments, linens, stuffs and necessaries,  
Which since have steaded much; so, of his gentleness,  
Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom. (1, 2, 159 – 168)

It was neither his ability that brought them ashore nor his far-sight that provided the rationing and other necessaries, and if Ganzalo forgot to furnish the 'books' (which the magician claims to value above his dukedom, but still, forgets to take with himself!) in the boat, the play could have ended there, for Caliban later will repeatedly refer to the power of these books:

Having first seized his books (3,2,97)  
Remember  
First to possess his books; for without them  
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not  
One spirit to command: they all do hate him  
As rootedly as I. (3, 2, 99 – 103)

Prospero's own portrayal of their peril in the sea shows that he loves more to complain than to cure a situation by his own effort:

There they hoist us,  
To cry to the sea that roar'd to us, to sigh  
To the winds whose pity, sighing back again  
Did us but loving wrong. (1, 2, 148 – 151)

True it is that Prospero assumes the position of the Master and Lord in the island:

Know for certain  
That I am Prospero and that very duke  
Which was thrust forth of Milan, who most strangely  
Upon this shore, where you were wreck'd, was landed,  
To be the lord on't. (5, 1, 57 – 62)

True it is that the King's Bible came out in 1611, the very year of *the Tempest*, and much ink has ever since been spent to suggest that Shakespeare consciously portrays Prospero in the light of God/ the Lord/ the Savior (Engan 48, 50), who ultimately

forgives his enemies, and true it is also that the Prospero himself announces the list of magical feat he has accomplished in the play, thereby reconstructing his God/Mage like image in the play:

I have bedimmed  
 The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,  
 And twixt the green sea and the azure vault  
 Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thinder  
 Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
 With his own bolt; the strong based promontory  
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up  
 The pine and cedar. Graves at my command  
 Have waked their sleepers, oped and let 'em forth  
 By my so potent art. (5, 1, 39 – 50)

But it is interesting that Shakespeare's play does never give the audience any opportunity to see before their eyes, that Prospero not only speaks but also performs, single handed, what he claims to have the ability to perform. Rather, we see that he is more comfortable to make orders and it is Ariel who under his threats, raises the Tempest, keeps the passengers and ships safe, their wet clothes getting finer and newer through the sea-change. It is Ariel who again plays the enchanting music, who dismisses the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian over Alonso, and that of Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano over Prospero. It is Ariel who like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table and the banquet vanishes and then Ariel also gets vanished. Not only does he arrange a show of several shapes which dance, mock and mow on the stage but, in fact, the masque itself, which Prospero claims to display before the royal audience as a special dish of his art, has been organized by Ariel:

Pros: Thou and thy meaner fellows your last service  
 Did worthily perform; and I must use you  
 In such another trick. Go bring the rabble,  
 O'er whom I give thee power, here to this place:  
 Incite them to quick motion; for I must  
 Bestow upon the eyes of this young couple  
 Some vanity of mine art: it is my promise  
 And they expect it from me.  
 Ari: Presently?  
 Pros: Ay, with a twink.  
 .....  
 Well.  
 Now come my Ariel! Bring a corollary,  
 Rather than want a spirit: appear, and perty!  
 No tongue! All eyes! be silent. ( Soft Music, 4, 1, 34 – 68)

This is Prospero's real magic. He wants to bestow upon the eyes of his royal guests "some vanity of mine art", he himself promised it and he knows that all spectators expect this from him. And therefore, he smilingly puts the burden and responsibility of the show on Ariel's shoulder. The spirit will work hard and arrange the show. Prospero will bag and swallow all the applause.

To keep the labour continually engaged and locked in production is a capitalist venture. To turn the labour into a slave in order to ensure an uninterrupted flow of 'action' is a colonialist enterprise. In the island, Prospero attains both through an implementation of the mechanics of suppression. The techniques of suppression and domination have been first probed into and explained by the Norwegian physiologist Ingjald Nissen in the 1940s, further developed into seven master suppressive techniques in the 1970s (Sandvik et al. 14 – 17). Two of these are seen to have been extensively used by Prospero in *the Tempest*, 350 years before the birth of the theory. The first suppression technique deals with the issue of 'making invisible' in order to get control over another individual by marginalizing or omitting them. The stage directions emphasize the fact that Ariel is never visible to anyone else than Prospero and in two occasions the Master orders Ariel to remain invisible: "Thy shape invisible retain thou still" (4, 1, 85) and "To the King's ship, invisible as thou art" (5, 1, 97). These are reiterations, originating from Prospero's thundering order at the initial stage of the play:

**Be subject**

**To no sight but thine and mine, invisible,**

**To every eyeball else. Go take this shape**

**And hither come in't: go, hence with diligence<sup>1</sup>(1, 2, 301 – 04)**

– a cunning move, which not only makes Ariel 'literally' invisible, thus allowing others assume that Prospero is the real magician performing the 'wonder', but in fact, enables Prospero to rob of the entire credit of 'performance' from Ariel, thereby, metaphorically projecting himself progressively getting larger than life and Ariel, gradually becoming smaller, tiny, insignificant and invisible.

The second suppression technique is related to issue of producing threats of violence and physical torture, with a bait of offering release. And Prospero is simply dexterous in his handling of this technique. It is interesting to note that in the play, his real power lies in inflicting pain upon the beings who are normally non-human, namely Ariel and Caliban, the first an airy spirit and the second, a sub human beast, ape, fish or monster. Prospero's angry words to remind Ariel of his own good deeds: "Dost thou forget/ From what a torment I did free thee" " (1, 2, 250 – 51) originate from his own need to affirm his power and authority through a threat of further installment of the same agony and torture upon disobedience:

Pros: If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak  
 And peg thee in his knotty entrails till  
 Thos hast howl'd away twelve winters.  
 Ari: Pardon master;  
 I will be correspondent to command  
 And do my spiriting gently. (1,2, 294 – 99)

Commenting on the relationship between Prospero and Ariel George Lamming has said:

It is a dangerous partnership, and Prospero never hesitates to remind him of his servitude. Like some malevolent old bitch with a bad conscience, Prospero's habit is to make you aware of his power to give. He is an expert of throwing the past in your face.

(Qtd. In Hulme and Sherman 153)

For Ariel, the past is not very sweet. He lives in the present and hopes for a better future. He surrenders to Prospero's threats: " I must/ Once in a month recount what thou hast been/ Which thou forgot'st" ( 1, 2, 262 – 63) and having been lured to the hope of getting liberty, serves the master day in and day out. Prospero's promise to grant Ariel his much expected release is possibly Prospero's most powerful weapon to ensure Ariel's service and servitude to his project, and he bestows it at regular intervals:

- I will discharge thee(1, 2, 298)
- Thou shalt be free(1,2, 497)
- Thou shalt have the air at freedom(4,1,265)
- Thou shalt ere long be free(5,1, 87)
- But yet thou shalt have freedom(5,1,96)
- Thou shalt be free(5,1, 241)

Because Prospero emphasizes his power to release throughout the play, he asserts the role of the Savior, but that very role once again gets undercut when ultimately, in a supreme irony, Ariel does not get his freedom, a minute earlier than others, but only at the end of the play, when Prospero does not have any further need of him, or in fact, not even then, Ariel's additional task being to ensure a calm wind and a gentle sea during the party's return journey to Milan.

Caliban, however, is not so submissive. For him the past is important and still alive. Sticking to his faint memories, Caliban glorifies the beauty of the island, his motherland, in the true sense of the term, and refuses to be robbed of his original aboriginal culture:

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, 363 – 65)

Equally aggressive, he throws the challenge on the face of Prospero:

This island's mine, by Sycorax, my mother,

Which thou takest from me. (1, 2, 331 – 32)

Like Ariel, Caliban is also given a reminder of Prospero's generosity and of his goodness: "I have used thee, / (Filth as thou art), with human care, and lodged thee/ In mine own cell" (1, 2, 345 -47). But unlike Ariel, Caliban refuses to be lured by Prospero's pseudo benevolent 'power to give'. He knows the rights cannot be given but are to be achieved by struggle. And Caliban's struggle combats and undercuts Prospero's story, the coloniser's narrative. By his own claim Prospero initially served as a school master for Caliban. But, towards the end of the play, when he accuses Caliban of an incurably vile nature : " A devil, a born devil, on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,/ Humanly taken, all, all lost, quite lost;" (4, 1, 188 – 190) , the readers come to understand that the vile nature in Caliban stems from the cumulative effect of Prospero's own teaching, othering and colonizing agenda in the island.

But even though, Ariel fails to resist Prospero's suppressing stratagem on his face, as does Caliban, there is one respect in which he takes his revenge, upon Prospero, and it is no mean achievement. Unlike Prospero's words which almost always bear a thundering command, abuse or threat, the music Ariel plays *in the Tempest* is sedative and capable of attracting listeners, who follow it as blindly as the river follows the call of the sea. Ferdinand speaks of its effect upon him:

Where should this music be? I' the air or earth?

It sounds no more: and sure, it was upon

Some god o' the island. Sitting on a bank,

Weeping again the king my father's wreck,

This music crept by me upon the waters,

Allaying both their fury and my passion

With its sweet air: thence I have follow'd it

Or it hath drawn me rather. But 'tis gone.

No, it begins again. (1, 2, 387 – 395)

It is Ariel's music that makes Ferdinand go or 'draws' him toward Miranda, the direction that Ariel 'devises'. Miranda – who has never seen any other men than Caliban and Prospero – takes Ferdinand's beauty as a sign of divinity: "I might call him / A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble" ( 1, 2, 415 – 17). During Miranda and Ferdinand's first encounter, Prospero seems to be astonished by what is going on and his overwhelming delight comes out two times, breaking all check valves of reserve and restrain: " [Aside] it goes on, I see,/ As my soul prompts it. Spirit fine spirit! I'll free thee/ Within two days for this" (4, 1, 419 – 21) and once again shortly after this, " At the first sight/ they have changed eyes. Delicate Ariel, /

I'll set thee free for this" ( 1, 2, 440 – 42). It seems that Ariel has hit upon something that Prospero himself had not thought of. When he recognizes the brilliancy of the idea, he does not hesitate, scheming as he is, to sink his claws into Ferdinand in order to control and capture him. And therefore, he readily agrees to Ariel's promised freedom.

But the happiness of his daughter's prospectful marriage, once again undercuts Prospero's mission of reclaiming Milan. For, hereafter, the issues of Ferdinand, the present Prince of Naples, will sit on the throne of Milan. Once Prospero accused his brother Antonio of the crime to 'subject his coronet' and 'bend the dukedom yet unbowed to the feet of Naples (1, 2, 114 – 15). He reproached it as the most 'ignoble stooping'. But at the end of the play Milan sees him from afar to do the same misdeed himself, which once again proves that Prospero never learns anything in the play. His magic wand broken or unbroken, he is the same Prospero, careful to his own interest and indifferent, coarse, instinctively vile and arrogant to those of others. Here his image gets complete as the ideal colonialist.

But, Ariel's playing the role of master and making Prospero follow his plan as a subject, is another important image of the play and it carries significant overtones. Throughout the play, the coloniser's only fear was that his subjects did not get united. Therefore he intentionally used Ariel upon Caliban and his gang. Caliban's revolt, he knew, must not be supported by other 'spirits' who hate Prospero "as rootedly as I" (3, 2, 102 – 03). Does Caliban's use of the word 'spirit' here, refer to Ariel? Did Ariel too, hate Prospero in the same way as Caliban did? The play never gives a direct answer to this. But 'delicate Ariel's' delicate way of taking revenge does show that the coloniser's real power lies not so much in his magic as in his tactics to keep the subjects divided and ruled. Once they come together, Caliban in his open revolt, Ariel in his delicate strategy, once the workers' objectives meet together to end the misrule of the master, Prospero does not have anything more to do and his end is indeed in 'despair'.

## Reference

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