

# MONSTERS ON THE ISLAND: CALIBAN'S AND PROSPERO'S HIDEOUS PROGENY



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Shakespeare's *The Tempest* presents peculiar uses of the supernatural. Prospero's «rough magic» transforms the island, the self-contained allegorical space where he is physically and emotionally exiled. Prospero's uses of magic are mostly repressive, not only against Caliban, that representative of «utter otherness», but also against the spirits inhabiting the island, theatrically embodied in Ariel. Caliban, Ariel, Ferdinand—even nature—are slaves of the colonial ruler, who has defeated them by means of his verbal art. Caliban's «hideous progeny», is inextricably linked to figures of «otherness» both historical and literary (for instance, Frankenstein's monster). But Prospero's «progeny» (for example, the mad scientist) is also made explicit in texts indebted to Shakespeare's masterpieces.

This paper attempts an interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* taking into account the deployment of supernatural powers—or that which is perceived as supernatural—as a factor intrinsically united to the plot and the dramatic action of the play. *The Tempest* produces, among other devices, a crucible of magic, spiritual embodiments of natural elements, and a pattern of utter monstrosity: Caliban, who, paradoxically enough, was a representation of the so called “natural man” in Renaissance literature. Our main emphasis will be precisely on the meaning of monstrosity in the play, and its apprehension from a colonial perspective, which transforms the natural into the supernatural, both from the point of view of the conqueror and the conquered. We shall also pay attention to Caliban's “hideous progeny”—ironically punning on Mary Shelley's self-referential allusion in her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*—, that is to say, some selected images of monstrosity intertextually linked to Caliban. Caliban is an influential figure in posterior treatments of the monster as the epitome of otherness, and his seed appears in a succession of insulated characters—physically or mentally, or both—perceived as “other”: Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, the creature in *Frankenstein*, the vivisected hybrids in Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and, arguably, the “Lord of the Flies” in the homonymous novel by William Golding.

Finally, our analysis will also focus on the repressive utilization of supernatural powers as seen from a colonial framework, also dealing with Prospero's “hideous progeny”, one of the magician's intertextual investitures being that of the transgressing scientist.

*The Tempest* is full of charms, enchanting music, mysterious apparitions, strange shapes, brave spirits and monsters. Just as “our life / Is rounded with a sleep”, so the play is rounded with Prospero's magic. When he arrives on the island, Prospero uproots Sycorax's black magic and imposes his own “rough” magic. Magic, we should remember, opens and closes the play, only to remind us of the insubstantiality of our lives. But before Prospero abjures his magic and promises to drown his books, we have a full view of the uses to which Prospero puts his supernatural powers.

On the whole, Prospero's art is verbal. It is based on the unlimited power of the word, of eloquence as understood in the Renaissance vision of the world (Cheyfitz 1991, 223). Prospero's power, as Caliban realizes, is grounded on his books. Books are magical in *The Tempest* and endow the interpreter or reader with tremendous prerogatives<sup>1</sup>. Prospero's power is seen in remarkable interventions and marvelous works which further his control on the island. Among his "providences" there are what we can term "creative" uses of magic, like delightful pageants or charming music, but we also have a few chances to witness Prospero's repressive use of magic. Besides the disturbing "physical" effects of magic, like the spirits or apes which pinch, fright or bite Caliban, this device intervenes in a more elusive way in *The Tempest*. In the same way that pageants, banquets and nymphs vanish in the play, also Caliban's past, together with his culture, his language and his sovereignty over the island is, we can say, snatched away by magic. Magic delights the senses throughout the play, and fills up the absences Prospero's art creates. It is utterly successful in taming Ariel, in raising the tempest at the opening of the play, and fulfils some other purposes, but proves faulty in the subjection of Caliban, the monster, a figure of rebellion, misunderstanding and difference.

The uses of allegory and enchantment seem to be adequate vehicles for the supernatural background of the play. Prospero's supernatural powers—his magic—constitutes a representation of colonial repression. But this repression is not only exerted upon the monster: another representative of otherness, Miranda, suffers from the patriarchal manipulations of Prospero concerning her chastity. Submission to her father is total, unlike Ariel's—and of course Caliban's—reaction. Prospero controls the hostile setting of the island, a place where he—the same as Robinson Crusoe, Victor Frankenstein when making the female monster in a remote place in the Orkneys, Moreau and the children in Golding's novel—is forced to stay. Despite Gonzalo's laudatory opinion, the island is for its new master anything but paradise or utopia, and it simply becomes a place of conflict where homesickness and revengeful thoughts meet motivated wonder. Prospero's role in controlling all his possessions on the island is not far from that played by the prototypical master of a colonial plantation. Armed with his supernatural powers, he has to face any possible source of menacing "difference". As Greenblatt (1976) argues, magic is not real magic in the colonial context, but is presented as such when viewed from the outside. The colonized perceived the white colonizers in some cases as omnipotent magicians and/or supernatural beings.

In general terms, "island literature" deals with otherness; in keeping with our referential framework, the unknown island is conceived of as a self-contained possible world for the colonial imagination, a place where anything unexpected can happen. In the case of Prospero, as soon as he reaches the island he opposes Sycorax's black magic and, after defeating her—a female witch, and gender should be significant here—he seizes power and control over the island, submitting the black magician's son and converting him into his slave. The problem is that Prospero seems to be changing Sycorax's forbidden powers for his own black magic. Both are equally repressive. The ex-Duke of Milan envisions himself as a Messiah who uses white magic, but he surpasses those limitations, and his image as a white magician is de-constructed throughout the play. Therefore, Prospero's atti-

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<sup>1</sup> In this respect, Ana Manzanás, in a forthcoming article (see Bibliography), studies the analogy between visions of "the other" in *The Tempest* and Afro-American slavery. She states that: «Slavery supporters took advantage of the power of the written word—a power which in the eyes of the African slaves was akin to magic—to impose a providentially ordained submission onto their subjects.»

tude equals the role of the colonial ruler and the necromancer. Moreover, his omnipotent, god-like control resembles that described by the French philosopher Michel Foucault as one of the most nightmarish fantasies of power ever designed by the human mind: we are referring to the metaphor of the "Panopticon": a prison where the jailer can see and hear everything, but, conversely, he cannot be seen or perceived by the prisoners (in Rabinow 1984, 206). In this role Prospero is not far from becoming a forerunner of Orwell's Big Brother (the omnipotent Party) in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Prospero is the master in the colonial prison of his island, and he even uses in his repressive zeal the reluctant force of his "political police", represented by Ariel and the other spirits. However, the paradoxical fact is that he is also a prisoner—he is unwillingly compelled to remain on the island—the same as the other characters oppressed by his magic: Ariel, the spirits, Caliban, the courtiers... and Miranda, that object of "admiration" etymologically connotated, for Caliban to see but not to enjoy. Prospero's invisibility—also transferred to Ariel, his main ally—is precisely a symbol of this "panopticism", this metaphor of absolute control, this paranoiac desire of seeing without being seen. Prospero's supernatural powers, based on his linguistic "supremacy", are then repressive, and this tyranny is transmitted through teaching his system of values, the knowledge that will perpetuate his power, although he never lets his pupils share his hermeneutic magic: this becomes an arcane and unapproachable power which cannot be fully acquired by other characters.

On the other hand, it can be said that Prospero "creates" and transforms Caliban by means of his system of values and his "culture". In an Anglo-American framework, the role of Caliban is, for instance, that of the American Indian, the African or the Irish, who were systematically got rid of their territorial, moral and political rights by the colonial aggressors, receiving on the other hand the language and civilized "culture" of the Empire.

The allegorical space of *The Tempest* and its inhabitants is reproduced with intertextual power in other works of literature, as we have already pointed out, and some of them deal with monstrosity. Again, Foucault (1967, 68-70) makes us aware of the fact that a "monster" is something or someone to be *shown* (cf. Latin, *monstrare*; French, *montrer*; Spanish, *mostrar*; English, demonstrate). A monster does not necessarily present supernatural connotations, but monstrosity is in many occasions perceived as supernatural: although Caliban is a representative of the Renaissance "natural man", his origin and birth include him within the domains of the supernatural. According to Bishop Berkeley, *esse est percipi*: fear of "the other", repulsion of his "ugliness" and difference, contribute to the configuration of monstrosity as supernatural. In the colonial context, monsters possess features that are perceived as "not belonging with our community and our apprehension of Nature", but with a supernatural sphere. The apparently supernatural feature of monstrosity as represented in a "real" or allegorical island links several novels which, in our opinion, take *The Tempest* as the main intertextual source. Chris Baldick (1987, Chapter 2) studies the politics of monstrosity in an excellent and intriguing book, reminding the reader of the fact that, in Shakespearean terms, this characteristic is habitually used from a moral point of view as an illustration of a particular vice or transgression: «The monster is one who has so far transgressed the bounds of nature as to become a moral advertisement» (Baldick 1987, 12). The worst transgression is that associated to the "sin" of ingratitude (Caliban is obviously ingrate in Prospero's eyes). As the same critic establishes:

It is the vices of ingratitude, rebellion, and disobedience, particularly towards parents, that most commonly attract the appellation "monstrous": to be a monster is to break the natural bonds of obligation towards friends and especially towards blood- relations. [...] Long before the monster of Frankenstein, monstrosity already implied rebellion, or an unexpected turning against one's parent or benefactor (Baldick 1987, 13).

All the monsters or figures of otherness appearing in the novels that have already been mentioned (*Robinson Crusoe*, *Frankenstein*, *Moreau* and *Lord of the Flies*) seem to fulfil these conditions, whether factually or metaphorically. All of them —Friday, the creature, the Beast People and the children, respectively— have been subjected to a process of educational metamorphosis by colonial or imperial powers which provided them with “politically correct values” for the time being. All of them are “ingrate” to or betray their creators” priorly assimilated system of cultural values. Apart from these features, monsters always convey the association of deformity, a feature which can be perceived either as natural or supernatural.

From a literary perspective, the evolution is seen little by little, ranging from the convincingly colonial narrator of the “Age of Reason” in front of a black ex-cannibal —the narrative giving rise to a successful immersion in the end, Crusoe’s God, language and capitalistic ideas being transferred to the native—, to the conflict between an entirely human monster and his narcissistic creator, Victor Frankenstein, a man whose technological and scientific skills —the new instrument of magic— permit him to trespass the limits of nature. There is no “real” island in Frankenstein, but the “insularity” of Victor’s mind and his complete isolation and alienation, together with the episode of the creation and posterior destruction of the female monster in the Orkneys, and the haunting presence of self-enclosed and self-contained landscapes described throughout the novel, parallel echoes of the allegorical insularity appearing in the play.

The role of magical knowledge in the Renaissance and after is appropriated by the arcane dominion of scientific knowledge: Prospero hands his powers over to his “hideous progeny”, the ambitious scientists working in their “workshops of filthy creation”.

Like Frankenstein’s monster, Shakespeare’s “natural man” can be arguably conceived of as a *bon sauvage* whose unhappy condition of slavery and social rejection led him to evil thoughts and actions. Victor’s creature differs from his predecessor in his command of eloquence, an accidentally self-acquired linguistic and literary learning. This knowledge allows him to disguise demonic feelings in beautiful words and brilliant philosophical arguments. Unfortunately for him, his powers are limited to people not seeing his uncanny ugliness, a feature which bars him from the rest of mankind: the monster is thus characterized as an anti-Narcissus (1831, 114), a role played by Caliban in front of the beautiful Ferdinand and Miranda.

There are some hints in Frankenstein leading us to the notion that *The Tempest’s* influence on the novel is the product of something else apart from hazardous intertextuality (Mary Shelley knew her Shakespeare quite accurately). Victor’s main preoccupation centers on the monster’s sexual powers —one of the most recurrent colonial attitudes, and the rapidly increasing birth rate of the so called racial “minorities” in our post-colonial context is but a clear example of what we imply— in case he creates a female monster for his creature (1831, 165-66). As Frank Kermode pinpoints, Caliban, as the Renaissance wild-man type, is depicted as a satyr, unchastity being a conventional attribute of salvage men. Moreover, «Caliban is a salvage man, and the West Indians were salvage men of a topical kind; hence the Indian element in this natural man» (*The Tempest* xxxix). It is curious that Frankenstein’s monster had decided to leave Europe «and inhabit the deserts of the new world» (1831, 165), in case Victor would have given him a female companion. The scientist’s fears, like Prospero’s, concern the creature’s unchaste inclinations. The parallelism is even more frightful if we take into consideration the moral implications of Victor’s creation, the female monster being his “daughter”. Prospero’s obsession with Miranda’s virginity is expanded by Frankenstein’s dark terrors concerning sexually assertive monsters, both male and female.

Victor Frankenstein's transgression becomes even more painful in H.G. Wells's Darwinian nightmare of late Victorianism, a pessimistic fable of the flaws of imperial power (Ballesteros 1991). Prospero-Victor turns into Dr. Moreau, the epitome of the mad scientist. His "magic", like that of his predecessor in Mary Shelley's novel, comes from the laboratory, now more than ever the instrument of unnecessary and gratuitous pain as seen in the form of animal vivisection. The product is a tortured half-animal and half-human hybrid. Expanding the great Spanish painter Francisco de Goya's words, it could be stated that «The dream of Reason engenders monsters». The dream of civilization and education is obviously included in this sentence. The victims of the scientist's thirst for forbidden knowledge are reminders of Caliban's divided self, of his utter otherness as perceived by the colonial mind. Moreover, the allegorical space of the island is complemented here by a grim vision of post-Darwinian God, understood now as the cruel experimental scientist. As Brian Aldiss points out, «We were up from the apes, not down from the angels. We carried in our anatomies proof of the ancestral beast» ("Afterword" to Wells's *Moreau* 1988, 140). The monster, then, is inside, not outside our selves—a lesson already learned by Wells in Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, among other examples of the use of the motif of the double in fantasy literature. Helped by his Ariel—Montgomery—, Moreau creates individuals of Horatian deformity in his "House of Pain": the Hyena-Swine, the Dog Man, the Satyr—the choice of this type could not be made at random—, the Wolf Woman ... All of them are but mere parodies of humanity vivisectioned in the laboratory of suffering. Once their ability to use language decays and disappears—Caliban's linguistic difference should be remembered in this respect—they lose any glimmer of their elusive human condition. Prospero's magic staff turns into the sharp scalpel. In our contemporary context of gene splicing and bio-engineering we can have a clear view of the consequences of Frankenstein's and Moreau's dangerous transgressions.<sup>2</sup> However, at the beginning there was Prospero.

Reason is also understood as an imperial value from an ironical position in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Fear of the supernatural and ideological manipulation leads a group of children to show that the seeds of colonial and imperial behaviour are, in a certain way, genetically transmitted. Some of them, led by the violent Jack, will create a paroxysm of horror produced by the imitation of adult strategies of control and order, an order inevitably degenerating into chaos. The children mimic adult uses of magic and enchantment, and adopt their oppressive handling of superstitious belief in the supernatural. The monster here presents several possibilities: the dead paratrooper hidden in the jungle and the boar-heads—both perceived as supernatural by the children—, or even Piggy, that archetype of physical and intellectual otherness.

As in the case of Prospero with respect to Caliban, the appropriation of language and cultural values—what is correct and what is not—turns out to be the main instrument of oppression for all the tyrannical figures in the novels mentioned above. In the allegorical space of the island otherness has to be either assimilated or destroyed. Paradoxically—and ironically—enough, only Caliban remains on the island—his territory—at the end of Shakespeare's play. But the "tyrants" who could use supernatural powers for their own colonial purpose will definitely come back again attempting to defeat and control their hideous progeny.

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<sup>2</sup> Another more recent link in the intertextual chain we are referring to would be the popular example of Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* (1992), also taking place on an island.

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