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“Who’s in, who’s out”:
Community and Diversity
in Shakespeare

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***THE TEMPEST* (1611) AND THE DISABLING NEW WORLD**

by

JIFENG HUANG

The themes of colonialism and anti-colonialism in *The Tempest* are no news to readers and scholars of Shakespeare. Caliban has long served as a focal point for various postcolonial critiques, encompassing ideas of both subjugation and resistance. In particular, his physical form has received increased attention in recent decades, prompting larger metaphysical questions with its obscuration and transgression of racial and species boundaries. Julia Lupton has examined Caliban's body as a Genesitic creation that transcends culturalist particularisations, claiming that "[Caliban] subsists within an unredeemed Creation not yet divided into nations, forming the forgotten ground of a heterogeneous universalism irreducible to either the economies of a normative humanity or the semiotic coherence of individual cultures" (3-4). Katherine Williams reads Caliban's body as a locus that unfixes disabling discursive impositions, contending that with it, "the play demonstrates not a 'monster' but the imposition of 'monster' as an incoherent concept" (212). Building on these scholars' insights, this article aims to bridge the gap between their inquiries by elucidating the connection between the ideological motive and the consequences of England's colonialist project at the core of the play's conflicts. I suggest that seeing the island in the play as a Creationist primal landscape is itself based on a culturally specific position grounded in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is from this position that the exiled characters seek to arrogate the island to themselves by legally, spiritually, morally, and, at last, materially disabling its Indigenous population. This colonial disablement went hand in hand with the Edenic vision behind England's voyages to the New World and, as instantiated by Caliban's disablement, persistently aimed for and hinged upon the invalidation of Indigenous autonomy.

The Island of *The Tempest* and Early Modern Colonial Ideology

The most conspicuous resemblance between the island of *The Tempest* and the New World is their shared imagery of fecundity, as Caliban's description of the former bears witness. When he asks Trinculo and Stephano to free him from Prospero's enslavement, Caliban offers to "show [them] every fertile inch o' th' island" and "the best springs", to "pluck [them] berries", to "fish for [them] and get [them] wood enough" (2.2.125; 2.2.137-38).¹ Prominent here are Caliban's hospitality and the island's fecundity, which echo Captain John Smith and his crew's first experience in Virginia in 1607: "the Countrie [for the moste part] on each side plaine high ground, with many fresh Springes, the people in all places kindly entreating vs, daunsing and feasting vs with strawberries,

¹ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Cambridge, 2002). Further references to the play are quoted from the same edition and will be given parenthetically.

Mulberies, Bread, Fish, and other their Countrie prouisions wherof we had plenty” (6). Before this, Captain Arthur Barlowe, who set sail for the New World at the behest of Sir Walter Raleigh, was amazed by the abundance of America upon arrival in 1584. He later looked upon it through a biblical lens: “The earth bringeth foorth all things in abundance, as in the first creation, without toile or labour” (Barlowe 108). Referring to the New World as a replica of Eden, he revealed a *telos* integral to his expedition and central to the later New England colonists’ journeys to America: The aim was not just to exploit new resources, but to find a second Eden and reestablish social order with the hope of redemption. In this respect, Prospero’s explanation of his exile – “By Providence divine” (1.2.159) – not only indicates its fatedness, but also its still redeemable, albeit lamentable, state. So too is the case with the other noblemen. Cast ashore on the island, the ingenuous Gonzalo is overwhelmed by its pristineness and marvels at its magical water:

That our garments, being, as they were, drenched in the sea,
hold notwithstanding their freshness and glosses, being rather new-
dyed than stained with salt water. (2.1.59-61)

Here, the renewed clothes and the scenario of baptism clearly symbolise the Christian rebirth.² Thus the wondrous effect that the water bears refracts the island’s terrain into biblical topography, where the voyagers can be cleansed of the past and aspire to redemption.

Through this lens, the island appears as a destination of sanctified colonisation, an ideal unspoiled land where the newcomers can start afresh and build a prosperous life. That is what Gonzalo envisages as he reiterates Barlowe’s aforementioned epiphany: “nature should bring forth / Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance / To feed my innocent people” (2.1.159-61). Thus Gonzalo counts on the island’s fertility and the self-sufficiency behind it described by Barlowe as “without toile or labour” (108). As such, without the need for human endeavour, the island is miraculously productive just like Eden, designed for the voyagers’ occupancy. However, the island’s apparent autonomy is contradicted by the claim Gonzalo himself lays to this new Eden and its native population, as he wills the island to “feed [*his*] innocent people”. Just in the preceding lines, where Gonzalo pictures the Utopian order of this new society with himself as king, the same contradiction is iterated as he deems it with “[n]o sovereignty” (2.1.153). Gonzalo’s fellow exiles Sebastian and Antonio consider it a blunder, ridiculing Gonzalo for his seeming confusion:

SEBASTIAN.	Yet he would be king on’t.
ANTONIO.	The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning. (2.1.153-55)

But rather than being an instance of silly inconsistency, Gonzalo’s ambivalent vision of the island – of being both autonomous and in need of his rule – is, I would stress, derived from a sophistical logic not uncommon in early modern accounts promoting sea adventures. In *Hakluytus Posthumus* (1625), the cleric Samuel Purchas justifies “the

² See *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Galatians 3.27.

lawfulness of Discoveries” by suggesting that the “superabundance” and “rich attractives” of “all Nations” are “open and common to the Communitie of Mankind” according to “the Lawes of God and Nature” (9-13). In doing so, he assigns the ownership of all lands on Earth to Christendom. Viewed in this way, the sovereignty that Gonzalo refers to is a native one bound to be void, for the fertile and self-running island is destined to be mastered by God’s subjects like him.

Yet, Indigenous autonomy has never been absent. As Siobhan Senier reminds us, “Indigenous people differ from other cultural minorities in their long-standing claims to particular geographic territories” (12). After European colonialism, the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples – encompassing their claims to all aspects of their Indigenous identity, including their own lands, local resources, as well as cultural and religious habits – has been, in one way or another, taken away from them and nullified. Even so, Indigenous peoples would evoke their unique histories with the annexed lands to revive their original claims to them. Caliban emphatically does so when he condemns Prospero for seizing the island: “This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me” (1.2.332-33). Citing the universal custom of hereditary succession, Caliban plainly asserts the rightfulness of his reclamation. To repudiate arraignments like this, colonists and their supporters would often discursively pathologise Indigenous peoples to render them unable to take care of their lands, resources, and even themselves. Deploying this disabling narrative, colonists could vindicate their actions of occupation and appropriation in the guise of caring guardians of native communities. A case in point is the Scottish theologian John Mair’s infamous invocation of Aristotle’s doctrine of ‘natural slavery’ to defend the Spanish colonisation of the Americas:

These people (the inhabitants of the Antilles) live like beasts on either side of the equator; and beneath the poles there are wild men as Ptolemy says in his *Tetrabiblos*. And this has now been demonstrated by experience, wherefore the first person to conquer them, justly rules over them because they are by nature slaves. As the philosopher (Aristotle) says in the third and fourth chapters of the first book of the *Politics*, it is clear that some men are by nature slaves, others by nature free; and in some men it is determined that there is such a thing (i.e., a disposition to slavery) and that they should benefit from it. And it is just that one man should be a slave and another free, and it is fitting that one man should rule and another obey, for the quality of leadership is also inherent in the natural master. (77)

In Mair’s account, Indigenous peoples are portrayed as ‘beasts’ and ‘wild men’; they neither the rational capacity nor the moral discipline to be in charge of their territories and of themselves. Lacking the abilities of a freeman stipulated by Aristotelian precepts of civic life, they should therefore be governed by capable (European) masters for their own good. This theory of Mair’s formed the basis for an argument in the same vein at the Burgos gathering of 1512, a meeting convened by Ferdinand II of Aragon to respond to the Dominican Order’s denunciation of the Spanish colonial atrocities. One of the main opinions presented there was that the subjugation of the Amerindian peoples was merited and should be sustained. As a supporter of Mair’s argument, Gil Gregorio sought to buttress it by using Ptolemy of Lucca’s Aristotelian political thought to interpret colonial subjugation as merely an act adhering to the laws of physics, suggesting that “[t]he Indians [...] exist only incompletely until they have been mastered; for they are the moved and the Spaniards, their natural masters, are the movers. Their freedom is

thus a violation of the natural order and, consequently, it is ‘harmful to them’” (Pagden 48).

Such ideological backing gave the colonists the license for continuous occupation, domination, and exploitation of Indigenous territories. Records of the macabre violence that occurred in consequence can be found in *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552), an eyewitness exposé written by the Spanish Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas. Besides slaughter and torture, enslavement was another major cruelty the Amerindians suffered, as Las Casas documented:

Each of the settlers took up residence in the town allotted to him (or *encomended* to him as the legal phrase has it), put the inhabitants to work for him, stole their already scarce foodstuffs for himself and took over the lands owned and worked by the natives and on which they traditionally grew their own produce. The settler would treat the whole of the native population – dignitaries, old men, women and children – as members of his household and, as such, make them labour night and day in his own interests, without any rest whatever; even the small children, as soon as they could stand, were made to do as much as they could, and more. Thus have the settlers exterminated the few indigenous people who have survived, stripping them of their houses and all their possessions and leaving them nothing for themselves (and these abuses continue to this day). (39)

Forced labour, overwork, starvation, and sleep deprivation led to various diseases and health problems among Indigenous peoples, while the virgin soil epidemics further exacerbated the situation. In addition, the harm and trauma inflicted during colonial warfare and subjugation caused them lasting physical and psychological damage. Hence, they were disabled by both environmental factors and bodily impairments. The discursive disablement of Indigenous peoples as discussed above thus preconditioned their material disablement. In turn, their Otherness manifests itself as material disablement in their bodies. Colonial disablement therefore engineered a complex form of disability. Tobin Siebers’s theory of complex embodiment regards disability “as a form of human variation” (25) caused by both disabling social structures and disabling bodily conditions. Colonial disablement corresponds to this model and, moreover, consists in the dialectic between the discursive and the material, a dialectic that produces unique experiences of disability by subjecting Indigenous peoples to a vicious circle of double debilitation. Early modern colonial ideology portrayed Indigenous peoples as incapacitated ‘beasts’, ‘wild men’, and ‘slaves’, so as to naturalise the exploitation of their labour, their lands, and their resources. In consequence, Indigenous peoples were dispossessed, diseased, and deformed by factors including homelessness, hunger, exhaustion, and torture. They were thereby reshaped into disabled bodies that said ideology would readily perpetuate as inferior. It is the friction between this colonial disablement and Indigenous autonomy, as exemplified by Caliban, that is at the heart of *The Tempest*’s dramatic tension.

The Discursive Disablement of Caliban

Whereas Gonzalo blanks out the island’s Indigenous autonomy to envision himself as its ruler, Prospero has assumed the rulership in deed, since he was banished to the island “[t]o be the lord on’t” (5.1.162). By implication, he has entitled himself to the

proprietary rights over everything on the island, including its native inhabitant Caliban. His most explicit proclamation of ownership of Caliban is of course the famous statement “this thing of darkness, I / Acknowledge mine” (5.1.274-75). The rhetoric of racialisation and enslavement of this statement, I argue, gives away the mechanics of colonialism that seek, and are dependent on, the disablement of Indigeneity.

First and foremost, the characteristic of ‘thingness’ not only metaphysically dehumanises Caliban, it also legally disables him. As Visa Kurki points out, the early modern notion of legal personhood in the West was derived from Roman law and formulated as *persona*, referring to “a human being with a civil standing” (35), that is, with the status of being a freeman (*status libertatis*), a citizen (*status civitatis*), and a member of a family (*status familiae*).³ Such a status is a sufficient condition for a person to own and use “things [...] [with] monetary value, such as material objects and slaves” (ibid., 33). As a nobleman from Milan and *paterfamilias*, Prospero qualifies *de jure* as a legal person whereas Caliban, the wild and kinless “monster” (2.2.28), does not. Categorised as a “thing”, by contrast, Caliban is reduced to a “*res*” with no “capacity for rights” (Buckland 3), namely a slave as conceptualised in the Roman legal framework. Through this juristic binary of human capacity and subhuman incapacity, the legitimacy of Prospero’s dominion over Caliban is clearly pronounced and reinforced.

Furthermore, proclaiming Caliban to be his “thing” allows Prospero to legitimise his annexation of the island. By professing himself to be the natural lord of the island, he invokes the Roman concept of *res nullius* as the legal basis for his occupation. Originally used to taxonomise “[t]hings belonging to nobody” (Berger 679) – including a type of slave⁴ – in Roman law, *res nullius* was later, as Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann demonstrate, employed as a crucial discursive tactic to “establish superior claims over imperial territories” (5) during the early modern European expansion. Things that are *res nullius* are “susceptible to being acquired by taking [*occupatio*], a mode of acquisition understood by the Roman jurists to be natural, based on natural reason and the *ius gentium*, and therefore open to Roman citizens and noncitizens [*peregrini*] alike” (ibid., 14). In applying the *ius gentium*, the “law of nations” (ibid., 15) laid down for all men, as opposed to the *ius civile*, the civil law peculiar to one people, early modern European imperialists expanded their domain of occupation to the entire world rather than just their own soils, thus giving sanction to their seizures of any things they deemed *res nullius* in the New World. This was also of particular consequence for the race to world dominion among the European countries in the Age of Discovery. As Portugal and Spain established titles to territories and high seas through papal bulls and agreements between themselves such as the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), their neighbours with vested interests – e.g., England and the Netherlands – needed a different system of principles to counter the authority of the Iberian powers’ titles and institute their own, and stronger, claims to the New World. From the 1530s onwards, the Protestant countries did so through recourse to the Roman legal system, leaning upon

³ See Visa A.J. Kurki, *A Theory of Legal Personhood* (Oxford, 2019), p. 33.

⁴ See W. W. Buckland, *Roman Law of Slavery: The Condition of the Slave in Private Law from Augustus to Justinian* (Cambridge, 1908), p. 2.

its historical weight and secular nature.⁵ *Res nullius* was a legal footing upon which they could confront, for instance, the bull *Inter Caetera* of May 4, 1493, whereby Pope Alexander VI granted by decree the areas “one hundred leagues west of any of the Azores or Cape Verde Islands” to Castile, be they “found” or “to be found”, already “discovered” or yet “to be discovered” (71, 77). Thus, *res nullius* became a central means for the colonial empires to negate competing European as well as Indigenous autonomy claims to New World territories.

Viewing the island as *res nullius*, Prospero declares his ownership of it valid upon arrival: “Upon this shore [...] was landed / To be the lord on’t” (5.1.161-62). According to the rule of “property of the first taker” (Gaius 2.67), or in layman’s terms, ‘finders keepers’, seeing that the island was a thing unowned, he could indisputably assume rights over it. This claim is, however, controverted by Caliban who protests that he had held sovereignty over the island – “This island’s mind, by Sycorax my mother” – before Prospero usurped it: “For I am all the subjects that you have, / Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me / In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me / The rest o’th’island” (1.2.342-45). Indeed, Prospero has occupied the island by possession instead of on the principle of *res nullius*. Still, to maintain the pretence of *res nullius*, so that his occupation persists under the rubric of Christian conduct, Prospero refutes Caliban’s averment by labelling him as a “thing”. In doing so, he not only negates Caliban’s status as a legal person and thereby his claim to the island, but he also effectively assumes ownership of Caliban by extension because Caliban, being part of the island, is then considered *res nullius* as well.

It is no surprise then that Prospero’s *acknowledgment* of this ownership – “this thing of darkness, I / *Acknowledge* mine” (5.1.274-75, emphasis J.H.) – contains a legal import. According to the *OED*, “acknowledge” can mean “[t]o own as genuine, or of legal force or validity” (1.c.), while also connoting “to recognize or confess [someone or something] to be the thing specified. Also reflexive” (1.a.). Correspondingly, Urvashi Chakravarty suggests that the legal signification of the word references a specific Roman tradition: “Prospero’s ‘acknowledgment’ [...] evokes the juridical language of confession which also recalls that other legal ceremony, the *mancipatio*” (189). As Gaius laid out, the *mancipatio* was a Roman legal procedure by which the ownership of a slave was transferred from the current proprietor to the next, and it was performed as follows:

in the presence of not less than 5 Roman citizens of full age and also of a sixth person, having the same qualifications, known as the *libripens* (scale-holder), to hold a bronze scale, the party who is taking by the mancipation, holding a bronze ingot, says: “I declare that this slave is mine by Quiritary right, and he purchased to me with this bronze ingot and bronze scale.” He then strikes the scale with the ingot and gives it as a symbolic price to him from whom he is receiving by the mancipation. (1.119)

In the presence of the noblemen as witnesses, Prospero’s acknowledgement of Caliban does bear the legal significance of a *mancipatio* scenario. But while I concur that Caliban is profoundly disenfranchised, it is difficult to see this moment’s resemblance to the

⁵ See Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann, “Acquiring Empire by Law: From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice.” (2010), pp. 19-20.

mancipatio, not least because Caliban was not transferred from another master to Prospero. On the contrary, he had been the master of himself and of the island prior to Prospero's arrival. The operative Roman legal idea here is therefore less *mancipatio* than *res nullius*, which, as I have mentioned above, proves particularly relevant to the early modern European expansion. Using it as a discursive weapon, the European colonists took possession of Indigenous lands and peoples simply because, for the colonists, they were there for the taking. Exactly through this mechanism, Caliban is transformed into a subhuman existence and hence legally disabled. Prospero's act of acknowledging Caliban, then, dovetails with naming him a "thing", seeking together to validate the ownership in legal discourse.

Moreover, the theological aspect of "confess" that "acknowledge" connotes in this instant needs to be taken seriously. In view of the Edenic quality of the New World, Prospero's confession betrays the religious impetus for his subjugation of Caliban. For the European voyagers, to be the governor of this second Eden – the realm of prosperity and redemption – merited their custodianship of not just the native population's material resources but its spiritual life. As Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations* (1589–1600) documents, Sir George Peckham championed New World expeditions and underscored the necessity of introducing God to the Amerindians for the sake of their own spiritual deliverance:

those Countries are at this day inhabited with Savages (who have no knowledge of God:) Is it not therefore (I say) to be lamented, that these poore Pagans, so long living in ignorance an idolatry, and in sort thirsting after Christianitie, (as may appeare by the relation of such as have travailed in those partes) that our hearts are so hardened, that fewe or none can be found which will put to their helping hands, and apply themselves to the relieving of the miserable and wretched estate of these sillie soules? (94)

Likewise, in *A Discourse on Western Planting* (1584), Hakluyt himself promotes the mission of conversion and contends that the Amerindians require it of their own accord: "the people of America crye oute onto us, their nexte neighboures, to come and helpe them, and bringe unto them the gladd tidings of the gospell" (10-11). Robert Johnson also presents in *Nova Britannia* (1609) what he thinks is a chief goal of New World expeditions: "to advance the kingdom of God by reducing savage people from their blind superstition to the light of religion" (ibid., 11). Thus, the Christian faith was seen as the remedy for the spiritual ignorance inherent in the New World, whose people were blind to God and deaf to his gospel. Nevertheless, they were aware of their deficient conditions and sought remedy for them. It was, therefore, believed to be an act of benevolence, not of oppression, for a Christian to help what they saw as the 'infirm' native population and point them in the direction of true grace, which was then integral to the former's own path to salvation. In other words, being the spiritual custodian of Indigenous peoples was seen as an indispensable responsibility for the New World voyagers on their journey to redemption. Nonetheless, this task was not based on the absence of Indigenous religions but on their very erasure. Just as Johnson's phrase "blind superstition" suggests, the Amerindians had their own gods, who were then deemed false through the prism of Christianity. The enabling of the Christian voyagers' spirituality thus necessitated the disabling of Indigenous spirituality. Such is the case with Caliban, who twice mentions the name of his and his mother Sycorax's God "Setebos" (1.2.375;

5.1.261), a Patagonian deity.⁶ On this basis, Prospero's confession conveys a compound message: his efforts notwithstanding, he failed to convert and reform the pagan Caliban; this failure was primarily due to his spiritual incompetence, which he acknowledges as his weakness. Yet, exactly through confession, he can regain spiritual strength and proceed towards redemption.⁷ His efforts prove fruitful shortly afterwards, as Caliban concedes: "I'll be wise hereafter, / And seek for grace" (5.1.292-93). It seems that by observing Prospero's confession, Caliban learns that acknowledging one's own spiritual failure is the right way to seek redemption, which prompts him to admit his previous spiritual blindness and embrace his new faith. In this regard, for Prospero, his confession not only facilitates his own spiritual elevation but also Caliban's by serving as an example of his conversion. Meanwhile, Prospero's pursuit of redemption subsumes Caliban as a supplement and erases his original faith, thereby disabling and eventually effacing his spiritual sovereignty.

Prospero's failure until this point was largely due to Caliban's "darkness", or so it is suggested. As an overdetermined marker of Caliban's racial Otherness, "darkness" denotes a spectrum of meanings that are supposedly illustrative of his inferiority, such as his physical difference and his ignorance. Kim Hall observes that "descriptions of dark and light [...] became in the early modern period the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of 'self' and 'other' so well known in Anglo-American racial discourses" (2). The dichotomy encompassed various aspects, ranging from differences in physical appearance, disposition, behaviour, to religion. Considering that Christianity was, in the words of Johnson, the "light of religion", Indigenous peoples' pagan beliefs or spiritual ignorance would simply count as darkness.⁸ The 'dark' Caliban, therefore, serves as a foil to Prospero and the other voyagers as they settle in a new world as good, and evidently white, Christians. In this instance, the religious and moral connotations of "darkness" are combined into that which is opposite to illumination in Renaissance humanist terms. It signifies not just Caliban's alleged ignorance, but his alleged insusceptibility to 'cultivation'. Earlier in the play, Miranda accuses him of being an incorrigible miscreant despite her intention to educate him, an attempt she herself depicts as an act of "goodness":

⁶ For discussions of Setebos as a reference to Caliban's Indigenous identity, see Charles Frey, "*The Tempest* and the New World." (1979); Alden T. Vaughan, "Shakespeare's Indian: The Americanization of Caliban." (1988); and Scott Manning Stevens, "Monstrous Indigeneity and the Discourse of Race in Shakespeare's England." (2024).

⁷ For the connection between confession and grace, see *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Proverbs 28.13: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy".

⁸ The notion that paganism equals darkness was proverbial in the Age of Discovery, see, for example, Letters Patent NO. 48 issued in 1606 for the colonisation of Virginia, in *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1675-1676*: "The King, greatly commending and graciously accepting of their desires to the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of His Divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such people, as yet live in darkness, and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages living in those parts, to human civility".

Abhorred slave,
 Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
 Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
 Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
 One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
 Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
 A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
 With words that made them known. But thy vile race –
 Though thou didst learn – had that in't which good natures
 Could not abide to be with; (1.2.351-60)

Enacted here is a humanist pedagogical scenario, where courses of *ars rhetorica* and ethics were taught to schoolboys for them to become civilised gentlemen. In Miranda's portrayal, Caliban was a barbarian with no language or intelligent thoughts of his own; and even after he learned their language, he could not take in the morals that came with the courses she gave him. This frames Caliban as naturally devoid of, and incapable of being instilled with, virtue. Miranda's depiction of him creates a stark contrast between Christian charity and barbaric vileness, which is further accentuated by Caliban's spurning the education he received: "You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (1.2.363-64). Patricia Akhimie has noted that "[c]onduct is essential to our understanding of race and class in the early modern period", when non-dominant and non-privileged social groups were characterised by "an inability to be better and even to know better" (5). Thus, Miranda takes Caliban's act of resistance as an act of ingratitude. His unwillingness to comply with genteel behaviour is translated into the reification of his "vile race" unable to be edified, or of him being "a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-89). Meanwhile, through rehearsing the pedagogical practices in the Renaissance schoolroom, Miranda reaffirms her and the voyagers' legitimacy in rebuilding a civic community in a new world by showing their abilities to carry forward a humanist tradition and to perform what they deem benevolence. Precisely in Miranda's attempt to reform Caliban, she morally incapacitates him.

The Material Disablement of Caliban

While Caliban's retort expresses his resistance to the moral education imposed on him and the discursive moral disablement associated with it, it also indicates the repercussion of this imposition, i.e., his material disablement in terms of language. I here see language not as a mere intracranial process, but an intra- and extracranial material phenomenon formed, conveyed, and perceived with our bodies and social interactions.⁹ Linguistic ability or disability, therefore, is conditioned by the synthesis of a subject's cognitive capacities, physical surroundings, social position, and cultural environment. Caliban's linguistic disablement is a material occurrence thereof. Perhaps a comparison of his

⁹ For language as a material phenomenon from a sociolinguistic perspective, see Alastair Pennycook, "After Words: There Is No Language without Materiality." (2024); for language as a material phenomenon from a philosophical perspective, see Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, 1993), esp. p. 68.

response with an anecdote told by the Spanish Dominican missionary Domingo de Santo Tomás would best illustrate this point:

It is of note that the Indians of Peru, before we Christians had come to them, had certain and particular modes of swearing, distinct from ours. They had no assertive oaths, such as 'by God' or 'by heaven' but only execration or curses...e.g. 'if I am not telling the truth, may the sun kill me' they said *mana checcanta ñiptiy, indi guañuchiuanmancha*...Once when I asked a chieftain in a certain province if he was a Christian, he said 'I am not yet quite one, but I am making a beginning.' I asked him what he knew of being Christian, and he said: 'I know how to swear to God, and play cards a bit, and I am beginning to steal.' (qtd. in Ostler 334)

Not unlike the situation of this chieftain, Caliban's acquired ability to curse embodies the destructive replacement of Indigenous language systems by colonial ones. Miranda's programme of educational reform is based on the dual role of (a European) language. As understood by Renaissance humanists and early modern expansionists alike, language served both as a tool for understanding and embracing the true faith and as an instrument of empire.¹⁰ As a result of this linguistic colonialism, which purported to advance progress through supplanting 'vulgar' (Indigenous) languages with 'civilised' (imperialist) ones, native cultural traditions conveyed through and tightly connected to Indigenous languages gave way to those of the colonisers. Caliban, however, uses his oppressors' language to talk back, reversing the denigration by calling it out for being vulgar and at times pillorying their misdeeds in return. Nevertheless, he cannot reverse the processes in which this language disables his native tongue and wears away his Indigenous identity, processes that are traceable exactly in his retort.

Caliban's material disablement lies substantially in his body as well. As Prospero admits to Miranda, the smooth-running island is not sustained by its automatic productivity, but largely by the gruelling work he subjects Caliban to: "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profits us" (1.2.312-14). Such forced labour paralleling the enslaved experience documented by Las Casas might of course have caused Caliban multiple health problems. Yet what leaves more directly perceivable impairments on Caliban is the corporal punishment Prospero inflicts on him. Throughout the play, we learn about the various ways of physical torture Prospero employs to punish Caliban, such as those listed in Prospero's threat here:

tonight thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honeycomb (1.2.326-30)

Often, Prospero's spirits execute the torture at his bidding, as Caliban recounts:

Sometime like apes, that mow and chatter at me
And after bite me; then like hedgehogs, which
Lie tumbling in my barefoot way and mount

¹⁰ See Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture* (New York, 1990), pp. 17-23.

Their pricks at my footfall (2.2.9-12)

These impairments inevitably disfigure Caliban, turning him into “strange stuff” (4.1.232), or a “monster” (2.2.28) that fits the racialised profile painted to rationalise his enslavement. Moreover, such torture takes a toll on Caliban’s mental state, as he complains that the adders Prospero sometimes sets to wound him, “[d]o hiss [him] into madness” (2.2.14). Thus, the corporal punishment of Caliban not only aims to discipline him, it has also moulded him into a physically deformed and mentally unsound ward in need of Prospero’s guardianship. He thereby embodies a disabled Other that colonialist narratives would purport to be the ground for, instead of an effect of, colonization.

Conclusion

As a material manifestation of colonial disablement, Caliban’s monstrosity is a chimera, with discursive distortion, physical disfigurement, and his bodily difference superimposed. Seeing the New World as a destination of conquest as well as a second Eden, early modern European voyagers occupied the territory for the expansion of their kingdoms on earth and for the prospect of reaching the Kingdom of God. To justify their occupation, they erased Indigenous autonomy by discursively pathologising Indigenous peoples to change them into invalid beings ineligible to assume ownership of their lands and of themselves. As a result of such pathologisation, Caliban is legally, spiritually, and morally disabled. To materially perpetuate this disablement, the colonist Prospero in turn inflicts constant torture on Caliban to produce a non-normative embodiment that the discourse of colonial disablement substantively hinges upon.

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Zusammenfassung

In diesem Beitrag wird untersucht, wie Kolonialismus in Shakespeares *The Tempest* Behinderungen generiert. Ausgehend von/Unter Berücksichtigung der Vision des Paradieses, die englische Reisende in die Neue Welt trieb, argumentiere ich, dass das Ziel der Erlösung – das sowohl im Stück angelegt ist als auch als eine wichtige Grundlage frühneuzeitlicher Entdeckungsfahrten bildete – die Unterwerfung von Alterität im Modus der Behinderung beinhaltet. Der Beitrag greift auf Erkenntnisse der *Indigenous Studies* und der *Disability Studies* zurück und untersucht die diskursiven und materiellen Aspekte, durch welche der Kolonialismus der Neuen Welt die Behinderung von Indigenität im Stück anstrebt, von der er gleichzeitig abhängig ist.

