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# Challenging identity hierarchies in Julie Taymor's Tempest

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**Challenging Identity Hierarchies in Julie Taymor's *Tempest***

by

Aaron W. Vinson, B.A.

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

DePaul University

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**DePaul University**

**June 2014**

## **DEDICATION**

To My Mother and Father, Tom and Barbara Vinson – Who Taught Me the Discipline and  
Curiosity Necessary Complete this Project

To My Wife, Amy Cohen – Whose Love and Support Helped Me Through Writer's Block,  
Technical Difficulties, Lost Books, and So Much More

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

While I am ultimately responsible for this thesis, I recognize that it was made possible by the inspiration, love, support, and guidance of many. I would like to thank my thesis committee for their direction, assistance, criticism, and patience. Without their help I may have gone down a different path. More importantly, they helped me cultivate new methods of critical inquiry and strategies for developing argumentation. In my many roles as a student, teacher, reader, viewer, I have been exposed to and considered the stereotypical portrayals of identity groups. Throughout this thesis I tried to challenge those representations and explore ways that Julie Taymor's film could do the same.

June 11, 2014

## ABSTRACT

### **Challenging Identity Hierarchies in Julie Taymor's *Tempest***

By

Aaron W. Vinson, B.A.

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Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* was released in 2010 and received mixed critical response though almost all critics lauded Helen Mirren's performance as Prospera, the first female Prospero in a major film. In the spirit of the original, almost all of the dialogue is Shakespeare's save for some voiceover where Prospera explains a modified origin story. Taymor's film challenges stereotypical character identities in Shakespeare's plays through casting, dialogue, and editing. Casting Helen Mirren as Prospera changes the dominant figure from a patriarchal tyrant to a matriarchal enlightened despot while casting Djimon Hounsou as Caliban forces an examination of colonial history in Shakespeare. Dialogue is trimmed and condensed, even added in very extreme circumstances as Taymor changes the dynamic to lessen misogynist stereotypes. Editing provides her with a weapon to accent her other moves with lighting and sound in ways that add to the classic story instead of distracting from them like her *Tempest* predecessors Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway. This paper will show how Taymor's reimagining casts characters anew,

forcing an interrogation of those characters' history, representations, and meaning as she explores whether or not Shakespeare was a feminist, sexist, or something else.

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## INTRODUCTION: How Julie Taymor's *Tempest* Challenges Hierarchies in Shakespeare

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will explore how Julie Taymor's 2010 film *The Tempest* challenges gender, sex, and race hierarchies in Shakespeare. I will show how Taymor's film questions assumptions about character identities and representations in Shakespeare's plays. Casting is an important step in any production, but Taymor's casting is significant for how it showcases her arguments in the context of several critical questions. Namely, her casting of Helen Mirren as Prospera changes the direction and standpoint of the play away from Prospero's patriarchal approach to Prospera's maternal one. When the exiled white father of Miranda, and master of Ariel and Caliban, becomes a mother and master, all of the major relationships in the play change. The significance of that change and *why* Taymor makes that change is another important component of this paper. The thesis of this paper is that Taymor illustrates how film adaptations of Shakespeare can question hierarchy by recasting and reimagining character identities, roles, and relationships. Taymor's reimagining casts the characters in a new light that forces a literary interrogation of those characters' history, representations, and meaning. She attempts to resolve a long-discussed question from feminist theorists as to whether or not Shakespeare was a feminist or a sexist or something in between.

*The Tempest* has weathered harsh criticism since it was released. With only a few positive reviews, its rating on the review aggregate site Rotten Tomatoes sits at a measly 30%<sup>1</sup>. While most of the reviews recognize the import of a feminist adaptation, some go so far as to call

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<sup>1</sup> Rotten Tomatoes calculates their review aggregate based on the total number of critics whose work is linked through the site; for *The Tempest* there are 92 reviews as of 13 May 2014.

the film “the worst Shakespeare film of all time” (Tookey 1). Betsy Sharkey of The Los Angeles Times calls the film “tentative” and a “disappointment” (1). A.O. Scott of The New York Times admires the cast but thinks Taymor’s adaptation is “messing around with Shakespeare” (1).

Philip French of *The Observer* finds almost everything wrong with the film except for Mirren:

“The villains do not come over with any force: the low-life figures (Alfred Molina and Russell Brand) are as unfunny as ever, the romantic young couple are insipid, and the magnificent Beninese actor Djimon Hounsou as Caliban is robbed of his natural dignity. The special effects are intrusive and anything but magical and the text is rather curiously edited. But it's worth seeing for Mirren” (1).

Sandra Hall of *The Sydney Morning Herald* tries to put a positive spin on some of the negative criticism and focuses on Mirren, “The film has plenty of detractors who see Taymor's approach as strained and overwrought, but Mirren finds some grace notes that no Prospero could ever have sounded” (1). Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* lauds the feminist recasting of Prospera but criticizes the film for being otherwise overly conservative (1). Roger Ebert similarly extols the Mirren-as-Prospera casting but finds that the film falls short of the lofty themes of Shakespeare’s original (583). Lawson Taitte of *The Dallas Morning News* is one of the most positive critics, championing Taymor’s adaptation as “bold,” claiming that Shakespeare buffs will “love it,” and even defending the much maligned special effects and how the CGI “illuminates the play in ways no stage production ever could” (1). Ultimately, I feel that Taymor’s film was judged too harshly by mainstream critics. Taymor is trying to stay as close to the source text – in terms of dialogue – as she can but she is also trying to change the core relationships of the play. Despite their reservations, Scott, Hall, French, Bradshaw, and Ebert all acknowledge the gravitas Mirren brings to Prospera yet their main complaint seems to be that Taymor does not change enough of

Shakespeare's play. Beyond her deliberate move of creating a Prospera, Taymor also makes Caliban black which many critics read as conservative and boring, considering Djimon Hounsou's performance as stereotypical and confusing. Yet those critics only process the film from an entertainment level, they do not peel back the layers of the film as literary critics would.

Literary criticism dedicated to Taymor's adaptation, only three years old, is scarce. I discovered eight books, journal articles, and dissertations that focus on Taymor's film. They cover a wide variety of topics ranging from the faithfulness of Taymor's adaptation to the familial relationships in the play to how the play touches on race, class, and gender. Jonathan Bate's introduction to the screenplay begins with a historicist approach in following the evolution of previous adaptations and segue ways into a psycho analysis of character relationships (10). Kathryn Caccavaio's dissertation on mothers and daughters through reading multiple texts together devotes a chapter to the new – and unique relationship – between Prospera and Miranda as well as the complicated Sycorax dynamic (201). Samuel Crowl's lecture focuses on the intricate moves Taymor makes to highlight Prospera's femininity and motherhood (177). Courtney Lehmann's journal article is the most detailed and in-depth in exploring Miranda's mother, Caliban's blackness, Sycorax's magic, and Ariel's mutability (49). Ann Marie Pleiss Morris's dissertation on Shakespeare and race, class, gender, covers a lot of material that helps contextualize female Prosperos and Sycoraxes on the stage (111). Francesca Royster's preface to a special journal on female icons discusses Taymor's move to create mother-daughter relationships as well as analyze black-white hierarchy (7). Julie Taymor's forward to her screenplay outlines her reasoning for casting and special effects decisions and her intent to create a dynamic yet faithful adaptation (14). Virginia Mason Vaughan picks up where Morris left off in analyzing (in more detail) the history of female Prosperos on stage ("Miranda,

where's your mother?" 354). While all of these works influenced my reading of the movie, I will engage Lehmann's article the most because of her diversity of readings of the adaptation that approach the movie from multiple perspectives. My intent is to provide a thorough, detailed feminist analysis of Taymor's *Tempest* and the intersections of gender and race.

This introduction will consider three issues that influenced the methodology of this thesis in engaging literary criticism, film adaptation, and *The Tempest*. First, who are the critics who have written about *The Tempest* – what school of thought do they employ in their work and how has that guided their interpretation of *The Tempest*? I will focus on two main schools of literary criticism: feminist and post-colonialist critics whose interpretations of *The Tempest* and questions regarding power, representation, and absence influenced Julie Taymor. Second, what is the film like as an adaptation – that is, how does Taymor's 2010 film stack up in relation to other Shakespeare adaptations and why is that such an important question for Shakespeare? I will contrast the film with two of Taymor's *Tempest* predecessors: Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979) and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) whose entries in the canon stood out as film adaptation as literary criticism – a debate that Taymor confidently enters. Third, how does Taymor change everything – how does recasting and changing the gender or racial identity of a character change the meaning or understanding of the play? I am most concerned with these moves Taymor makes to challenge traditional readings of *The Tempest* as proof of Shakespeare's sexist and colonialist leanings. Finally, I will strive to suggest new ways to read Shakespeare through film. This paper intends to be a unique examination of Taymor's film as it casts film adaptation as literary criticism.

## WHO HAS WRITTEN ABOUT *THE TEMPEST*?

*The Tempest* has inspired many readings from many schools of thought from many different angles. Isidore Diala explains the significance of *The Tempest* in stimulating identity movements, and interrogating hierarchy:

*The Tempest* continue to be re-read and soberly reappraised to illuminate Shakespeare's political positions - and even his contribution to the formation of a racist and colonialist ideology. Chantai Zabus has remarked on the special place of *The Tempest* in the Shakespearean canon as a site of continuing contestations for meaning and power. ... such texts serve as pre-texts to others which they underwrite, but notes that *The Tempest* has helped to shape three contemporaneous movements: postcoloniality, postfeminism or postpatriarchy, and postmodernism - from the 1960s to the present. Zabus's insight is that, during this period, the constant interrogation and alteration of Shakespeare's hierarchical positioning of Prospero, Caliban, Ariel and Miranda has meant that *The Tempest's* protagonists have become contestants disputing a territorial niche in the larger critiques of representation. (27)

Diala also emphasizes the significance of analyzing the position of specific characters within the text. The passage above also isolates two common approaches to analyzing *The Tempest*: feminism and post-colonialism. Feminists have noted for example that *The Tempest* has only one female character listed in the dramatis personae (Brevik 96). I will analyze Miranda, that single female listed, and Sycorax, the mother of Caliban who is mentioned frequently but silenced by her absence like Miranda's mother, to illustrate how *The Tempest* can be read through a feminist lens. Post-colonialists have found *The Tempest* to be an example of colonialism because there is a European colonizer (Prospero) who displaces non-European natives (Caliban) and enslaves

them for the comfort of himself (Lupton 7). I will analyze Caliban, who is labeled a “slave,” and Ariel, a spirit servant of Prospero whose servitude is more complex, will be investigated to peel back the post-colonial hierarchy of *The Tempest*. Feminist critics have debated whether Shakespeare’s work was intentionally misogynist in its depiction of few, silent, subjugated, and weak women, or if it was subversively feminist in its creation of strong, clever, and complex women<sup>2</sup>. Post-colonialist critics have debated whether Shakespeare’s work was deliberately imperialist in its valorization of protagonists who subjugated and controlled those beneath them, or if it was inspirationally rebellious in its showcasing of characters who fought and undermined those in power. Both of these schools converge in *The Tempest* where there is a lot to analyze in terms of weak and strong women as well as colonial subjects and white masters. The power structure of the play, with Prospero firmly at the top controlling his daughter and the natives of the island reveals the oppression of white male patriarchy (Busia 85; Donaldson, “The Miranda Complex” 68). Yet, I will argue that *The Tempest* is more than a colonial allegory: it can shift the frame of reference to challenge particular experiences<sup>3</sup>.

Unpacking literary analysis of Prospero is important to understanding the relationship Prospero has with Miranda, Sycorax, Ariel, and Caliban – the major points of criticism in this paper. *The Tempest* was Shakespeare’s last play written independently, and like Prospero, Shakespeare was on the verge of change. Shakespeare’s daughters were about to marry just like Miranda seeks to in his play. He was, after a long and successful stage career about to retire from his art just as Prospero faces breaking his staff and leaving his tomes. Finally, he was about to return, for good, to his home in Stratford and leave London behind just as Prospero must leave his magical isle for Milan (Bevington 190, 211). Given these hard to miss comparisons,

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<sup>2</sup> See Novy 1, Sights 357.

<sup>3</sup> For more on allegories and character experiences, see McInnis 210

historicists see Prospero as Shakespeare, as both enjoy a last hurrah before giving up their absolute power. Prospero's magic is usually the starting point for analyzing his patriarchal domination that some seem as sadistic while others merely totalitarian<sup>4</sup>. Despite being trapped on the island, Prospero's power seems absolute: control of the weather, control of shapeshifting spirits, control over sleep and wakefulness, control over knowledge, the list goes on. Thus, while many critics can argue over the source, purpose, or intent of his power, most agree that Prospero's magic is an important source of authority in the play<sup>5</sup>. First consider Prospero's banishment of Sycorax – the female mentioned second most frequently after Miranda. Sycorax was a powerful witch who, exiled from Algiers<sup>6</sup>, ruled the island, made Ariel do her bidding, and birthed Caliban. Gender theorists would emphasize Prospero's banishment of the feminine body while colonial critics would emphasize Prospero's banishment of the black body (Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* 237). Second, consider Prospero's subjugation of Ariel and Caliban – the two characters with the most lines after Prospero. Ariel was a spirit native to the island enslaved by Sycorax while Caliban was the only true native, born and raised on the island and both are made to serve Prospero. Gender theorists would point to Prospero's control of Miranda's education, time, and marriage while colonial critics would consider Prospero's rule as sovereign, absolute, and white (Sanchez 58). Both scenarios show how *The Tempest* – and Prospero especially – are important points of focus for examining gender and race in Shakespeare.

### WHAT IS FILM LIKE AS ADAPTATION?

While Shakespeare is regarded as the greatest playwright of all time, he could very easily be regarded as the greatest *adapter* of all time since almost all of his plays are based on historical events, other plays, or literary texts (Callaghan 286). That Shakespeare himself engaged in

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of critical positions, see Bevington 244

<sup>5</sup> For a more elaborate explanation of the sources of Prospero's authority, see Orgel, 8

<sup>6</sup> Shakespeare's spelling of Algiers as Argier was common at the time (Guffney 357).

adaptation makes the topic of Shakespeare-adaptations particularly intriguing for these new authors and auteurs are engaging in the same practice as the Bard. Carolyn Jess-Cooke outlines six terms, or degrees, of Shakespearean adaptation:

- *presentation* (in which the film tries to stay as close to the verbal text as possible)
- *interpretation* (in which the film respects the text but also insists on its own artistic integrity)
- *adaptation* (in which the film uses the text as the starting point for something quite different)
- *borrowing* (which ‘makes no claims to fidelity’)
- *intersecting* (which ‘attempts to recreate the distinctions of the original text’)
- *transforming* (which ‘reproduces the essential text’) (35).

In truth, it seems that the term “adaptation” is actually the farthest from what is conventionally understood for most would not consider Disney’s *The Lion King* as much of an “adaptation” as they would Franco Zeffirelli’s *Hamlet*. While the former would fit Jess-Cooke’s definition of “adaptation”, the latter would likely be a “presentation.” Instead of getting caught up in semantics, this paper will use the term “adaptation” in the conventional sense yet recognizing the different shades of possibility reveal the potential that every “adaptation” can have. While Taymor’s *Tempest* includes most of the verbal text, it removes some and adds more when explaining Prospera’s back story. Her film respects the text but does insert its own artistry. But the film is also more than that. It is not quite the departure that the “adaptation” definition intends, nor does it simply claim to loosely borrow from the Bard. “Intersecting” and “transforming” are intriguing possibilities since they imply that the adaptation can emphasize parts of the original text while reproducing that text in a (new) dynamic way. This paper places



Taymor in these latter two as her moves raise and answer several questions in the original text. This course is one many take and one mandated by Shakespeare for his creative process, the timeless and universal nature of his plays, and his vibrant themes make Shakespeare “infinitely adaptable” (Jess-Cooke 53; Lehman x). *The Tempest* is one of these infinitely adaptable plays though its uniqueness as an original play is significant in the Shakespearean canon. Travel literature and other works of the time that could have influenced *The Tempest* include Montaigne’s ‘Of the Cannibals’ ...[and] Strachey’s ‘True Repertory of the Wrack’ (Brevik 29; Callaghan 285, 286, 287). All of those influences could have influenced Shakespeare’s thinking and creation but “*The Tempest* is a rare Shakespearean creation in that no previous literary source can be found” (Brode 220). The lack of a literary predecessor means *The Tempest* is a Shakespearean original – where the Bard weaves his own beliefs with information that was popular at the time.

Weaving in new beliefs and subtleties is the hallmark of great adaptations: taking the original and emphasizing and reproducing significant themes. Some critics contend that twentieth-century films are too great a departure, transforming Shakespeare beyond recognition (Howlett 1). Yet these adaptations are still rooted in the original text because the techniques, ideas, and themes, are all inspired by Shakespeare – successful films “transform Shakespeare while remaining rooted in Shakespearean concepts” (Howlett 1, 2, 3). Other critics contend that film adaptations change the notion of authorship to be more collaborative and performative in opening up authorship, and therefore closer to the social conditions of early modern performance (Lehman ix). Collaboration and performance mean that film adaptations synthesize the critical, ideological, and literary discourse to create an end product that creates new ways of understanding Shakespeare (Howlett 2; Lehmann, *Shakespeare Remains* 18, 19). Film

adaptations provide directors an opportunity to both reflect on and engage literary criticism (Howlett 6). Frank Brevik develops this idea further in saying:

These creative adaptations in themselves are also often read as criticism. Indeed, appropriations and adaptations ... have become so established in the last forty or so years as the critical orthodoxy that many scholars read Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with these other creative works foremost in mind (80).

If film adaptation is a creative force that can influence how scholars read *The Tempest*, then appreciating Julie Taymor's adaptation requires situating her adaptation in a discussion started by many other directors. According to Eddie Sammons, compared to other plays from the Shakespearean canon, there are actually not many *Tempest* films:

“In screen adaptation terms [*The Tempest*] is not one of Shakespeare's most influential works. Few other films seem to have looked to it for inspiration ... The public, therefore, has little or nothing to turn to for a faithful presentation of it on screen” (147).

While many of Shakespeare's other major plays have films that are critical favorites from Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* to Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, Douglas Brode says that, “As to a definitive film of *The Tempest*: The Bard's buffs are still eagerly, if ever less patiently, waiting” (232). Interestingly enough, the lack of a definitive *Tempest* and the idea that the play has been neglected by cinema was a factor that drew Taymor to the play (Taymor, Interview by Jen Yamato 2). Four films stand out as those that attempted to enter the critical discussion of *The Tempest*: Franklin Schaffner's *Forbidden Planet* (1956), Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), Paul Mazursky's *Tempest* (1982), and Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991). In Franklin Schaffner's *Forbidden Planet* (1956) the plot points and themes of the storm, the shipwreck, the powerful father, the isolated father/daughter upbringing, and the magical servant(s) are present,

yet “*Forbidden Planet* ... is a totally original work, containing none of Shakespeare’s poetry, yet inspired and informed by one of the Bard’s great plays. Best of all, it is supremely true to spirit of that literary work” (Brode 223). In Derek Jarman’s *The Tempest* (1979) the story and dialogue are Shakespearean yet the setting in a dilapidated, what one would call ‘haunted,’ house and homoerotic undertones create a film that some say departs and distorts Shakespeare in order to emphasize transgression (Brode 224; Coursen 38). In Paul Mazursky’s *Tempest* (1982) modern setting, dialogue, and story that only loosely incorporates Shakespeare in a “corny attempt to make allusions to Shakespeare’s play” (Coursen 39). In Peter Greenaway’s *Prospero’s Books* (1991) critics found the film to be “even more radical than Jarman” in his portrayal of an all-powerful Prospero narrating the entire play, interspersed with references to magical books (Brode 229; Course 34; Jess-Cooke 40). Like Taymor, all of these films make moves to interpret Shakespeare in their own way. Based on references in scholarly works, Jarman and Greenaway have made the biggest mark on *Tempest* criticism. Both Jarman and Greenaway’s film provide intriguing reference points for exploring Taymor’s film and themes of gender and hierarchy. Jarman’s film is dark and dreary yet stands out in its unique representations of Sycorax, Ariel and Caliban and to a lesser extent, Miranda. Greenaway’s film is bright, hyper-mediated, and mystical, and builds on Jarman’s representations of Sycorax and Ariel while employing a sexualized Miranda and Claribel.

### **HOW DOES TAYMOR CHANGE EVERYTHING?**

Taymor’s creative moves change our understanding of Shakespeare, starting with *The Tempest*. First, casting Helen Mirren as Prospera reshapes the most dynamic character in the play as a mother. Second, casting Djimon Hounsou as Caliban represents one of the most contested characters in a post-colonial sense. These two changes force a re-examination of four characters:

Miranda, Sycorax, Ariel, and Caliban. In Shakespeare's play, all of these characters are defined by their relationship to Prospero. Miranda is a motherless daughter with no female role model, Sycorax is an evil witch contrasted with a powerful heroic magi, Ariel is a shapeless spirit who is the perfect servant, and Caliban is an abused beast of burden dominated by his owner. Prospero is integral to all of these definitions, and with *Prospera* Taymor changes all of them. Beyond simply focusing on this one move, this paper will explore all of the little moves Taymor makes in her adaptation to change these other characters. These changes are examples of Taymor entering into literary critical debate with her adaptation. She situates herself and her characters in centuries of criticism by trying to resolve textual debates with film adaptation. Most significantly, she engages questions posed by Novy and Sights as to how Shakespearean representations of women should be read. She applies a feminist lens to *The Tempest* – one that can be applied to all of Shakespeare's works – that attempts to challenge hierarchy and difference (Crowl 177). Admittedly there have been female Prosperos before, including a performance by Vanessa Redgrave in Derek Jacobi's production that Helen Mirren saw and which inspired her that a woman could play any role (Conan 1). Morris includes a long list of female Prosperos in her chapter on mothers:

Demetra Pittman played the role of Prospero in Penny Metropulos's production at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in 2001 with Linda Alper playing her sister Antonia. The Judith Shakespeare Company in New York also staged *The Tempest Project* in 2001, with Virginia Wing playing Prospero. In 2003, the Georgia Shakespeare Festival performed the play with a *Prospera*, Antonia, and Gonzala. The Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company lists an all-female *The Tempest* in its credits, and in 2006, Jody

Hovland played Prospera in Mark Hunter's production for the Riverside Shakespeare Theatre Festival in Iowa City, Iowa (112).

Morris also points to female actors as Hamlet, Romeo, Lear, Falstaff, and Richard (Morris 111). But as the above quote about female Prospero's indicates, those women performed as men for the production – they didn't create adaptations that reimagined the lead as a woman. Taymor's film cuts a bolder path and boasts a studio launch so it leads the charge in injecting women into roles dominated by men. While Shakespeare's original performances, and the process of writing for those performances, were limited by all-male casts, movies open up the possibility of gender recasting (Goodman 71; Rutter 243). Taymor's recasting shifts the blinders away from the solitary woman in the *dramatis personae* to reveal other issues of white patriarchy embedded in the text.

### **WHAT SHOULD *THE TEMPEST* BE?**

Each of the four chapters that follow are dedicated to analyzing central characters of *The Tempest*: situating each in prior literary criticism, transitioning to an examination of the role, exploring the change that a female Prospero brings, and finally, hypothesizing the potential of what the character could be moving forward.

Chapter 1 focuses on Miranda, and how Taymor's film changes Miranda's identity, role, and relationships in *The Tempest* to empower women. Prospera gives Miranda a role model, returns the mother to the fold, assimilates the paternal into the maternal instead of vice versa, and creates a rare Shakespearean rapport between two women. Taymor's Miranda is far from some ordinary wench, she is an independent woman who speaks her mind and goes after what she wants. Other films took a drastically different approach: Jarman's Miranda has excessive cleavage and curious dreadlocks while Greenaway's Miranda is found in a surprising sex scene

with Ferdinand. Just as Miranda speaks for herself now, so does her mother who can prove her fidelity, explain her exile, and mother her child. Finally, Taymor sweeps away many of the dark sexual undertones of years of Prospero criticism, replacing a possibly lecherous and incestuous Prospero with a strong and powerful woman.

I will discuss Sycorax, and how Taymor's film shows how Shakespearean identities, roles, and relationships defined by gender can be re-imagined as similarly complex relationships without gender stereotypes and vilification in Chapter 2. Sycorax is no longer the only authoritarian and powerful (and evil) woman in the play; instead, she seems much like Prospera another exiled and unfairly maligned mother. Both were punished for their dark arts and now they start to be more similar than different. Taymor's Sycorax is unseen, as in Shakespeare, yet her son is no longer a bumbling fool indicting an evil and stupid mother. In fact, her absence is in context to other films with different approaches: Jarman's Sycorax has sagging breasts and stereotypical African features and Greenaway's Sycorax is similar and shown in a bloody screen birth of Caliban. Instead of making Sycorax's magic "blacker," Taymor's Prospera makes Prospero's magic darker, blurring the opposition between Prospero's supposed white magic and Sycorax's black magic. Finally, Taymor removes the sexualization of Sycorax in contrast to the earlier films, replacing an incompetent parent with a mother who seems more like Prospera's predecessor than her opposite.

Chapter 3 focuses on Ariel, and how Taymor's film accents Shakespearean gender roles and identities as mutable, perhaps even suggesting that understanding gender as a social construct can reshape character relationships. Ariel's boundless magic no longer represents Prospero's male power; instead there are intricate female-female dynamics in this new master-servant relationship, Ariel's changeable gender undermines binaries and a fluid sexuality further

shows the malleability of identity. Taymor's Ariel is powerful and malleable, blowing fire and flitting about while taking the shape of water nymphs or hell hounds. In other films Ariel is more static. Jarman's Ariel is dark and possibly a sexual predator, while Greenaway's Ariel is light and clearly exudes a prepubescent naiveté. Taymor's Ariel is somber at times while childishly naïve yet the changability and fluidity in Ariel's physical form makes her Ariel more of a spirit instead of a plodding servant. Finally, Taymor's release of Ariel reveals a generally positive Prospero(a)-Ariel relationship, especially in contrast to her peers whose Ariel slinks off or confusingly multiplies.

I will show how Caliban and Taymor's film shows how Shakespearean identities and relationships built on hierarchies and otherization can be challenged through adaptation in Chapter 4. Caliban's slavery is now explicitly tied to western colonialism, and his blackness forces an examination of race representations. At the same time he weaves together the feminist threats of resisting hierarchy. Taymor's Caliban is black and commanding, a serious look at the character instead of an afterthought complementing bigger more important characters. In other films Caliban is a joke: Jarman's Caliban is comic and questionably sane while Greenaway's Caliban is majestic yet channels a ballerina instead of a slave. Taymor's Caliban is intelligent and cunning, eschewing many stereotypes of blacks, slaves, and colonial subjects. Finally, Taymor's Caliban embodies resistance, a physical and intellectual challenge of white colonial patriarchy who fights for his freedom and, while textually limited to failure, still wins in the end.

## CONCLUSION

Taymor's *Tempest* generates new angles of analysis by embracing the mutability of identity to question identity, power, and hierarchy. All four chapters contends that all roles can be recast. Any character in the dramatis personae can be regendered, recolored, resexed to create

new readings of that character and that play. Second, all character identities can be interpreted. If any character can have his or her gender, color, or sex change, then his or her identity in the play should not be composed of that prior identity signifier. Third, all character relationships can be transgressive. Characters are the sum of their relationships with the other characters, and if one character's gender, color, or sex changes, then the relationship changes too and creates new ways to interrogate representation of that group.



## CHAPTER 1: Miranda – Mothers and Daughters in Julie Taymor’s *Tempest*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will consider how questions raised by feminist readings of Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, in particular motherhood and voice, are answered by Julie Taymor’s 2010 film *The Tempest*. Her film is an interesting examination of feminist issues for Shakespeare’s Prospero becomes for Taymor Prospera. The preeminent question for feminists analyzing Shakespeare is to understand sex and gender ideology in the plays as representative of early modern culture and how modern adaptations are representative of contemporary social mores. One view considers Shakespeare a feminist because his plays blurred gender lines, criticized female stereotypes, and allowed women to seek their own destiny. Another view considers Shakespeare a sexist because his plays featured controlling male characters, relied on self-serving patriarchal marriages as plot devices, and constrained women simply by not writing many female characters. This chapter will argue that Taymor’s film engages with these questions by showing how *The Tempest* can empower women. Taymor asks contemporary viewers to see new possibilities in Shakespeare’s play script. The chapter will consider four questions surrounding the identity, role, and relationship of Prospero and Miranda. First, who is Miranda, this woman all alone on the island?<sup>7</sup> While *The Tempest* has been considered one of Shakespeare’s most masculine plays because Miranda is the only female, recasting Prospero as Prospera turns the most powerful, central character, into a woman, giving Miranda a female role model and a mother. Second, Prospera the mother alleviates the second biggest criticism of *The Tempest*: where is Miranda’s mother and why has she left her family? Third, with Prospera a mother, Prospero’s previous function of incorporating both father and mother roles becomes muted as Prospera is present as a mother and

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<sup>7</sup> Miranda would further be inscribed as the only woman listed in the *dramatis personae*.

Miranda, instead of having no memories of other women, has no memories of men. Fourth, the mother-daughter relationship forces an examination of the father-daughter relationship it replaces. Claims of incest<sup>8</sup> and paternal recovery<sup>9</sup> are replaced with expressions of maternal power and a strong positive relationship between two women – a Shakespearean rarity.

Miranda's story begins with the story of Felicity Jones, the young actress Taymor cast because she was "special" (Taymor, Interview with Christina Radish 1). Jones received mostly positive reviews as A.O. Scott of *The New York Times* described her as "the sweet, unworldly apple of Prospera's eye and a younger, softer version of her ardent, intelligent mother... [her performance demonstrates] marvelous feeling and conviction" (1). Jones is her mother's daughter she is very convincing as a younger Prospera and she conveys a sharp wit in her dialogue and mannerisms. Robert Beames of *The Telegraph* thought her a shining stand-out, a scene stealer whose "Miranda is almost the equal of Mirren's Prospera, and the scenes between the two of them are the most gripping and emotional" (1). Jones builds an emotional connection with Mirren in their touches, looks, and conversations that show the audience why Prospera is so worried about her daughter's fate. Jones's career took off after *The Tempest* with a Sundance-winning role in *Like Crazy*, and major supporting roles in *Hysteria* and *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, as well as starring turns in the *Theory of Everything*, and *The Invisible Woman* (Haslett 1). She must have made the most of her time shooting *The Tempest* because she raves about Helen Mirren as an actress who inspires her (Jones, Interview by Sophie Haslett 1). Her strong role models as well as her intent to play "nuanced, complicated, strong-willed females" provides a window into how she approached Miranda (Jones, Interview by Sophie Haslett 1). She disappears into the role, doing what Miranda must do, while adding her own strength (Taymor,

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<sup>8</sup> For critics discussing Prospero/Miranda incest see Berggren 26; Howard 307; Schotz 49; Thompson 239.

<sup>9</sup> For critics discussing Prospero as symbolizing paternal recovery see Adelman 193; Greene 165.

Interview with Christina Radish 1). Jones's strength shines through and is informed by Taymor's script where the first physical description of Miranda reads "MIRANDA flashes a defiant face up toward her mother" (Taymor, *The Tempest* 34). Her intelligence, strength, and defiance make her playing chess with Ferdinand, offering to carry his wood, and pressuring her mother to shorten the tempest all believable and compelling. It is important to contextualize how Taymor's film tells Miranda's story by comparing it with representations in other major film adaptations. In Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), Miranda is first shown at 5:55, tentatively walking around the dark house, her face lit by the big candle she raises above her. She wears her hair in dreadlocks that hang unruly about her face and messy corn rows that exaggerate the long dangling hairs. She is startled by Caliban and finally addresses her father in a childish voice, complaining about Caliban. She is promptly scolded by Prospero, who physically steers her away from Caliban. At 8:43 Prospero asks Miranda if she remembers time before their exile as he stands over her while she reclines in an armchair and he stares down at her. At 23:02 Miranda spies Ferdinand for the first time, immediately kneeling down by him as he sleeps naked in the hay. Prospero has Ferdinand's sword in hand and points it at Miranda to silence her protests defending Ferdinand. At 51:27 Miranda goes to Ferdinand who is chopping wood in a locked room of the house. She frees him with the skeleton key she discovered. She stares intently at Ferdinand but her squinting and trembling mouth conveys a disaffection that makes her question of love difficult to believe for it rings as empty hope: to escape this terrible haunted house she is trapped in. She offers herself in marriage and laughs as she runs off. At 120:28 Miranda and Ferdinand come to the celebratory feast with Miranda holding an umbrella and with short blonde hair – not her dreadlocks and corn rows. In Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), Miranda is finally seen at 18:05 tossing and turning in bed. As Prospero talks of what she had

before, we see it on screen: her old female attendants and a little princess Miranda escorted by her mother whose face is shown for a few fleeting seconds at 19:40. At 41:20 Prospero and Miranda confront Caliban. Miranda remains silent, never attempting to speak, clutching Prospero for support. At 46:30 Miranda stares in wonder at Ferdinand and shortly thereafter an image noted as the “Book of Love” is shown with drawings of naked men and women holding and touching each other. Prospero (voicing Miranda) mentions virginity and love. Later, at 104:44 Miranda comes upon Ferdinand chopping logs where she coaxes him to rest. She asks if he loves her and white horses appear behind them while Miranda proposes marriage as they swarm around them. Five minutes later, at 109:58, a man – possibly Ferdinand – is shown having sex with Miranda whose white dress has been opened to reveal her breasts as the man moves on top of her. Finally, at 128:48 Miranda joins hands with Ferdinand at her wedding where she wears a red satin gown. Jarman and Greenaway develop a Miranda character who is defined by her body: Jarman with exaggerated cleavage, Greenaway with a transparent white dress. Both versions could be read as sexualizing Miranda as a temptation for both Ferdinand and Caliban: Jarman features homoeroticism and other implied couplings while Greenaway features a rare scene of Miranda engaged in intercourse. Taymor makes different moves with a more conservative depiction of Miranda: she makes Miranda a beautifully naïve young woman yet establishes her as an advocate for what she wants and believes in. Her Miranda changes how daughters should be understood for she is confident in acting without her mother.

### **WHO IS MIRANDA?**

Critics have emphasized for centuries how Miranda remained the only female to appear on stage during *The Tempest* – unique even for Shakespeare (Sanchez, 50). What does that singular female representation say? Lamb called *The Tempest* one of “Shakespeare's most

‘masculine’ works” (Lamb 544). What is most challenging for feminist critics is that Miranda is so patently uninteresting, a stereotypical feeble heroine; she is empty, uncultured, and denied agency (Donaldson, “The Miranda Complex” 68; Slight 361). If the benchmark for feminists was to locate characters that empowered women or exposed oppressive structures, Miranda could do neither for she simply could not engage readers’ attentions nor earn their empathy. Other critics have pointed to Miranda’s perfection and chastity as making it difficult for her to be understood and analyzed for she is flawless (Berggren 29). Once Miranda is placed on a pedestal she loses a lot of her humanity, and the one female character ceases to be a character at all for she is simply a stereotypical cutout. Feminists have seized Miranda’s chastity and explored how it could reflect perfect human virtue (Leininger 289). In this vein, Miranda’s chastity is a value and ideal that cuts across genders and is something all can aspire to. Yet the stronger feminist argument is that chastity is part of Miranda’s agency and that the play showcases her desire to marry Ferdinand in recognition of domesticity that challenges the paternalistic order (Slight 376). This angle is more complicated yet serves as a way to read Miranda as choosing her partner, setting her limits, and determining her own destiny.

In the opening scene where Taymor’s Miranda (played by Felicity Jones) is introduced, she runs along the rocks barefoot in an off-white dress that bounces as she runs. Taymor’s shot alternates between Miranda’s pink face and the hardened face of Helen Mirren’s Prospera. At 3:58 in the film her face is well lit throughout the scene, even before Prospera literally clears the skies. On page 34 the script reads, “Through the tears and drops of rain that stream down her face, MIRANDA flashes a defiant face up toward her mother.” A calculating Prospera carefully weighs her daughter’s pleas for mercy before finally telling her “be collected.” Furthermore she adds “No more amazement” and “Tis time I should inform thee farther.” Taymor’s Miranda

illustrates how the character can be represented positively and played as choosing her own destiny. As Donaldson and Slights mentioned, Miranda has long been portrayed as annoying and agentless. At two points in Act I, Scene II, Prospero calls his daughter a “wench” while chastising her:

PROSPERO No, wench; it [Ferdinand] eats and sleeps and hath such senses  
As we have, such” (I.ii.477-478).

PROSPERO Thou think’st there is no more such shapes as he,  
Having seen but him and Caliban: foolish wench!” (I.ii.563-564).

‘Wench’ could mean maiden, girl, or lass but during the early 1600’s ‘wench’ was used as a derogatory term for servant women who were considered lower class (Moran 239). Even if it was not intended as a derogatory term then, it has negative connotations now (Schmidt 1). Taymor’s film keeps these two lines largely intact yet replaces ‘wench’ with ‘child.’ A single replacement could be accidental or unintentional but double replacement marks a specific purpose. Prospero’s earlier chastising tone is replaced with a more endearing phrase that makes Prospera seem more like she is reminding Miranda for something than punishing her. This change assists Taymor in creating both a more positive vision of Miranda and Prospera – the two female characters in her film. Felicity Jones’ angelic face captures the chastity and perfection of Shakespeare’s Miranda and the scenes between her and Ferdinand feel realistic. Their meeting is heartfelt instead of corny like the BBC version. At 24:40 in the film, corresponding to Act I, Scene II, line 474, Miranda is wide-eyed and happy, curious at this new creature as Ferdinand stumbles to his knees, with sunlight framing this sunken figure in a black outfit that clearly contrasts with Miranda’s white dress. Both Ferdinand and Miranda remain incredulous at the discovery of the other, speechless, mouths agape. Furthermore, Miranda seeks him out when he is performing

tasks for her mother and her actions to assist him to remove any doubt that she wants to be his wife. Thompson raises the question of Miranda's forced gender isolation, "Miranda at one point stresses her isolation and lack of female companionship by saying "I do not know / One of my sex, no woman's face remember, / Save from my glass, mine own" (III.i.48-50)" (234). In the movie Miranda discusses other faces generally instead of specifying women because since she sees the face of her mother everyday, she is no longer the lone isolated woman. Thus, Taymor's Miranda should be analyzed through her relationships that shape her roles and interactions (Slights 364). Taymor's Miranda can now be read as commentary on the relationships that are absent or archaic in Shakespeare's original text.

### **WHERE IS HER MOTHER?**

Miranda's lonely tenure on the island prompted many to ask, where is her mother? Why is there so little mention of her mother? Furthermore, *who* is she and *why* has Prospero never discussed her until the start of the play? This raises questions of both the identity of her mother and why Prospero has kept it from her for so long (Johnson 19). This omission is so glaring because Miranda's mother remains absent from Prospero's memory and "wholly absent" from Miranda's memory (Orgel 1). This leads to the recurring question of absent mothers in Shakespeare. Rose sums it up well pointing to the large amount of father-son and father-daughter relationships, yet, "Few mothers appear in what traditionally have been designated as the major plays... mothers are conspicuously absent from [the tragedies]... [and] more striking, in the six most celebrated romantic comedies ... no mothers appear at all" (292). Where are all the mothers?<sup>10</sup> Why<sup>11</sup> have they been erased<sup>12</sup> and removed? Rose quickly dispatches the two main

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<sup>10</sup> An analysis of familial pronouns (mother, father, daughter, son) in Shakespeare's comedies reveals the rhetorical occurrence of the word "mother" 147 times compared to "father" 481 times.

<sup>11</sup> Shakespeare was not alone in depicting few mothers in his plays, and a more advanced analysis of mothers in Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Johnson would be a valuable academic inquiry.

counter arguments first by saying that despite the illegality of female actresses, there are plenty of non-mother female characters, and second that women had a surprising amount of legal and economic agency of the time (Rose 292, 294). Thus, the “why” becomes more pressing.

Adelman and Thompson contend that absent mothers direct the reading of the play to a dominant father and a system controlled by men (Adelman, “Born of Woman” 91, 111; Thompson 240).

This can be read as either a critique of this system or an affirmation of it, yet Taymor seems decided for the former. Her replacement of the father with the mother shatters the notion of male control for Prospera is a powerful woman whose magic deters Caliban, assists in revenge against Antonio, and marries Miranda and Ferdinand. Taymor’s film is a powerful feminist adaptation since it becomes one of the few major versions of any of the plays with a mother character, let alone a woman as strong as Prospera. Additionally, Taymor erases one of the most controversial lines of *The Tempest* when it comes to motherhood:

MIRANDA Sir, are not you my father?

PROSPERO Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and

She said thou wast my daughter; and they father

Was Duke of Milan; and thou his only heir (I.ii.66-69).

Orgel interprets this line by contending that “Prospero's wife is identified as Miranda's mother, in a context implying that though she was virtuous, women as a class are not, and that were it not for her word, Miranda's legitimacy would be in doubt” (1). Taymor removes this doubt in two ways: first, that Prospera can clearly claim her own motherhood of Miranda and second, that line about virtuous mothers is replaced by a more concrete exchange between the two of them at 6:40 into the film:

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<sup>12</sup> Google’s NGram viewer maps use of the word “mother” in English texts between 1560 and 1660 – never above .016% while “father” peaks at .026%; *The Tempest*, likely written in 1610, falls between two of the century’s rises high points. Further academic research could use NGram to explore these questions.



MIRANDA But are you not my mother?

PROSPERA The same. Who long ago was wife

to him who ruled Milan most liberally.

Ambiguity and assault on virtuous mothers is replaced by an absolute certainty of the lineage of Prospera and the identity of Miranda.

The question of “where is Miranda’s mother” is considered by many critics as a starting point for examining the absence of women and mothers in Shakespearean texts (Johnson 19; Orgel 1; Rose 292). Furthermore, the question of “*who* is Miranda’s mother” is pertinent in illustrating the lack of depth that accompanies the few women Shakespeare depicts. Queen Gertrude in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* is one of his most prominent female characters and often listed as a villain. Like Sycorax, Prospero’s nameless wife, and Claribel, almost all the audience knows of Queen Gertrude’s history and motives are through the lens of a male character with an invested reason to slant it against her. Prince Fortinbras, the Norwegian prince who is preparing to invade Denmark – which should make him a threat, has his motives and valor touted by both Horatio in Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 79-107 and then further supported by Claudius in Act 1, Scene 2. While both characters do not describe their own interests, Queen Gertrude we might say receives the Sycorax treatment and Fortinbras the Ferdinand treatment. In *Hamlet* 5.1.41-91 the Ghost decries his wife’s disloyalty, betrayal of his love and her vows, and he details her possible motives, while in Act 3, Scene 2, Hamlet’s Player Queen adds:

PLAYER QUEEN: “In second husband let me be accurst!

None wed the second but who kill’d the first...The instances that second marriage move

Are base respects of thrift, but none of love:

A second time I kill my husband dead,

When second husband kisses me in bed” (III.ii.174-180).

If Queen Gertrude was given a monologue explaining why she had to marry Claudius so quickly as well as her hopes for Hamlet, the perception of her would drastically change. Perhaps Claudius threatened to kill Hamlet if she refused, or maybe her marriage to Hamlet’s father was loveless and Claudius was her lover all along – and possibly Hamlet’s real father. With the ability to shape her own narrative, Queen Gertrude could have changed her actions from breeding resentment and hatred to compassion and empathy. The real reason it is easy for the Ghost’s jealousy and Hamlet’s Player Queen’s coquetry to discredit Queen Gertrude is that the audience does not know anything about her and her appearance late in the first act compounds this problem. Taymor’s scene in Prospera’s cell where she explains her past to Miranda bestows Prospera with motive, ambition, credibility, and empathy as she describes her exile. Taymor’s film has tools at its disposal that a play does not, for instance flashback:

“As PROSPERA tells their story to MIRANDA, we flash back, in quick fragments, to various images in Milan:

PROSPERA works intently in her LIBRARY/LABORATORY as her husband lovingly watches her from the doorway. A cradle lies at her feet, the infant, MIRANDA, crying.

In a CHAPEL, at the funeral of her HUSBAND, the Duke, a royal crowd assembles in prayer. ANTONIO, PROSPERA’S brother, looks to his sister with concern.

At a meeting in the STATE ROOM with her counselors, PROSPERA, the new Duke, signs documents as her brother looks on with envy.

In the castle shadows, ANTONIO conspires with the KING, while SEBASTIAN looks on.

The KING'S MEN break into PROSPERA's alchemical LAB and smash all her instruments.

In the dead of night, PROSPERA and the now four-year-old MIRANDA are violently torn out of bed by armored guards.

While the city sleeps, PROSPERA and her YOUNG DAUGHTER are secreted into a BOAT by old GONZALO and sent off to sea.

PROSPERA Upon thy father's death, authority was/Conferred (as was his will) to me alone,/Thereby awaking the ambitions of/My brother and thy uncle, call'd Antonio"  
(Taymor, *The Tempest* 37).

Dark imagery and foggy transitions communicate the nightmarish dream of Prospera's fall in Taymor's world. The revised backstory is an instance of rewriting but it helps clearly outline a "feminist perspective" for Prospera that situates her exile as one of gender discrimination (Royster 7; Vaughan, "Miranda, where's your mother?" 350). What follows the flashback is another new creation from Taymor where Prospera animatedly details the betrayal of her brother as he labels her a witch, destroys her lab, and exiles her and her daughter – supported in exchange for fealty to Naples. Taymor's Prospera has something Queen Gertrude could only dream of – the chance to tell her own story and develop her own character, free of representation by biased peers.

### **HOW DOES THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP CHANGE *THE TEMPEST*?**

The creation of Prospera changes the identity and roles of Prospero and Miranda. Prospero's most stable relationship – bracketing for the moment whether he is a witch or magus, a selfish man or a selfless one – is as a father to Miranda (Thompson 240). Prospera's emergence changes the fundamental nature of Prospero – exposing lines of critique that analyze his role as a

father. First and foremost Prospero defines fatherhood as the central social agent, “*The Tempest*, along with Shakespeare’s other late romances, likewise participates in a conservative reestablishment of the father as the lynchpin of society, burying the mother and validating patriarchy” (Penuel 115). Taymor’s version destabilizes the father as the lynchpin of the society of the island, restores the mother, and questions patriarchy. The original play posits the mother within the father as the father incorporates motherly characteristics and takes over maternal functions, “acting as both father and mother”, Prospero “supplants the mother” (Donaldson, “Digital Archives” 7; Orgel 4; Penuel 116, 125). Beyond attempting to establish the father as the pillar of society, *The Tempest* could be read as removing the social and emotional purpose of the mother. In her 1987 article Adelman’s analysis of Macbeth and Duncan shows how the removal of the mother can be destabilizing:

Duncan combines in himself the attributes of both father and mother: he is the center of authority, the source of lineage and honor, the giver of name and gift; but he is also the source of all nurturance...He is the father as androgynous parent from whom, singly, all good can be imagined to flow...Such a father does away with any need of a mother: he is the image of both parents in one, threatening aspects of each controlled by the presence of the other (Adelman, “Born of Woman” 94).

Prospera flips all of this on its head, combining attributes of both parents yet establishing a woman as the center of authority – her androgyny and power shows how a mother can be strong and independent. Miranda is also defined by the unique roles she fulfills as her father’s daughter. In conventional terms she takes her mothers place as the woman of the house (Berggren 26). This is the focus of many critics’ arguments about overcoming the incest drive, yet it also is incredibly practical for audience members would likely assume Miranda filled the roles of

cooking and cleaning left by her mother. Just as Prospero could be boiled down to Miranda's father, so too can Miranda be boiled down to Prospero's daughter, "So much, then, is this young woman circumscribed into being nothing if not her father's daughter" (Johnson 57). While she remains a daughter regardless of the gender of her parent, it does change her agency. Everything she has learned has been from her father which explains how she relates to knowledge, power, and social relationships (Schotz 53). Learning everything from a mother instead of a father changes how Miranda comes to understand herself – her body and her social status. Taymor improves Miranda's confidence in her body image – turning a naïve girl with an empty proposal to carry logs into a confident woman who knows what she wants. The script reads, "It is clear that MIRANDA is much more athletic and used to moving on the wild terrain" (Taymor, *The Tempest* 95). Sure enough, Miranda nimbly descends the rock face, jumping after Ferdinand as he carries his logs. Her line remains the same as before but it has more meaning when she says:

MIRANDA It would become me  
As well as it does you; and I should do it  
With much more ease; for my good will is to it,  
And yours it is against (III.i.33-36).

This Miranda really could carry logs with ease. Taymor improves Miranda's status – in relation to her mother and with the only other island resident, Caliban. Before, her relationship with Caliban is marked by his threat toward her and her father's protection of her that prevented Caliban from peopling the island with little Calibans. Prospero proclaims:

Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,

Took pains to make thee speak” (I.ii.412-415).

As he launches into a long speech demonizing Caliban, Prospero assumes the role of a spurned teacher whose trust was abused and Miranda was the unfortunate victim. Taymor shortens Prospero’s speech to just the lines above and gives it to Miranda. The actions Miranda ascribes to herself can be read as her being her own agent, resisting both Caliban’s overtures and Prospera’s control (Sanchez 65). Taymor’s Miranda seems more comfortable and at ease with her mother than other adaptations that usually depicts Miranda in supplication to her father.

To understand the significance of the move from Prospero to Prospera, consider how a similar switch would change a father-daughter relationship into a mother-daughter relationship. *King Lear* features a father with three daughters while their mother remains out of the picture and almost entirely unmentioned save for a line that is eerily similar to Prospero’s veiled insult on the virtue of women:

LEAR I think you are [my daughter]; I know what reason I have to think so: if thou shouldst not be glad, I would divorce me from thy mother’s tomb, sepulchering an adultress (*King Lear*, II.iv.136-139).

If *King Lear* became *Queen Lear*, or even simply featured *Queen Lear* on stage to some extent, it would change the definition of *Lear* as well as the relationship between *Lear* and each of the daughters. *Lear* would no longer be a fool who divides his kingdom too early, but a mother who steps aside for her children – as many monarchs over time have done. Just as *Prospera* marries *Miranda* to *Ferdinand* for the happiness of her daughter, so too might *Lear* find a husband that would make *Cordelia* happy. And finding the King of France to be that husband, perhaps *Lear* would take pride and happiness in that match and go to live with *Cordelia* instead of the already married, already independent, and already treacherous *Goneril* and *Regan*. The mother-daughter

relationships between all three daughters might have been much improved as well which could have avoided a French invasion and maintained prosperity of the realm.

### **WHAT ABOUT HER FATHER?**

Taymor's reimagining of the parent-child relationship complicates many previous criticisms of the father daughter relationship in Shakespeare's original *Tempest*. Critics agree that the father-daughter relationship is important yet some read it differently, considering the incest drive and analyzing the erasure of maternal power in reading the play as one of paternal recovery. Sanchez points out how Prospero's "interactions with Miranda frame his encounters" with the other characters, especially Ariel and Caliban (58). Prospero's relationship with Miranda is hierarchical and controlled: he holds the power and he controls her. Many critics explore how the father-daughter power dynamic extends to the marriage of the daughter. McEachern writes, "[m]arriage becomes the focal point ... The marriage of a daughter is a difficult moment for a father, especially if he lacks a wife. He must move from the center of his daughter's world to the circumference and must watch another take his place" (McEachern 272). Prospero's only positive blood relationship is with his daughter and even though many read Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand as part of Prospero's machinations, Prospero cedes power over Miranda to another. Prospera maintains both tropes with few changes. Her encounters with Caliban are often to protect her daughter while her interactions with Ariel are to assist her in securing Miranda's future. With patriarchal control absent, Prospera makes a sacrifice when she gives her daughter to Ferdinand and leaves the island where she is all-powerful (Crowl 178). Some read Prospero's control of Miranda as control of her sexuality and Thompson takes it the next step, "Prospero's control might be more problematic and that his concern with his daughter's sexuality might indicate an incestuous desire for her" (239). Incest is a common

theme many draw from *The Tempest* and it is discussed in many analyses of film adaptations of the play from *Yellow Sky* to *Forbidden Planet* (Howard 307). Additionally, the possible conflict and victorious overcoming of incestuous desire is a recurring theme in Shakespeare's plays (Schotz 49). Berggren writes that, "In refraining from the incestuous coupling with his own child, the Shakespearean father reestablishes his own sense of dignity and restraint, so that he once again [achieves] self-purification" (26). Miranda is the only woman and Prospero has been gone from Milan without sexual release for many years so his desire could be overpowering. In the conventional sense, this incest drive is erased with Prospera not only because mother-daughter incest is less often deployed in literature but also because Prospera could potentially use Caliban or Ariel to satisfy these desires<sup>13</sup>. Either way, Taymor makes a conscious effort to leave these themes behind in her adaptation. Shakespeare scholars often conclude that the absence of maternal power is intentional, "paternal authority can be recovered only in her absence, in the shrunken realm Prospero finds on her banishment" (Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* 37). Additionally, from *Hamlet* to *King Lear*, the absence of paternal power releases destructive powers that pervade Shakespeare's tragedies (Adelman, "Born of Woman" 94, 96). In Adelman's 1992 book she writes,

The romances can be understood as Shakespeare's final attempt to repair the damage of this legacy, in effect to reinstate the ideal parental couple lost at the beginning of *Hamlet*: the idealized mother is recovered in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, the idealized father in *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. But the attempt at recovery itself reinscribes the conditions of loss: in the plays of maternal recovery, the father's authority must be severely undermined and the mother herself subjected to a chastening purgation; in the

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<sup>13</sup> For a further explanation of how Prospera moves the discussion beyond Freudian focus on father-daughter desire, see Bate 10.



plays of paternal recovery, the mother must be demonized and banished before the father's authority can be restored (193).

Taymor's *Tempest* reads more like a play of maternal recovery for there is no father in the play and Miranda never questions that – paternal authority has been removed from the equation.

Furthermore, the reimagining of Prospero as Prospera returns the mother from her banishment.

The mother-daughter relationship forged by Prospera and Miranda Taymor adapts from Shakespeare is notable because there are few mother-daughter pairs and almost as few dialogues between women. Father-son, mother-son, and father-daughter relationships are common in Shakespeare but there are no mother-daughter relationships (Schotz 45). Furthermore, there are only nineteen examples of female-female conversations in Shakespeare (McKewin 119).

Without this relationship, something is missing, something Taymor hopes to restore as she says in an interview, “I think what you get with Helen's performance is this unbelievably complex woman who's both powerful and vulnerable, has an incredible maternal side to her, which is very unique, to have this mother-daughter relationship” (5). The complex relationship Taymor creates allows women to define themselves apart from stereotypes and in their own voices. Taymor's film makes that all possible because it creates a positive mother-daughter relationship as the central relationship of the play (Crowl 181; Royster 7). Conan writes how that changes everything, “The relationship with Miranda becomes maternal ... in becoming maternal ... she improves her relationship. It doesn't have that rather uncomfortable patriarchal, oppressive kind of feeling that Prospera - Prospero has when played by a man” (4). Taymor deliberately creates what Lenz calls a “counter-universe” for feminists to infuse the importance of female-female friendship into a play that did not even contain multiple female characters. Lenz explains the “counter-universe” this way:

Restoring women to the plays, feminist critics call attention to the importance and intensity of female friendship in Shakespeare. They find that women's shared conversation, mutual affection, and extraordinary intimacy create a kind of female subculture apart from the man's world...They delineate a female "counter-universe" that is a repository for styles, attitudes, and values sharply contrasting with those of the dominant male order (5).

Miranda's conversations with Prospera have more power than before because Miranda has more power and the conversations are themselves more significant because they show two women discussing the course they want to take – forging their own destiny. McKewin notes "[t]he private peace of women provides a chance for them to consider the options of conformity or self-assertion" (121). Female-female conversations offer a new feminist reading of Shakespeare that creates space for women to redefine their identities, criticize patriarchy, and create a new power structure (McKewin 119). Prospera makes all this possible by creating female-female conversation and also being an example of new reading that redefines identity to challenge patriarchy and establish positive maternal power.

## CONCLUSION

Taymor's *Tempest* is a new reading of Shakespeare themes and characters that empower women. First, all roles can be recast and re-imagined by gender. Taymor's Prospera shows how strong female actors can assume traditionally male Shakespearean roles with very slight adjustments. If acting roles can be recast while staying true to the text and dialogue, gender empowerment can happen without sacrificing textual integrity. Second, gender stereotypes – and their influence on gendered relationships – can be deconstructed. Taymor's mother-daughter relationship not only provides new ways of reading those relationships but also criticizes the

original father-daughter relationship. If characters can highlight these gender stereotypes *and* model non-stereotypical behavior, norms can be satirized and changed. Third, all character identities can be understood without gender. Taymor's Prospera is not the same as Shakespeare's Prospero yet she does encompass similar motives, desires, and actions – regardless of their gender difference. If characters can be more than their gender, their language, power, and privilege can be interrogated without being clouded or directed by gender.

## **CHAPTER 2: Sycorax – Witches and Villains in Julie Taymor's *Tempest***

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will show how Taymor's *Tempest* delivers a feminist answer to representations of witches and demonized women in Shakespeare. As Prospero becomes Prospera, the dynamic between a male wizard and a female witch changes. The preeminent question for feminists approaching magic in Shakespeare is to understand how labels and categorization communicate identities and roles that are influenced by social conventions. One view considers Shakespeare a feminist because his female witches were powerful and influential in his plays, they were women who decided their own fate. Another view considers Shakespeare a sexist because his female witches were demonized and vilified in his plays, they were women who were ugly and evil. The thesis of this chapter is that Taymor's film shows how Shakespearean roles and identities defined by gender can be reimagined as similarly complex relationships without gender stereotypes and gender vilification. The chapter will consider four questions surrounding the identity, role, and relationship of Prospero and Sycorax. First, who is Sycorax, this unseen, unheard, exiled woman? While *The Tempest* has been understood as one of Shakespeare's most patriarchal plays because it centers almost exclusively on its central male

figure and women who challenge authority (like Sycorax) are exiled and never seen again, Taymor's Prospera gives voice to powerful women accused of witchcraft who achieve their own destiny. Second, what is Sycorax, the mother, like, this apparent consort of the devil<sup>14</sup> who begot a treacherous would-be rapist<sup>15</sup>? Even though Sycorax has long been the most developed mother in the play, though we are only given a few lines about her, Prospera the mother problematizes the idea of Sycorax the inadequate parent. Third, how does the inception of noble alchemist Prospera begin the redemption of the evil witch Sycorax? Fourth, what makes Sycorax and Prospera more similar than different? Long portrayed as the antitheses of each other, these two witches seem more and more like they are from the same coven.

It is important to contextualize how Taymor tells Sycorax's story in her film as well as how it has been told in other major film adaptations. In Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), at 58:18, Sycorax is shown as an obese woman lazing back in a fly infested cell – you can tell it is fly infested because they buzz audibly. Her cell is truly a cell, not an architectural marvel, the raw concrete cracking and the grounds and walls caked with mud. Sycorax smokes what is presumably opium from a pipe while an adult Caliban – who is completely naked – suckles from her breast. She pulls a naked, pale white, Ariel into her presence by drawing his chain, hand over hand, until he stumbles to her feet. There is no cloven pine in Jarman's imagination, just Ariel in a chained collar. In Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), at 35:31, Sycorax is again shown as a fat big-breasted woman who reclines in a litter and is attended by white and black servants. Her litter and her throne are decadent like Prospero's similarly opulent decorations and she is being caressed by a servant when she encounters a young Ariel. The next scene illustrates

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<sup>14</sup> Caliban as a product of his mother – a consort of the devil: “PROSPERO Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!” (I.ii.376-377).

<sup>15</sup> Caliban as a prospective rapist: “PROSPERO In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate/The honour of my child” (I.ii.407-408).

Prospero's voiceover as Ariel is trapped in a cloven pine. The following scene similarly follows Prospero's narration as Sycorax gives bloody birth to Caliban whose fetus appears in an inhuman shape clawing from her womb. Jarman and Greenaway make a radical change that is not based in the original Shakespeare text: they show Sycorax<sup>16</sup>. Both versions could be read as satirizing the demonization of Sycorax – or exploiting it for both scenes heap added nudity and eroticism on a scene that does not appear in the play. Taymor takes a step back: she does not show or characterize Sycorax.

Taymor's silencing and erasure of Sycorax has drawn criticism. Katryn Caccavaio says of the emission:

Without the presence of Sycorax (absent even from cinematic flashbacks in the film) to offer differing (oppositional?) vision of maternal power in a colonial context actually perpetuates colonialist readings of the play .... there is no closure with Sycorax's absence and she is still denied her identity as the mother of the multitude in the New World. In this sense, Sycorax is exiled in the purest sense of the word; she remains on the periphery of the action of the film and therefore the power inherent in her identity as a mother also remains marginal despite Prospera's added sense of power because she is a woman/mother (211).

Derek Jarman's film gives Sycorax the most screen time and she ends up as a parody. Her casting was likely intended for that as Claire Davenport, who played Sycorax, was known mostly for "large lady roles" – so much so that she appeared in four movies where her characters were called "fat lady" (two separate films), "fat dancer" (*Star Wars Episode VI*), and "fat stripper" (in an adult film) ("Claire Davenport"). This raises the question: is Taymor's not casting Sycorax,

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<sup>16</sup> Sycorax appeared on English stages from 1667 through the early nineteenth century in an adaptation popularized by Davenant and Dryden that many took as the original (Bate 10; Morris 111; Shanahan 91; Swedenberg 323).

and ignoring her on film, worse than casting an actor, and demonizing Sycorax on film?

Davenport's characterization is laughable and excessively disgusting: breast feeding an adult and wallowing in filth. Instead we see Taymor's revolutionary recasting of Prospera changes how Sycorax can be understood for everything we learn and understand of Sycorax comes from Prospera.

### **WHO IS SYCORAX?**

Several post-colonial critics have emphasized that Sycorax has represented the silencing of indigenous women (Diala 33; Ping 97). To what extent does that silence still resonate? In the 1623 folio printing of *The Tempest* Sycorax is not in the *dramatis personae* and has no lines despite some critics contending that Sycorax is the most developed female character in the play (Lamb 542). In film both Jarman and Greenaway, who chose to visually portray Sycorax in their movies, did not give her any lines. In addition, she remains absent from cinematic equivalents of the *dramatis personae*. Jarman's movie begins with detailed placards that depict the actor name, their character, and a character explanation. Four actors do not receive a placard or explanation: Elisabeth Welch "A Goddess", Claire Davenport "Sycorax", Kate Temple "Young Miranda", and Helen Wellington-Lloyd "A Spirit". Greenaway's movie concludes with a cast listing that does not include Sycorax despite her short appearance. How does this Sycorax – created by these representations and understood through these analyses – symbolize female identity and sexuality? That Sycorax remains an underdeveloped character simply described as evil, wicked, and frightening makes reclaiming Sycorax difficult for feminists (Busia 86). A simple standard for sympathetic characters is that they evoke feelings and overcome situations that the audience can relate and connect to (Taylor 377). That is difficult if Sycorax remains an evil witch who never has the chance to speak for herself. Thus the first main obstacle for Sycorax being a

sympathetic character or a locus of feminist activism is her ability to be more than an evil witch. The second main defining factor of Sycorax is that she Caliban's mother – in fact, Berggren says Sycorax is *the* defining matriarchal figure of *The Tempest* (31). That Sycorax is defined as a bad mother because her son is evil further complicates her redeployment as a feminist agent (Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* 216; Thompson 237). Once Sycorax is defined as reason, cause, and mother of Prospero(a) and Miranda's island antagonist, it is difficult for her to earn any sympathy. Thus the second main obstacle for Sycorax is that her motherhood needs to be redefined and understood in new context.

Sycorax is introduced in Taymor's *Tempest* in a daylight scene at the pool where Prospera calls forth Ariel. At 13:40 in the film Ariel asks for freedom, his white almost translucent skin painting his goodness in contrast to the pure black obsidian he kneels on. Despite the daylight the scene is darkly lit as Prospera chastises Ariel 30 seconds later for requesting freedom while reminding him of the horrors of Sycorax. At 14:52 in the film the softly and slowly building ominous music becomes more pronounced as a dark wispy tree starts to materialize behind Ariel and Prospera's voice reaches its angriest pitch. While Jarman and Greenaway show what Prospero narrates, Taymor's film simply includes a dramatization of Ariel being trapped in the tree – Sycorax remains silent and unseen. Instead, Taymor's version makes small changes in word use and repetition that influence perception of Sycorax. First consider word use and Sycorax's introduction in the original text with these two lines:

PROSPERO "Hast thou forgot  
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy  
Was grown into a hoop? Hast though forgot her?" (I.i.305).  
PROSPERO "This damn'd witch Sycorax,

For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible  
To enter human hearing, from Algier,  
Thou know'st, was banish'd: for one thing she did  
They would not take her life. Is not this true?" (I.i.311-315).

Taymor leaves out "who with age and envy/Was grown into a hoop" to describe Sycorax while she simplifies her backstory with the removal of "for one thing she did/They would not take her life." Taymor's exclusion of the former removes a possible image of Sycorax as the stereotypical old witch – a woman without many avenues of expression and jealous of the young woman who pay her no heed (Bever 967). Removal of the latter eliminates some of the mysterious suspicions of Sycorax dodging a conviction – something that would have doomed Shakespeare era witch suspects to a lifetime of looking over their shoulders and ignoring whispered insults (Bever 973). Second, repetitive insults demonizing Sycorax were avoided by Taymor, as illustrated by examining the original text from I.i.320-340 where Taymor has struck lines:

PROSPERO ...thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorr'd commands,  
~~Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee,~~  
~~By help of her more potent ministers~~  
~~And in her most unmitigable rage,~~  
Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
Imprison'd thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years; within which space she died  
And left thee there; where thou didst vent thy groans  
~~As fast as mill-wheels strike.~~ Then was this island—



~~Save for the son that she did litter here,  
A freckled whelp hag born--not honour'd with  
A human shape.  
ARIEL Yes, Caliban her son.  
PROSPERO—Dull thing, I say so; he, that Caliban  
Whom now I keep in service. 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, witch Sycorax  
Could not again undo: it was mine art. (340)~~

Taymor cuts dialogue that would remind the audience that Sycorax is a “hag” and a “damn’d witch” filled with “unmitigable rage” and a summoner of nefarious “potent ministers” who “littered” the evil Caliban on the island. With slight word changes and Taymor starts to introduce a Sycorax who should not be understood as a damned witch who unleashed hellspawn but a sorceress who used her magic to make her exile more comfortable.

### **WHAT IS SYCORAX LIKE AS A PARENT?**

Sycorax’s absence from the island to which she was exiled, combined with her abandonment of her son, raises the question of how the audience comes to understand Sycorax generally and as a mother specifically. Is everything we know of her heresy? Since Sycorax does not appear in the play, or Taymor’s film, everything we know of her is through Prospero(a) and Caliban. Thus, Taymor’s attempt to soften the representation of Sycorax is a step toward a feminist understanding of the character because she can become more sympathetic. Taymor’s

film sets up an even more explicit parallel than the original play as both exiled mothers raise their child alone on the island. Caliban's upbringing is more starkly contrasted with Miranda's. Taymor keeps Prospero's original line describing Caliban's birth on the island: "Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself/Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!" (I.i.377-78). She also keeps Prospero's original line describing Miranda's arrival on the island:

"Tho wast that did preserve me!

Thou didst smile. Infused with a fortitude from heaven, which raised in me

An undergoing stomach, to bear up

Against what should ensue" (I.i.179-184).

Sycorax's parenting produces Caliban, a would-be-rapist while Prospero(a)'s parenting produces Miranda, a naïve innocent who takes Ferdinand's breath away. At first glance Taymor seems to have recreated the same bad parent that has represented bad mothers for centuries (Berggren 31; Busia 86). Is Sycorax evil – according to Shakespeare or Taymor? In creating her own exiled sorceress, Taymor removes any obstacles in the way of the parallel between Prospero and Sycorax – they could be read as two sides of the same coin, representing both the bad and the good.

The question of "how can we change our understanding of Sycorax the mother" can provide a template for reengaging other maligned mothers and/or female villains in Shakespeare (Diala 34). Furthermore, it creates another question: if there are other instances of evil mothers defined by their evil sons, what does that say about Shakespeare (Thompson 237)? How can those characters be re-imagined? The Queen in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* is a character with villainous qualities. Like Sycorax she has a son, Cloten, who appears to be a simple brute. Like Caliban he desires the beautiful innocent daughter of the man in whose house he lives, Imogen,

to sire his children despite her hatred of him. Like Caliban's desire for Miranda, Cloten declares he will rape her (III.iii.214-2121):

CLOTEN With that suit upon my  
back, will I ravish her: first kill him, and in her  
eyes; there shall she see my valour, which will then  
be a torment to her contempt. He on the ground, my  
speech of insultment ended on his dead body, and  
when my lust hath dined,—which, as I say, to vex  
her I will execute in the clothes that she so  
praised

That is much more graphic than Prospero's derision of Caliban's attempt (I.ii.407-411):

PROSPERO In mine own tell, till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.  
CALIBAN O ho, O ho! Would't had been done!  
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else  
This isle with Calibans.

In her 1992 work Janet Adelman contends, "The would-be rapist Caliban at the end – his violent sexuality is construed as derivative from the woman's part, an extension of her will in him" (216). Several of Shakespeare's female antagonists are aided by sons who are the physical embodiment of their mother's mental evil. Yet Shylock's daughter Jessica from *The Merchant of Venice* runs away and does not institute her father's hatred. If the Queen in *Cymbeline* were to be understood as distant from Cloten, to be recognized as clearly off-screen when Cloten has his idea, to have clearly not suggested the rape, would she be considered removed from his plan?

The Queen does meet all of those criteria just as Sycorax is long dead and has not interacted with Caliban for years, she is so far off-screen that she is never seen, and she clearly never suggested rape. Taymor's film moves in this direction by making Caliban his own man who seems intelligent in his own right in his attempt to use Stephano and Trinculo but also that that plan is his own. Thus, by interrogating what we know about Sycorax, or the Queen, and generating the distance she needs to be understood as her own character distinct from her son helps make her a more sympathetic character.

### **HOW DOES THE BLACK-WHITE DYNAMIC CHANGE *THE TEMPEST*?**

The creation of Prospera changes the relationship of Prospero and Sycorax. Prospero's most defining factor is his magic but the role we ascribe to him – witch, magus, wizard, or sorcerer – is an important detail (Donaldson "Digital Archives" 176; Orgel 8). Prospera's re-imagining changes the way Sycorax and Prospero are defined – exposing sexist stereotypes that define protagonists and antagonists. First, the purpose of Prospero's magic serves to control female agency and sexuality, "Several recent critics have argued that Prospero's magic in *The Tempest* may be understood as an attempt to control a dangerous and threatening female sexuality, and to replace it with a kind of sanitized, non-physical generativity that is gendered male" (Donaldson, "Digital Archives" 176). While past directors have illustrated this idea with an over-sexualized Sycorax<sup>17</sup>, Taymor does not sexualize Sycorax by avoiding the temptation to physically depict Sycorax while also removing the lines from the text that allude to Sycorax's out-of-wedlock child. In Peter Donaldson's 1998 article he builds on this argument by contending that the original Prospero absorbs "good" female qualities while denigrating the "bad" ones:

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<sup>17</sup> In Davenant and Dryden's stage adaptation Sycorax is Caliban's sister, still a "monster", yet promiscuous – she represents a sexual conquest for the colonial conquerors (Shanahan 109; Swedenberg 327, 335).

The magic in *The Tempest* is ‘both generated by and based on revulsion from and fear of women’s sexuality.’ The strict sexual morality Prospero enforces, the demonization of sexuality in his accounts of Sycorax and Caliban ... Prospero’s magic does not merely control but derives from and usurps female potencies – the ‘bad’ magic of Sycorax as well as the nurturant and compassionate aspects of Shakespeare’s ‘good’ female characters. Power thus ‘passes from female to male figures’: Prospero appropriates female qualities ‘while keeping female figures subject to male authority by defining compassion as an aspect of his magic.’ His magic, then, both controls female sexuality and competes with it, replacing ‘feminine’ nurture and care-giving with modes of concern, compassion and forgiveness that are fused with his willful and magical [control]. (176)

Taymor addresses this problem more directly through her Prospera who is no longer an example of male appropriation of stereotypical positives but an embodiment of those positives. Second, Prospero’s magic informs his role on the island as well as Sycorax’s. Sycorax’s definition as a witch – and her evil magic that Ariel would not perform yet would perform Prospero’s – gives her historical and literary baggage that make it difficult to empathize with her. Witches of Shakespeare’s time were almost always females, persecuted for violating social norms, whose demonization was important in the development of early female stereotypes (Bever 956, 957, 973). Sycorax’s magic is defined in the original text as “damn’d”, “hell[ish]”, “foul”, and “terrible” throughout Act I, Scene I. Prospera’s magic – like Prospero’s in the original text – is rarely described yet her new back story composed of dialogue not written by Shakespeare, has her accused of similar evils:

PROSPERA Perverting my

Upstanding studies, now his slandering  
And bile-dipped brush did paint a faithless portrait –  
His sister, a practice of black arts!;  
A demon; not a woman, nay – a witch!  
And he full-knowing others of my sex  
Have burned for no less! (Taymor, *The Tempest* 39)

Prospera has the opportunity to voice her own opinions beyond the simple performance of this tragedy that befell her. Taymor bathes her in dark shadowy lenses with Antonio in an even darker light, his features menacing while the intercut with images of Miranda hanging on every word and an angry Prospera in their similarly dark cell, Prospera's voice rising to a crescendo and the music following her. Thus, Prospera establishes that witch suspects should be presumed innocent until proven guilty while also questioning whether female magi should be assumed as evil antagonists.

The evolution of Sycorax's representation from Shakespeare to Taymor illustrates an intriguing connection between representation and identity – especially of Shakespearean mothers. Sycorax as a mother is demonized – her banishment to the island and from it establishes a conflict between maternal and paternal power and the fate of strong mothers (Adelman, "Born of Woman" 96; Berggren 31; Busia 94; Lamb 542). Prospera lessens this blow and prevents their conflict from becoming one of maternal versus paternal power as well as showing how strong mothers can be successful protagonists. To understand the significance of this move, consider how a switch to an evil witch would change the representation and identity of a character who was previously locked between protagonist and antagonist: Lady Macbeth. *Macbeth* is already Shakespeare's most famous depiction of witches and magic yet Lady Macbeth is often played

simply as a madwoman who cannot get the blood off of her hands. Yet upon hearing of Macbeth's meeting with the witches she says:

LADY MACBETH That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;

And chastise with the valour of my tongue

All that impedes thee from the golden round (I.v.27-29).

"Spirits" could mean that she is summoning evil assistance. But the comparison of these two lines makes a stronger case for Lady Macbeth acting *and* sounding like a witch:

THIRD WITCH All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter! (I.iii.52)

LADY MACBETH Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!

Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter! (I.v.53-54)

How does understanding her character as a "witch" change our understanding of the motivations, role, and identity of her character? Understanding Lady Macbeth as a fourth witch could clarify her role as an antagonist and her identity as a witch (and a queen). Closing this gap in the similarity between Lady Macbeth and the witches changes her motivations to ones of evil instead of merely ambition. Given this reading, how would a hypothetical change in Macbeth's choice of murder weapon change his role and identity? If Macbeth were to have murdered King Duncan with a potion or poison or by summoning an evil harpy to strike him down, how would Macbeth's representation change? Would movies depict him around similar cauldrons or would theatre productions show him as a male protagonist pouring over his learned books? Would Lady Macbeth have a recurring fear of tasting the poison they had used on Duncan in all her foods? Both of these new readings that posit the Macbeths as witches question what it means to be a witch and how slight changes in representations can change how the audience responds to a character and understands their role and identity. These switches and reversals could be used to

create new feminist understandings of other maligned females in Shakespeare as well as to show similarities between male protagonists and female antagonists.

### **WHAT MAKES SYCORAX AND PROSPERO(A) SIMILAR?**

Taymor's recasting of the gender dynamic between Sycorax and Prospero(a) complicates many previous feminist criticisms of the Sycorax-Prospero dynamic in Shakespeare's original *Tempest*. While Prospero emerges as the perfect example of masculinity, Sycorax embodies the flawed feminine (Limpar 55; Slights 361, 376). Prospero is learned, powerful, and a successful parent while Sycorax is pagan, broken, and an absent parent. The two magicians are defined in opposition from the very beginning (Lamb 542). Ildiko Limpar adds, "Prospero and Sycorax are the inverted images of each other ... Sycorax "appears to be Prospero's antithesis- the nightmare which complements- his wish-fulfilment and this contrast is emphasized by their parallel situations'" (Limpar 53). Their antithetical relationship is further illustrated by their magic: Prospero and his "white" magic and Sycorax and her "black" magic (Brevik 96). Why the male is ascribed white magic and the female is ascribed black magic is an intriguing question that Mary Ellen Lamb explains: "The debasement of Sycorax's female black magic exalts Prospero's magic, and the theatrical spectacles he stages, as white and masculine ... the distinctions between Sycorax's black magic or "goety" and Prospero's white magic or "theurgy" articulate the split between body and mind" (542). This is further developed in that Prospero sets out to undue Sycorax's evil magic, applying his "book-educated" magic to conquer her "devil" magic (Ping 96). This book-education makes Prospero a student of the mind (and books) and Sycorax a student of the body (consummated with the devil):

Witches suggest cooks or washerwomen, boiling things in their supernatural yet homely cauldron. But the magician or magus or sorcerer, all terms for males, was different. Often



perceived as learned and associated with Court, the magician was not, unlike witches, thought to have had intercourse with the devil. Various contemporary pamphlets represent his powers as art rather than as perversions of natural acts. And like Prospero, the magus eschewed the body-oriented cauldron for the mind-oriented book. (Penuel 120)

These four characteristics have been used to define Sycorax and Prospero in opposition to each other but they all become blurred with Taymor's Prospera.

Parallel situations, white versus black magic, mind versus body, book magic versus devil magic have a prominent presence in Taymor's *Tempest*. First, she strengthens the parallel backstories. As Helen Mirren says in an interview about her role:

It's now a duchess instead of a duke. She's someone who inherits the dukedom from her husband who dies. And I think the idea of this woman seeking knowledge, seeking education, which is the back story of Prospero, you know, because he gets caught up in all his - in his research is why his brother ousts him, is the an excuse. A much better excuse if it's a woman caught in up in research and education. You know, people are terrified of women with knowledge. That's why women all over the world are excluded from knowledge. (Conan 6)

Prospera, like Sycorax is accused of the dark arts, of being a witch, and of consorting with the devil and this device is used to exile her and her daughter from Milan. Sycorax suffered a similar fate with her son in Algiers. Second, the white versus black magic becomes more and more complicated. While Sycorax is implied to be a non-European woman<sup>18</sup>, the magic of both women is increasingly similar. Witches curse, they summon spirits, and they consort with evil creatures

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<sup>18</sup> Sycorax is said to be from Algiers – “PROSPERO This damn'd witch Sycorax,/For mischiefs manifold and sorceries terrible/To enter human hearing, from Algier,/Thou know'st, was banish'd” (I.ii.311-314).

such as harpies and hellhounds. Prospero does all of these things and Taymor's Prospera emphasizes the use of all of them. Prospero(a) curses Caliban:

PROSPERO For this, be sure, to-night 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 pinch'd  
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging  
Than bees that made 'em. (I.i.383-388).

Prospero(a) summons spirits:

PROSPERO Spirits, which by mine art  
I have from their confines call'd to enact  
My present fancies. (IV.i.131-133).

Prospero(a) instructs Ariel to look like a harpy and the scene direction in most editions reads:

“[Thunder and lighting. Enter ARIEL, like a harpy; claps his wings upon the table; and with a quaint device, the banquet vanishes]” (III.iii.67). And then Prospero says “Bravely the figure of this harpy hast thou/Perform'd my Ariel; a grace it had, devouring” (III.iii.98-99). Additionally, in Taymor's film the script reads:

“Thunder and lightning. ARIEL appears as a GIANT HARPY that divides into hundreds of blackbirds/harpies, their wings madly flapping. They attack the banquet table, the KING, ANTONIO, and SEBASTIAN. The banquet vanishes in a whirlwind of ash and black feathers. A roaring wind continues. ARIEL, the harpy, its breasts, face, and talons covered in black, oozing oil, chants in a distorted and terrifying voice. With giant wings

outstretched, this creature sits, perched on a volcanic mound of shattered glass in the center of the banquet table” (Taymor, *The Tempest* 124).

Prospero(a) summons hell hounds as well:

“[A noise of hunters heard. Enter divers Spirits, in shape of dogs and hounds, and hunt them about, PROSPERO and ARIEL setting them on]

PROSPERO Hey, Mountain, hey!

ARIEL Silver I there it goes, Silver!

PROSPERO Fury, Fury! there, Tyrant, there! hark! hark!

[ CALIBAN, STEPHANO, and TRINCULO, are driven out ]

Go charge my goblins that they grind their joints

With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews

With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them

Than pard or cat o' mountain” (IV.i.274-280).

Which again, Taymor accents in her script:

“From the pool of water, that has suddenly transformed into bubbling fire and lava, a pack of growling and barking dogs emerge to chase away the thieves. Part black beast and part fire, these dogs nip at the backsides and heels of the three fools, driving them up and out of PROSPERA’s grounds. Once the lava dogs have emerged out of the laval field, ARIEL’S face is revealed, composed of bubbling lava, laughing and screaming with delight and ferocity” (Taymor, *The Tempest* 148).

Even the epilogue at the end where Prospero(a) admits that some magic might have been criminal remains unchanged (V.i.38-57; Epilogue 13-20). Mind and body merge as Prospera has the same physical body as Sycorax and shoulders the same accusation – that they gave their body

to Satan. Additionally, while Prospera's books are accentuated, the description of Sycorax as Pagan or weaker than Prospera remains but is muted. Thus, how does their similarity reshape how we understand their stories – exile and return. Prospera returns to Milan victorious while Sycorax is never heard from but like many other moves this paper takes, that does not have to be how we read Sycorax's departure from the island. Perhaps she too made a triumphant return to Algiers, aided by her magical talents. Just as Prospera sacrifices her absolute freedom to return to the island (symbolized by her wearing her long forgotten corset), Sycorax sacrifices her relationship with her son to return to her home.

### CONCLUSION

Taymor's *Tempest* changes her audience's understanding of the relationship between Prospero(a) and Sycorax specifically, and more generally the representation of gender stereotypes between protagonists and antagonists. Most significantly, Taymor's inclusions and/or exclusions of lines and representations of Sycorax make the character more sympathetic. Including other strong female characters removes Sycorax's burden as the "most developed female character" who has to stand in for all women and mothers. This makes her sympathetic because she is no longer the locus for all maternal/paternal arguments and increasing parallels the between her and Prospera – both exiled, both mothers, both raising kids on the island – makes both of them sympathetic because of the obstacles they are forced to overcome. Including an independent, intelligent Caliban instead of an independent, stupid son, the product of his evil mother, means that Caliban's attempted coup and attempted rape were not his mother's machinations. This makes Sycorax sympathetic because she is no longer a murderer or rapist in absentia<sup>19</sup> which starts to relax her definition as an antagonist. Including explicit similarities

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<sup>19</sup> A few critics contend that Caliban's tendencies toward rape reflect the evilness of his mother; for more see Adelman 216 and Thompson 237.

between Prospera and Sycorax's magic problematizes witches as natural antagonists and generates space for hypothesizing motives for their magic and explanations for their exile. This makes Sycorax sympathetic because her identity and role as an evil witch is reshaped and she can begin to be understood not as an implicit antagonist. Excluding sexualized, visual depictions of Sycorax like Jarman and Greenaway, removes the argument that Sycorax is symbolic of the body – and a body that gave itself to Satan – in contrast to the learned book-oriented Prospero. This makes her sympathetic because seduction is an unfairly genderized negative associated with evil women. Excluding a Prospero who appropriated “good” feminine (motherly) qualities assumed by the mother contrasted with a Sycorax who assumed “bad” feminine (motherly) qualities further removes the sharp divide between the maternal and the paternal. This makes Sycorax sympathetic because she no longer symbolizes the bad parent. The result of Taymor's adaptation is a complex understanding of several character that is not plagued by gender stereotypes or vilifications.

## CHAPTER 3: Ariel – Spirits and Servants in Julie Taymor’s *Tempest*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter will consider how representations of spirits and female servitude in *The Tempest* are changed through a feminist adaptation like Taymor’s *Tempest*. In her film, the dynamic between a male wizard/master and a male spirit/servant changes. Taymor increases the theme of spirits, through Ariel, representing the mutability of identity while also exploring how female-female servitude is different from male-female servitude. In this chapter I will examine how Taymor’s film explores new identity possibilities from within Shakespeare’s text and how understanding gender as a social construct can reshape relationships. The chapter will consider four questions surrounding the identity, role, and relationship of Prospero and Ariel. First, who is Ariel, this fluid, metamorphosing, androgynous spirit? While *The Tempest* has been understood as one of Shakespeare’s most patriarchal plays because male authority (Prospero) is established as absolute on a magical island, Prospera in Taymor becomes a female authority who masters men to accomplish her goals and ambitions. Second, what is Ariel the spirit like, this magical being who can fulfill Prospero’s every desire? Even though Ariel has long been a source for gender trouble in the play, Prospera the woman further explores the potentials of female-female relationships while drawing further attention to the changeability of gender. Third, how does the introduction of female master Prospera restore the feminine to a position of power? Exploring the differences between master Prospero and master Prospera develops a new appreciation of Shakespearean servitude. Fourth, how should Taymor’s Ariel be understood and employed by feminists? Long used as the “other” female character, Ariel’s gender and sexuality provide new ways to read and re-imagine Shakespeare.

Ariel's casting and the criticism behind Ben Whishaw's characterization further illustrates the role Ariel has in gender performativity. While theater companies cast women as Ariel during the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, companies have cast men as Ariel during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Morris 110). Taymor's Ariel is unique because he is almost entirely CGI since Whishaw was recorded entirely in the studio – literally the invisible spirit as his cast members did not see him on location (Bate 9; Lehmann, "Turn off the dark" 53). Whishaw's star is rising and he has drawn rave reviews from great performances in *The Hour*, *Skyfall*, *I'm Not There*, and *Bright Star* (Clarke 1). Betsey Sharkey of *The Los Angeles Times* argues that Whishaw is great in Taymor's *Tempest* – pulling off Ariel as man and woman (1). Doug Denby of *The New Yorker* thinks Whishaw pulls off this feat as well but thinks him "a translucent pale hermaphrodite" (1). While that is not exactly what Taymor wants, it does convey the same gender-bending message as Sharkey's conception of Whishaw performing both genders. He clearly believes in the gender-bending approach Taymor takes to Shakespeare, telling an interviewer of an exchange he had with the playwright where he wants to play a woman, Viola, and Taymor said "we'll do that" (Kellaway 1). Despite his confidence in creating characters with mutable gender identities and possibly unusual sexualities, Whishaw does not talk about his own sexuality – even to quiet much speculation that he is gay (Clarke 1). Robert Beames of *The Telegraph* contends that Whishaw's Ariel is "faint and sickly" plagued by a "tacky aesthetic" (1). Michael O'Sullivan of *The Washington Post* goes slightly further in deriding Ariel as an androgynous street mime (1). Yet, if Whishaw communicates androgyny, Taymor has succeeded teasing out a gender-bending performance. It is important to contextualize how Taymor's film tells Ariel's story and how it has been told in other major film adaptations. In Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), Ariel is introduced at 4:00 into the film, but

Prospero struggles to get Ariel to appear. Different objects around Prospero creak and groan in the haunted house-like set until Ariel's gasping whisper is heard. A crack of lightning and flash of light frightens Prospero and causes him to turn away. Ariel finally appears, emotionless, white-faced, with dark hair and an outfit that evokes the persona of an escaped mental patient who has refused to discard his straightjacket. His monochromatic depiction is in stark contrast to the dreary and dilapidated house that is constantly bathed in darkness. At 55:40 Ariel literally goes face to face with Prospero to make his plea for liberty – much later than in the original text. At 57:30 Prospero reminds Ariel of his previous plight. Jarman's long shot that holds both characters in the frame cuts to exaggerated close-ups of Prospero as he taunts Ariel about Sycorax. The flashback depicts Ariel as the same age and physical stature though he is without his white uniform – or any other clothes. Finally, at 128:46 Ariel, in white tuxedo seems to tentatively sit on a throne as Prospero looks on. They say nothing until an uncomfortable Ariel sits one step beneath the throne. He sings a passionless song and then tiptoes past Prospero, looking at him as if to speak, then runs off without a word as squealing tires accent his departure. In Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), at 3:54 a naked young boy, described as having “no complexion on him,” pees exaggeratedly into the pool where Prospero is playing with a toy ship. Ariel wears a burnt orange loincloth, and his strawberry blonde hair is long and curly, evoking the image of a classical Cupid. At 158:42 twin teen Ariels whisper to Prospero about “all this service he has done.” Prospero thanks his “Ariels” and says they shall be free. A montage of Prospero, accompanied by twin boy Ariels and teen boy Ariels, throwing his books into the water follows. The teen Ariels are clothed as their younger iterations, with similarly translucent skin and strawberry blonde curls though one teen Ariel has dark chest hair. Prospero's final goodbye at 202:15 reveals the twins to be mirror images: there is only one teen



and one boy Ariel. At 204:08, as Prospero's frame recedes into the background, teen Ariel emerges from the water into a clapping crowd. He morphs into the boy Ariel and runs in slow motion, finally jumping out of the pages and leaping off camera, the final image of the film. Jarman and Greenaway develop Ariel's character with special effects and unique camera angles to create their own character. Both versions could be read as different takes on the innocence/naiveté of a spirit – Jarman features a dark and possibly sexually predatory Ariel while Greenaway features a light and clearly childlike Ariel. Taymor makes a different move with similar tools: she uses modern special effects and high definition camera to present the same Ariel in many forms. Her Ariel changes how the spirit should be understood for the spirit's fluidity becomes an instrument for examining the volatility of identity, role, and relationships.

### **WHO IS ARIEL?**

Gender theorists have seized on Ariel as representing the line between the human and inhuman as well as the line-crossing ambiguity of gender (Adelman 237; Bate 9; Bevington 212). How does that ambiguity define Ariel? In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Ariel is listed simply as "an airy spirit" and is mostly free from gendered pronouns. David Bevington notes: "Ariel must represent something like the creative spirit. Ariel is not human; Ariel is immortal. One does not know whether to refer to Ariel as 'he' or 'she', because Ariel has no gender" (Bevington 213). In their films, both Jarman and Greenaway depict Ariel as a pale boy or man, somber in the former, naïve in the later. Jarman's Ariel is ominously sexual, staring at and stroking Ferdinand and while his sexuality is much more muted than the sailors', Jarman's Ariel is, at the least, questioning his sexuality. Greenaway's Ariel is playfully ignorant, peeing with abandon and frolicking throughout Prospero's cell and while he is portrayed by a young male actor and a teenage male actor, Greenaway's Ariel is, based on conventional norms, performing multiple

gender roles. That Ariel is a blank slate both in terms of sexual identity and gender identity makes Ariel useful for feminists questioning identity binaries. Ariel questions identity norms by cross-dressing, fulfilling multiple gender roles, and serving Prospero (Rackin 114). Furthermore in the original text and in adaptations Ariel is one of the few characters who has the opportunity to speak and perform for Ariel's self in ways that Miranda, Sycorax, and Caliban can only dream of. First, Ariel assumes many roles marked by costumes of both traditional male and female dress (Johnson, 696). Second, Ariel's role-shifting makes Ariel androgynous in way few Shakespeare characters, much less any character, has been before (Sibley-Esposito 128).

Ariel is introduced in Taymor's *Tempest*, springing from a blue pool in answer to Prospera's summons. At 11:20 in the film Ariel's voice greets Prospera with "all hail great master" before Ariel can even be seen until Ben Whishaw's pale white naked body is made out, absorbing the blue hue of the pool until Ariel leaps from the pool with a splash, revealing Ariel as a blank white body. Prospera asks if Ariel has done her bidding and a gleeful Ariel describes what has been done as rock music and a laughing Ariel inject comedy into what could have been tragedy and establishes Ariel as a trickster. At 13:40 Ariel abruptly grabs at Prospera's foot, accentuated by the sound of a discordant drum as Ariel pleads for freedom. Despite being able to physically grab Prospera, Ariel is revealed to be a wispy shadowy spirit whose quick movements seem to be the disappearance and reappearance of smoke. At the end of Prospera's scolding at 16:00 Ariel lays curled on the floor, more corporeal than before, finally rising to stroke Prospera's shoulder in an attempt at forgiveness. All of that springs forth from what was simply "[Enter ARIEL]." While other scenes indicate whether Ariel is supposed to enter as a water spirit, nymph, or harpy, this first scene does not. Taymor's decision to show Ariel as the water spirit and a powerful fire shooting is borne from Taymor's imagination and the bard's line

“I flamed amazement” (I.ii.229). Furthermore, depicting Ariel as physically caressing Prospera is a unique approach that is carried through the whole film. In Ariel’s exit for freedom, at 141:30, Prospera is clearly sad to see Ariel go. As she says the words that will bring liberty, Ariel, as shadowy spirit, is extremely close to Prospera. Ariel’s freedom is still communicated via song but as Ariel falls away, Ariel breaks into many pieces, many forms, and they all sing as the camera pans back and more shapes divide Ariel. These three adaptations: making Ariel’s physical form more fluid and amorphous, portraying Ariel and Prospera as having a physical relationship, and concluding with Ariel becoming even more fragmented, show how Taymor’s adaptation interprets Ariel along critical lines. What also marks Taymor’s Ariel as so unique is how closely Ariel’s lines are to the original text. While Taymor takes liberties with Ariel’s physical portrayal, Ariel’s dialogue is almost unchanging – unique among Prospera, Miranda, and Caliban. Taymor’s Prospera and Ariel emphasize some of the rhetoric, in particular, the use of “my” as a possessive – both in an endearing and controlling way. The result is a representation of Ariel as a nymph spirit whose physical and psychological identity is always fluid and changing.

### **WHAT IS ARIEL LIKE AS A SPIRIT?**

Ariel’s identity starts from that of a spirit but what exact spirit is a question answered simply by how Ariel is understood. Dorling Kindersley says it well:

Ariel’s gender is not specified in any of the play’s speeches, and from the eighteenth century through to the early twentieth century the part was regularly played by a woman (See Orgel’s edition, 70). The indeterminacy arises in the first instance from the fact that Prospero shields his relationship with Ariel from the other characters, so that there are no third-person references in the dialogue .... the text itself is open to a large degree of indeterminacy in the question of a spirits’ sexuality. (186)

That Ariel is understood through Prospero, played by men and women actors, and a symbol of indeterminacy informs Ariel's identity. There is one point in the play where Ariel uses a gendered pronoun to describe Ariel's self:

ARIEL On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task

Ariel and all his quality (I.ii.222-223).

This is the *only* part where Ariel uses this descriptor. It could be a mistake, it could be a slip, it could be an answer. Taymor even keeps this line and casts Ben Whishaw as Ariel. Yet her directions also include:

“The spirit, ARIEL, is the essence of energy, composed of light filtered through vibrations and patterns of air, fire, and water.

He is an androgynous spirit that can transform his physical presence with a flick of PROSPERA'S command or his own quicksilver change of mood and passion.

He appears in or as the elements of nature, i.e., a human form that is filled at different times with storm-wind, fire, clouds, butterflies, bees, fireflies, etc.

With his mood swings, colors and patterns run up and down his form, and his size and shape can expand, contract, split, and multiply, freely moving in and around the environment.

He is only visible to PROSPERA and, of course, to the audience” (Taymor, *The Tempest* 42).

Here Taymor uses some of her own gendered pronouns to describe Ariel though she clearly establishes him as androgynous and that his physical and emotional frame is ever changing. Some might take issue with the point that Prospera can change Ariel's physical presence yet if Prospera is the only one who can see Ariel, is Ariel merely an extension of Prospera's power?

That Ariel takes many forms while serving Prospero(a) is another example of indeterminacy for Ariel appears as a sea nymph (a breasted spirit), a harpy, and several hell hounds – showing both the fluidity of Prospero(a)’s and Ariel’s magic as well as Ariel’s own flexibility. Taymor’s direction for the sea nymph:

During the song FERDINAND rises as if in a dream and follows the drift of the music and the strands of glowing light that are the almost transpate feminine form of ARIEL as a SEA NYMPH (Taymor, *The Tempest* 62).

And her direction for harpy:

ARIEL, the harpy, its breasts, face, and talons covered in black, oozing oil, chants in a distorted and terrifying voice. With giant wings outstretched, this creature sits, perched on a volcanic mound of shattered glass in the center of the banquet table (Taymor, *The Tempest* 124).

Ariel is described as a “wish-fulfillment-spirit” who is “understanding, tolerant, sexually available, and emotionally undemanding ... all magical gifts” (Miller 36). Furthermore, Ben Whishaw’s Ariel is much cozier with Helen Mirren’s Prospera than Shakespeare’s *Tempest* which merely hinted at a possible physical relation. Taymor adds her own twist to an original line that notes Ariel’s total submission to Prospero(a):

ARIEL Pardon, master;

I will be correspondent to command

And do my spiriting gently (I.ii.347-349).

How can Ariel go about “spiriting gently”? It is a phrase that implies another action besides spiriting. In Taymor’s version this is the point where Ariel caresses Prospera’s shoulders in an attempt at forgiveness. Ariel is also concerned with satisfying Prospero(a)’s pleasures:

ARIEL All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail, I come

To answer thy best pleasure (I.ii.219-220).

PROSPERO Come with a thought I thank thee, Ariel; come

ARIEL Thy thoughts I cleave to. What's thy pleasure? (IV.i.180-181).

“Pleasure” could mean many things, yet it is a word that appears only four times in the entire play and two of them are in exchanges between Ariel and Prospero(a). The other two being Ferdinand's daydreams about Miranda and Caliban's delight at convincing two henchman to join his assassination plot. The recasting of Prospero and the androgyny of Ariel creates interesting angles for approaching sexual identity. The original text engages the question as a possible male-male sexual relationship while Taymor's film changes the question to a possible female-male sexual relationship or a female-questioning one. In reading the relationship as sexual, Taymor's adaptation moves it away from male homosexuality and more into the realm of broader sexual identity for Ariel's androgyny inspires many different labels for their possible relationship.

Changing our understanding of the spirit Ariel provides a template for engaging the mutability of gender in Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers two characters with qualities like Ariel's: Puck and the Changeling boy. Puck (like Ariel) is sent by Oberon (like Prospero) to make others fall in love (Miranda and Ferdinand), Oberon does not have a sexual relationship with Titania (like Prospero whose wife was never on the island, leaving open the possibility of a relationship with his spirit-servant). Oberon's motives are guided by his intent on possessing “The Changeling,” a ward of Titania's that Oberon inexplicably wants. The Changeling represents blurred identities and indeterminacy and is sought to be controlled by the most powerful male magician of the play (Slights, “The Changeling” 260, 262). Puck describes the Changeling as well as Oberon and Titania's power struggle:

PUCK Because that she as her attendant hath  
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;  
She never had so sweet a changeling;  
And jealous Oberon would have the child  
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;  
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,  
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy (II.i.388-394).

And later Oberon adds:

OBERON I do but beg a little changeling boy,  
To be my henchman (II.i.489-490).

And after his victory Oberon gloats:

When I had at my pleasure taunted her  
And she in mild terms begg'd my patience,  
I then did ask of her her changeling child;  
Which straight she gave me, and her fairy sent  
To bear him to my bower in fairy land.  
And now I have the boy (IV.i.1605-1610).

Controlling the Changeling is similar to controlling Ariel for both masters seek a magical servant to be their henchman and both fight a powerful magical female entity – Oberon and Titania, Prospero and Sycorax. These similarities show that spirits and magic represent the mutability of gender in Shakespeare. Both Ariel and Puck are introduced as spirits and, explicitly or implicitly, it is known that they want their freedom. Consider the dubiousness of these all-powerful spirits who can take many shapes and forms as well as make young people fall in love but are bound by

an old man with a staff. As Taymor changes Prospero to Prospera could she as easily flip Oberon and Titania? Would she simply exclude the last quote from Act IV? Changing the gender of the master who gets his or her way would change the implicit messages underlying who is the victor, the protagonist, and the power-broker.

### **HOW DOES THE MASTER-SERVANT RELATIONSHIP CHANGE *THE TEMPEST*?**

The creation of Prospera changes the identity and roles of Prospero and Ariel. Ariel's defining factor – beyond being a spirit – is servitude (Evelt 161, 190). But is Taymor's Ariel a male serving a female master? A female serving a female master? Both answers would be different from the text which inscribes yet another character as performing service for a male master. Prospera's recasting changes the way that Prospera and Ariel define their master/servant dynamic which defines them. Taymor's change is significant for Prospera must be a different master than Prospero just as Ariel must be a different servant to Prospera than Ariel would be to Prospero. This generates several questions that help explore their relationship in the text as well as in the film. First, what happens when the master-servant hierarchy is analyzed and questioned? This hierarchy was everything according David Schalkwyk: "We need to approach early modern master-servant relationships with the unaccustomed view that all members of the society were servants: many were both masters and servants, and even the monarch was a servant of God and his or her people" (97). In terms of literary analysis, examining the services provided by Shakespeare's characters is a powerful tool in understanding the motives and obligations (Anderson 176; Dowd 644). Additionally, the master-servant hierarchy and the gender binary hierarchy are based on subordination: a man/master that provides for a woman/servant and a servant/woman who accepts subordination (Evelt 32, 41). Taymor's move with Prospera focuses on this hierarchy and blows it up. Quite simply there were few women masters noted by history



or literature and almost no female masters with female servants (Evelt 110, 160). Taymor's Prospera highlights the absence of female masters while Ariel's physically female performance generates a female-female master-servant relationship. Second, how does the relationship in the film change the nature of controlling master-servant power dynamics? Early modern service was dominated by masters worried about losing control of their servants and servants worried about losing a job – from a master (Evelt 4, 21). David Evelt presents a complex and philosophical take and the expectations and obligations of masters and servants:

Incorporated in these definitions is the duality of body and soul: physical bondage, spiritual freedom. Phenomenologically, all of us are enslaved by our bodies and the laws of nature .... all people are enslaved by their passions. True freedom can be found only in the motions of the spirit. Thus, Luther's English follower William Whately treats servitude as an equation of dichotomies: bond is to flesh as freedom is to spirit (1640, 1.156). The Scottish commentator Robert Rollock argues that if it is a vice in a servant to be disobedient (i.e., free) in body, it is equally a vice to be submissive (i.e., bound) in spirit to anyone but God. It is on this ground that servants are encouraged to resist and even to disobey the wicked order of their masters, a crucial component of fully faithful service. (9)

Evelt makes several arguments about Shakespearean servants that raise questions about Taymor's adaptation. If Ariel represents the duality of the body and soul is physical servitude transposed with the idea of spiritual freedom since Ariel *is* a spirit? If Ariel displays almost limitless power yet is inexplicably tied to Prospera is this because Ariel's passion for Prospera is what binds Ariel to Prospera? If Ariel's disobedience of evil female master Sycorax is now similar to Ariel's plea for freedom when Prospero becomes Prospera is Prospera a good master

where Sycorax was not? The answer to all of these questions could be a simple “yes.” Physical servitude happens in the course of love – as it does for Ferdinand, just as passion is what binds partners together – as it does for Miranda, and Ariel’s refusal of Sycorax could be a refusal of a sexual or emotional relationship. All supported by the conclusion that “the discovery of perfect freedom through service occurs only when service shades into love” (Schalkwyk 98).

This reading of master-servant relationships, illustrated by Taymor, emphasizes a new way to understand Shakespearean masters and servants. Prospero the master is endowed with, and Ariel the servant is subjugated by, patriarchy, privilege, and magic. Prospera reconfigures this because she controls her servants with only magic – only her own power and knowledge. To appreciate the consequence of this move, consider how a change in another Shakespearean play about service would change those power dynamics. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Bianca’s and Katherine’s mother is wholly absent from the play and they are raised by their father, Baptista Minola. Lucentio enters the picture to become the Latin tutor Cambio while Hortensio becomes the music tutor Litio as they try to win the hands of Baptista’s daughters. Lucentio wins the love of Bianca while in service to her while his servant Tranio convinces Baptista that he (as Lucentio) should win Bianca’s hand. Lucentio’s Cambio enters into Baptista’s service in Act II Scene I and he is Baptista’s servant even though he teaches Bianca who addresses him as “master”:

Lucentio. Now, mistress, profit you in what you read?

Bianca. What, master, read you, First resolve me that.

Lucentio. I read that I profess, 'The Art to Love.'

Bianca. And may you prove, sir, master of your art! (IV.ii.1831-1834)

Two adaptations could change the power dynamic. Lucentio could enter service as a female servant – Cambia, a gender switch that is hardly a stretch for Shakespearean comedies. This would give Bianca some power: “The absence in the play of female servants . . . . means that she has no one over whom to exercise [authority]” (Evet 49). Baptista could also be Bianca and Katherine’s mother, a parental shift that might be a stretch given the few single female parents in Shakespeare. This would establish Baptista as a female master controlling a male tutor/servant. *Shrew* also brings to the forefront a question hinted at in the previous paragraph: why choose a power relationship in which you will be employed by the one you desire? The word “love” appears twenty-three times in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and slightly fewer in Taymor’s. Only two instances pertain to relationships:

MIRANDA Do you love me?

FERDINAND O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound

And crown what I profess with kind event

If I speak true! if hollowly, invert

What best is boded me to mischief! I

Beyond all limit of what else i' the world

Do love, prize, honour you (III.i.79-85).

ARIEL Do you love me, master? No?

PROSPERO Dearly my delicate Ariel (IV.i.52-53).

Ariel’s question seems to mimic Miranda’s and Prospero(a)’s answer, although less flowery than Ferdinand’s, amounts to the same thing. Lucentio’s love culminates in a Ferdinand-like victory while Ariel’s love culminates in a departure (and freedom).

## WHAT, OR WHOM, SHOULD ARIEL BE?

Taymor's recasting of the gender dynamic between Ariel and Prospero(a) moves previous criticism of the Ariel-Prospero relationship toward colonial patriarchy. Many critics of *The Tempest* analyzed it as a source of pro-colonial, pro-imperialist discourse (Brown 48; Shabazz 10). Many colonialist critics focus on Caliban since he has "determined aspects" while Ariel remains ambiguous (Reynolds 191). Prospero is the clear colonizer of language for he speaks over four times as much as Ariel (Vaughan 7). Prospero's language regarding Ariel is truly one of possession. The word "my" is frequently used as a personal possessive in relation to another character but none more often than Prospero/Ariel and Ariel/Prospero:

"My Ariel" (I.ii.218),

"My brave spirit" (I.ii.238),

"That's my spirit" (I.ii.249),

"My master" (I.ii.251),

"Thou my slave" (I.ii.318),

"That's my noble master" (I.ii.352),

"My quaint Ariel" (I.ii.374),

"My lord it shall be done" (I.ii.376),

"My master" (II.ii.330),

"Prospero my lord" (II.ii.365),

"I will tell my master" (III.ii.115),

"My Ariel" (III.iii.99),

"Ariel! my industrious servant, Ariel!" (IV.i.36),

"My potent master?" (IV.i.37),

“Dearly my delicate Ariel” (IV.i),  
“Now come, my Ariel” (IV.i.64),  
“Ay, my commander” (IV.i.184),  
“My bird” (IV.i.203),  
“My lord” / “My spirit” (V.i.4,7),  
“My tricksy spirit” (V.i.258),  
“My Ariel, chick” (V.i.359).

Ariel is Prospero’s slave, servant, spirit, bird, chick while Prospero is Ariel’s lord, master, commander. Beyond the lord-slave and master-servant parallels, “strong possessives incorporate a pronoun Possessee (thus, *mine = my one*)” (Zribi-Hetz 534). Prospero(a)’s linguistic performance firmly establishes control over Ariel. Control is the tool of imperialists and in this case, the unstable gender identity of Ariel posits Ariel as a submissive female under the dominant male Prospero. Thus, *The Tempest* is often explained as a metaphor for patriarchal colonialism since the masculine conquers the feminine (Busia 85). This metaphor is expanded in two main ways: that fathers are the embodiment of colonial stewardship over inferiors and that men are the actors in colonial relationships. Prospero, as a father who effortlessly controls Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel, demonstrates how women are oppressed by “the rule of their biological and cultural fathers” (Donaldson, “The Miranda Complex” 68). Additionally, Caliban and Ariel, the two colonized subjects under Prospero, illustrate colonialism “as a relationship between men” (Diala 33). Taymor’s film bridges the competing view points of feminist and colonialist readings of the text, assimilating both perspectives in an attempt to make its own original argument in the debate (Crowl 177). While Taymor keeps most of the “my’s” that inscribe Prospero’s control over Ariel, her gender switch symbolically reverses male imperialist

control. Prospera becomes a mother who raises her daughter instead of merely controls her and who sets clear expectations for her servants. Prospera also re-genders colonial relationship for it inserts a female voice into a discussion over power while Ariel's visually changing identity undermines the assumed dominance of males in colonial discussions. But if Prospera is no longer a male imperialist, then Ariel is no longer symbolic of the colonized. What then should Ariel be? Taymor's Ariel is ambiguous and fluid and is exactly as Ariel should be – as a starter for discussions into feminism *and* colonialism, gender *and* sexual identity.

The ambiguity of Ariel, in Shakespeare and in Taymor, provides interesting opportunities for exploring possession and identity ambiguity in Shakespeare. Prospero(a)'s possession of Ariel is demarcated by continual use of the possessive “my” and the context of that dialogue blurs the lines between the nature of the relationship between the two. Belonging to Prospero(a) defines Ariel while Ariel's response and language – including the use of “pleasure” – hint at a possible sexual relationship. Taymor's film with a female Prospera and an androgynous Ariel creates many possible for transverse relationships. In *Antony and Cleopatra* Antony has an attendant, Domitius Enobarus, who is devoted to him yet abandons Antony for Octavius. When Antony does him a kindness, Enobarus dies from heartbreak. Consider these two passages and the magnitude of “my” and a slight turn of ambiguity:

ANTONY. Forbear me.

There's a great spirit gone! Thus did I desire it:

What our contempt doth often hurl from us,

We wish it ours again; the present pleasure,

By revolution lowering, does become

The opposite of itself: she's good, being gone;

The hand could pluck her back that shoved her on.

I must from this enchanting queen break off:

Ten thousand harms, more than the ills I know,

My idleness doth hatch. How now! **My** Enobarbus!

[Re-enter DOMITIUS ENOBARBUS]

DOMITIUS ENOBARUS. What's your pleasure, **my lord**?

ANTONY. I must with haste from hence (I.ii.214-226).

And:

DOMITIUS ENOBARUS. O sovereign mistress of true melancholy,

The poisonous damp of night disponge upon me,

That life, a very rebel to my will,

May hang no longer on me: throw my heart

Against the flint and hardness of my fault:

Which, being dried with grief, will break to powder,

And finish all foul thoughts. O **my** Antony,

Nobler than my revolt is infamous,

Forgive me in thine own particular;

But let the world rank me in register

A master-leaver and a fugitive:

O Antony! O Antony! (IV.ix.353-364)

The insertion of three “my” phrases similar to the ones that define Prospero(a)/Ariel shifts the reading of Antony and Enobarus. While it would be difficult to read the play without considering Enobarus overcome with guilt, the nature of the relationship becomes more ambiguous as does

the nature of Enobarus' grief. Imagine a few scenes akin to what Taymor has inserted where Enobarus' entrance would include immediately walking up to Antony and caressing his shoulders as Enobarus asks what Antony's pleasure is. Subtle moves can change the direction and reading of a relationship and that is the power of Taymor's adaptation.

## CONCLUSION

Taymor's *Tempest* creates new avenues for reading Shakespeare in a way that embraces the mutability of gender and sexual identity. First, all roles can be recast and reimagined. Taymor's recasting of the main character (Prospera) is accented by the visual reimagining of Ariel with a constantly changing physical form. Taymor shows that a female lead can shake the foundations of Shakespearean patriarchy and imagine relationships that are unique. If acting roles can be either/or and are no longer tied to tradition, any actor can play any role and any character can become any gender. Second, all character identities – gender and sexual – can be open for interpretation. Ariel's gender fluidity, illustrated by visual biological changes, creates a character who blurs identity lines and is simultaneously one and the other. Slight directional adaptations that do not change Shakespeare's text yet change the performance further blur the lines between Ariel's sexuality. If character's gender and sexual identity can become mutable and are no longer assumed by societal norms, any character's identity can become whatever identity the actor and/or director want their character to inspire. Third, all character relationships can become transformative. Ariel's physical connection with master Prospera generates a relationship that goes beyond magical service. Making this relationship more overt forces an interrogation of power disparities in master/servant relationships while also hinting at homosexual relationships. If character's roles blur just as their identities, they can become valuable tools in creating a Shakespearean gallery that features a multitude of identities.



## **CHAPTER 4: Caliban – Blackness and Slavery in Julie Taymor’s *Tempest*** **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will consider how questions regarding blackness and slavery in *The Tempest* are answered through a feminist analysis of Julie Taymor’s 2010 film, *The Tempest*. As Prospero becomes Prospera, the dynamic between a white male master and a black male slave changes. All of the chapters in this paper have read *The Tempest* in a context of analyzing hierarchy: the Miranda chapter examined power relationships between parents and their children, the Sycorax chapter explored power relationships between stereotypical male protagonists and female antagonists, and the Ariel chapter explored power relationships between masters and servants. Additionally, all of the chapters have assessed whether Shakespeare was a feminist based on a determination as to whether his characters empowered women or silenced them. Caliban is similar in that he provides another way to analyze an important power relationship – black/white – yet the connection to feminism appears tenuous. However, the insertion of Prospera creates a direct confrontation between a male-female relationship that is black-white. Thus, the thesis of this chapter is that Taymor’s film shows how Shakespearean identities and relationships built on hierarchies can be challenged through adaptation. The chapter will consider four questions surrounding the identity, role, and relationship of Prospero and Caliban. First, who is Caliban, this malignant slave? While the *The Tempest* has long been examined as a patriarchal play because of Prospero’s absolute rule, post-colonial theories criticizing Prospero as a white male who dominates the locals – Caliban have grown in number as more adaptations have made Caliban black. Second, what is Caliban the slave like, this black beast who carries about Prospero’s menial labors? The deliberate choice of making Caliban black, combined with his

identity and role as a slave, provokes a discussion of power relationships – and white/black relations – in Shakespeare. Third, how does the introduction of female master Prospera undermine the hierarchy of white patriarchy? Exploring the dialogue and actions of Prospera reveals a new reading of the Caliban threat and of fears of the black body. Fourth, how does Taymor’s Caliban synthesize feminism and post-colonialism? Taymor’s Caliban strives to be his own man who defines his own identity and resists the power structures that attempt to subjugate him.

In an interview about the film, Taymor explicitly mentions Djimon Hounsou’s casting as confronting the racial debate over Caliban’s identity and symbolism (Interview with Christina Radish 1). Taymor is even more explicit in her chapter introducing the script, contending that casting an African brings colonialism and imperialism of Africa to the forefront (“Rough Magic” 17). His casting clearly represents Caliban as black while his master(s) are very white –and they have imposed their will on him in his homeland. Hounsou’s casting brings much more than just blackness – he has made a career of playing slaves in movies such as *Stargate*, *Amistad*, and *Gladiator* (Caccavaio 208). Taymor’s moves make him more than just a recycled representation of a slave. Djimon Hounsou’s characterization fuses Taymor’s influences of Japanese Butoh dance with Hounsou’s country of origin’s Benin Voodoo festivals<sup>20</sup> (Lehmann, “Turn off the dark” 55). Butoh informs Caliban’s dramatic and overly-controlled movements as well as his white face paint. Despite bringing cultural context and emotional gravity to the role, Hounsou receives mixed criticism for his Caliban. Critic David Denby of *The New Yorker* hypothesizes that Taymor’s gender recasting will please left-wing critics while her imperialist view of Caliban

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Bate suggests Taymor’s incorporation of Hounsou’s Benin experiences is a nod to Frantz Fanon, who wrote the seminal anti-imperialist work *Prospero and Caliban: Black Skin, White Masks*.

will enrage them (1). Denby's complaint assumes that the left reads Mirren/Housou as complicitly performing colonialism instead of generating debate. Other critics think Housou is hard to understand, that he "shouted his lines as loudly as humanly possible" and that he is "incomprehensible" (Beames 1; Tookey 1). Caliban does seem to speak in staccato but perhaps it was lost on the critics that he was differentiating his speech from the other (white) characters. Keith Phipps of the *A.V. Club* recognizes this and defends Housou's Caliban as effective that his "West Indian accent and a patch of white skin places emphasis on the play's colonial themes" (1). I would say that his casting and representation alone force an examination of colonialism, and that Taymor and Housou have succeeded.

Taymor's film tells Caliban's story differently than it has been told in other major film adaptations. In Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), Caliban is introduced at 6:56 into the film, as he eats a raw egg – picking it out from a basket of rotten apples and onions. He sits on the floor by the fire, wearing an old suit, a bald figure evoking comparisons to the Addam's family's Lurch. His horror house attire, facial expressions, and slap stick coincide perfectly with communicating the dank and dark yet campy atmosphere. He spits the raw egg out at Miranda, causing her to scream and he laughs hysterically at Miranda's fright, standing up and shaking his trousers from the crotch as she runs off. At 11:30 Caliban uses the same trouser shaking move when he laughs at Prospero accusing him of raping Miranda. Prospero's monotone and Caliban's giggling laughter combined with his seemingly more keen interest in men undermines any threat or fear of him attacking Miranda. In fact, at 20:01 Caliban surprises Miranda as she washes and she quickly huddles to hide her bare chest. She easily pushes him out of the room as he is more intent on clowning around than forcing himself on her. After she hears him laughing down the hallway, Miranda laughs as well. While Jarman's Ariel warrants a drawn out departure, Caliban

receives no send off in Jarman's film. In Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991), at 39:40 Prospero takes Miranda's hand and says "come, we will visit Caliban my slave." Miranda wears a thin white (exaggeratedly so) costume wedding dress. Her breasts and nipples are easily seen through the dress. As they walk to Caliban the screen intersperses shots of Caliban's book – the Book of the Earth – as different states of excrement are poured onto the pages for roughly 20 seconds starting at 39:56. At 40:38 Caliban leaps out into the water with an animal growl. He is bald, spindly, mostly naked, and ashen. Caliban's actions mimic a ballet dancer's while Gielgud reads his lines. Caliban wears a tight loincloth with dangling bulbs hanging from the front, seemingly mimicking exaggerated testicles that dangle beneath his body. At 42:20 Caliban grabs these bulbs as Prospero reads Caliban's lines of peopling the island. At 42:57 Caliban is shown shaking a book's pages into the water and then discarding the binding. At 100:00 into the movie Caliban appears, creeping around acrobatically, his face painted, his lips red. Caliban is revealed to have odd markings painted onto his body and his skin seems redder and darker. Caliban ballet grows faster as he talks to Stephano and Trinculo. At 109:37, he mentions Miranda's beauty and at 109:58 a man – possibly Ferdinand – is shown having sex with Miranda whose white dress has been opened to reveal her breasts as the man moves on top of her, his pants on and his exaggerated white ruff obscures most of her face. An interesting contrast to Caliban, and in the case of the representation of black people in *The Tempest*, is Claribel. At 52:20 she is introduced, smileless and downcast she demures as the screen pans to her half naked, black husband. At 53:35 they are flashed again as they say "lost to an African." At 54:08 they talk about "plantations" and how Prospero would run them. At 56:40 Claribel is shown when they mention the next heir, she is writhing on a table with her hands at her bloody loins, moaning in pain, while behind her is her naked black husband, being rubbed down by slaves, his expression blank.

While he has some black slaves, he has two white female slaves whose naked bodies fill the screen while Prospero narrates. Greenaway's portrayal concludes when at 156:10 Caliban prostrates himself in front of everyone as he begs for forgiveness. Caliban crawls off after Prospero acknowledges him. Jarman and Greenaway develop Caliban's character with physical extremes: Jarman with a comic satire, Greenaway with a ballet acrobat. Both versions could be read as different takes on Caliban's service and threat to Prospero and Miranda: Jarman features a bumbling servant while Greenaway features visual depictions of intercourse. Taymor makes different moves with a different physical depiction of Caliban: she makes Caliban a physically imposing black man yet weaves in a subtle satire of Caliban as a simple slave. Her Caliban changes how the oppressed should be understood for his cunning and resistance becomes an instrument to challenge all identity hierarchies.

### WHO IS CALIBAN?

Even more than Ariel, Caliban has ignited a debate as to whether he is human or inhuman as well as serving as a tool to question social hierarchy (Bach 394; Brevik 46; Vaughan xvii). How does that discussion of humanity define Caliban? In Shakespeare's *Tempest* Caliban is listed in the *dramatis personae*<sup>21</sup> as "a savage and deformed slave" and is denigrated at almost every turn by the play's protagonist, Prospero. Julia Reinhard Lupton ponders, "Is [Caliban] man or fish? Creature or person? This indeterminacy at the heart of Caliban sets him adrift," then concludes "Caliban's humanity ... remains a question rather than a given in the play" (13). In film both Jarman and Greenaway depict Caliban as a bald white man, comic in the former, silent in the later. Jarman's Caliban is satirical, communicating much with just his facial expressions as we engages in a performance most would label "crazy." Greenaway's Caliban is artful, dancing through the film with unusual symbols painted about his body. That Caliban is stereotyped – as a

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<sup>21</sup> Note that the *dramatis personae* was not authored by Shakespeare.

questionably intelligent being and possessing either rudimentary or no speech makes him an intriguing subject for those questioning identity binaries. Caliban questions norms through resistance, racial performance, and pragmatic possibility. First, Caliban's actions, words, and representations can be understood as a way for all subjugated peoples to resist hierarchies of domination (Vaughan xvi). Second, post-colonialists contend that Caliban's experiences speak to the people of the global south from Latin America to Africa to South East Asia – even Native Americans (Royster 7; Vaughan, "Caliban in the Third World" 289; Vaughan, "Shakespeare's Indian" 137). Third, diverse readings of Caliban all utilize him as a catalyst for change, for interrogating difference, and for developing a new ways of understanding and appreciating heterogeneity (Brevik 55; Caccavaio 200; Lupton 7).

Caliban is introduced in Taymor's *Tempest*, resisting Prospera's summons, hiding in his dark hole. At 17:33 in the film, Prospera calls "What ho! Slave! Caliban." As ominous music plays, Djimon Hounsou's Caliban crouches in his cave, finally leaping to the surface at the crescendo. His darkness is exaggerated by the blue sky behind him as Prospera sticks her staff at him as if to ward him off. Caliban curses them as unusual sound effects accent his unique speech, causing Miranda to flinch and Prospera to curse back. Caliban's lamenting the loss of his mother, the loss of his island, and the loss of the love of Prospera and Miranda contrasted with Prospera spitting back about Caliban's attempted rape outline him as the "lying slave" of Shakespeare. Caliban's role as the antagonist is clearly established through Taymor's musical and cinematic accents yet these same moves hint at sympathy. Close shots reveal Caliban's body to be scared, caked with mud, and with unusual body painting, including a white moon shape over one of his eyes. Caliban's body is a major part of his identity yet he is very clearly human, and not an animal, black and not white, and powerful and not satirical. Shakespeare's only stage

direction in this scene is simply that Caliban is “[within]” – possibly indicating the cave but the music, lighting, camera angles are all Taymor. At 35:10 Caliban encounters Trinculo while Caliban is carrying wood. Caliban tries to hide from the shouting Trinculo, though Stephano’s arrival shortly thereafter removes this escape and Caliban moves quickly through being a fish, mooncalf, monster, and islander to becoming a conspirator as he suggests how Stephano can become king of the isle by killing Prospera. While Caliban exhibits the same comic shock at Trinculo peeling back the gabardine to hide from Stephano, Caliban is quick to act drunk despite maintaining even speech and body movements as he hatches a plan to unseat Prospera. Taymor has definitely made him more than a silly clodish slave. Taymor’s liberties seem all the larger when again simple stage direction bears different fruit for all Shakespeare adds to the scene is when Caliban is “[Singing drunkenly].” A reading that posits Caliban as in control of his own destiny hinges on the physical mannerisms Taymor coaches out of Hounsou – not the original text. Caliban’s plot is brought to an end at 139:40 where he laments following Stephano and is finally acknowledged by Prospera – mostly through silences and glances shown by mid-range to close-ups of Caliban followed by those of Prospera. Finally at 141:16 Caliban departs Prospera’s cell for the last time, pausing as if to look back but not turning back to glance at Prospera. Despite his villainy being revealed – and his defeat – Caliban walks from the cell and says his goodbye to Prospera on his own terms, without crawling away in prostration as Greenaway’s Caliban does. Shakespeare’s text merely notes that Caliban exits as the slave that has served Prospero(a) for a decade gets no special goodbye as Ariel does. Taymor’s script reads:

She turns to find CALIBAN, still motionless, in the exact same position. Finally he looks up, directly into her eyes. He then looks to her staff, expecting PROSPERA to use it against him. It is almost inconceivable that the punishment and torture do not come.

PROSPERA takes in the full measure of her own responsibility for CALIBAN. There is a silent moment of communion between them. CALIBAN turns, climbs up the steep steps. For a moment he hesitates in the doorway, then exists the courtyard without looking back” (171).

These three changes: making Caliban a sympathetic antagonist, centralizing his identity in a very human body, and depicting Caliban as an intelligent agent, show how Taymor’s adaptation interprets Caliban along critical lines. What distinguishes Taymor’s Caliban is that – like Ariel – his lines are close to the original but the physical body language is so different. The result is a representation of Caliban as a smart slave whose freedom and identity are questions he is very much invested in shaping himself.

#### **WHAT IS CALIBAN LIKE AS A SLAVE?**

Caliban’s identity as a slave, and possibly a racial minority, provokes a question about what being a black slave means for Caliban’s identity, role, and relationships. According to the Vaughans, understanding Caliban is vital to understanding *The Tempest*:

Caliban is not the most important character in *The Tempest*, though he is, as most critics and directors make clear, essential .... "Caliban is the ground of the play." He has a scant 177 lines of text (compare Prospero's 653 lines), and he appears in only five of the nine scenes, yet Caliban is central to *The Tempest's* plot and structure and to its dialogue. He speaks more words than any character except Prospero .... Almost as important as his own lines, of course, are the volume and significance of the words spoken to him or about him; by this measure Caliban is clearly, next to Prospero, *The Tempest's* predominant character (7).



That Caliban is understood in comparison to his master – Prospero(a) defines his servitude.

David Evett refers to Caliban as “the prototypical servant, hewer of wood and drawer of water” but also that “there is the consistently rebellious slave Caliban” (Evett 189). His servitude even informs his body in Taymor’s *Tempest*:

“CALIBAN is the antithesis of ARIEL. He is earth. He is the island.

Most of his skin resembles the bluish, black, and clay-red earth, its texture made of fossilized shells and hardened lava. The rest of his body is textured with maplike shapes of white skin.

His head, chest, and limbs are carved with random curse words learned from his master, PROSPERA – some formed as angry raised scars, some as tattoos made with squid ink and natural dyes” (Taymor, *The Tempest* 56).

Here Taymor literally inscribes Caliban with servitude while also calling attention to his skin which, in the film, does represent this script note but is also colored by the identity of Djimon Hounsou, a black man. While Taymor establishes Caliban as a generic racial other, she also pushes him toward being a black other in contrast to a white Prospero(a). Caliban unquestionably carries out the physical labors of Prospero(a):

PROSPERO We cannot miss him [Caliban]: he does make our fire,

Fetch in our wood and serve in offices

That profit us (I.ii.366-369).

And Taymor maintains this device despite the earlier depiction of Ariel easily creating fire and moving physical objects at will. Furthermore, Prospera has Ferdinand fetch in wood in Act III – possibly serving as an ironic counterpoint in the valor of a nobleman bringing in the wood out of love versus the slave bringing in the wood out of fear. Taymor consciously maintains this visual

echo as she includes scenes where both men lug their wood on their backs, both talking to themselves, and both dropping their wood dramatically. Thus, the reason for Caliban's slavery and subjugation remains muddled, even after his shouting match with Prospero(a) for it is simply unnecessary. Is his fetching of wood necessary or a mere distraction to keep him out of trouble? This question yields a more important one: is Caliban supposed to be totally powerless? Taymor would likely say no because the wood-fetching busy-work and a Prospera who yields a staff to deter him indicates that Caliban is a potentially powerful foe. Beyond being a powerful (antagonistic) foe, Taymor also uses Caliban's prowess as a tie-in to his humanity, including Caliban's final lines where he laments his misguided support of Stephano and Trinculo. This confession shows he is learning from his mistakes, emphasizing his humanity (Lehman 52; Vaughan 19). Both Jarman and Greenaway exclude these lines that Taymor includes along with her aforementioned staring contest and battle of wills. To what purpose does Taymor's support of the "smart Caliban" serve? Taymor's Caliban is black. Despite centuries of criticism, there is no verifiable historical or textual support that Shakespeare intended Caliban to be black (Brevik 64). Taymor *made* her Caliban black. This is a deliberate choice that literally colors her how Caliban is represented and understood. Thus, the purpose of a devious Caliban who resists both white Prospera and manipulates whites Trinculo and Stephano – while going head to head with white colonizers at the own game and surviving – establishes Caliban as a figure that challenges white male hierarchy. Caliban should be read as a black challenger to hierarchy, not merely another servant. Yet this creates more questions – most importantly being, *why* does Taymor make Caliban black?

Changing our understanding of Caliban – to being a black servant – requires an examination of other black servants in Shakespeare. However, there is only one black servant –

Aaron the Moor from *Titus Andronicus*<sup>22</sup>. In that tragedy, Aaron the Moor, like Caliban, is instructed to do most of the heavy work for Tamora and is demonized when he carries out her bidding. Two main events of the complex and bloody *Titus* are significant here: first that Aaron convinces Demetrius and Chiron to kill Basanius and rape Lavinia and second that Aaron is caught and killed at the end, only regretting that he did not do more evil. While Caliban tries to convince Trinculo and Stephano to kill his master, Aaron successfully convinces Demetrius and Chiron to kill on behalf of his mistress. Furthermore, both Caliban and Aaron view rape as a weapon to conquer both the victim and their father. While Caliban is acknowledged in the end and left to his own island, Aaron is punished in the end and left to die. These comparisons help answer why Taymor made Caliban black. It would be easy to conclude that Caliban is made black because he is an evil antagonist – like Aaron and from that build that their denigration of the feminine (through rape) is important to their darkness. Yet Caliban does not murder anyone, surely no women (as Aaron murders a midwife and a nurse), and he does not complete a rape or mutilation. Caliban’s apprehension toward Prospera, supported by his recognition that her books and her intelligence are the base of her power, is actually a sign of respect toward women. While Caliban is unquestionably one of the antagonists, that darkness does not mandate his blackness. Taymor ensures that Chris Cooper’s Antonio is just as evil, if not more so, in his attempts to kill the King and in flashbacks where he usurps Prospera’s power. With his antagonism removed as a cause for his blackness, how does his servitude influence his identity as a black man? Taymor’s combination of a female master with a black slave is interesting for as *Titus Andronicus* bears out, female masters are more forgiving. Despite Tamora’s vileness, Aaron refutes her at several junctures, namely refusing to kill their love child and fleeing with the baby. That there is

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<sup>22</sup> Taymor’s 1999 film *Titus* received warm praise from many of the critics who lambasted her *Tempest*. In it Taymor sticks close to the racial stereotypes of Aaron the Moor (defined as black in Shakespeare’s original) while her latter film incorporates literary criticism of Caliban to create a black character (Royster 6; Sharkey 1).

leniency to be exploited in a master-servant relationship with a female master and a male servant is undeniable throughout Shakespeare – in the rare occurrence of a female master (Evet 160). Taymor’s combination creates a black slave who has a surprising amount of room to challenge and resist his master. This is further shown in the film when Caliban foments a coup on the opposite side of the island without his master noticing, save for Ariel. Caliban’s symbol as exploiting and representing pockets of resistance that form to resist racial hierarchies ties in to resistance to gender hierarchies because both challenge white male colonialism founded on domination.

### **HOW DOES THE BLACK-WHITE POWER DYNAMIC CHANGE *THE TEMPEST*?**

The creation of Prospera changes the identities and roles – and most importantly, the relationships – of Prospero and Caliban. How are Taymor’s Prospera and Taymor’s *black* Caliban set in opposition by Prospera’s gender and Caliban’s color? Caliban represents a dangerous servant, one who, “resisted every order, did his work only under compulsion, and returned curse for cure. His attempted rape of Miranda exposes the vulnerability of gently born Tudor and Stuart children” (Evet 191). Taymor emphasizes this fear by making Caliban black and forcing an examination of why this blackness makes Caliban seem more dangerous. Once Caliban is read as, at minimum, a racialized other, “Caliban’s attempt on Miranda’s virtue makes him ‘the first nonwhite rapist in white man’s literature’” (Vaughan, “Shakespeare’s Indian” 148). Furthermore, Caliban is not the only being plugged into hierarchy:

Miranda’s presence as the dependent, innocent, feminine extension of Prospero serves a specific end in the play’s power dynamics … Prospero needs Miranda as sexual bait, and then needs to protect her from the threat which is inescapable given his hierarchical world – slavery being the ultimate extension of the concept of hierarchy. It is Prospero’s needs

- the Prosperos of the world - not Miranda's, which are being served here. (Leininger 289)

The result is that Miranda is a woman who needs paternal (that is, patriarchal) protection from a dangerous other. Taymor's film removes the assumption that a male would simply deter Caliban for Prospera holds her own with a commanding voice in a scene where she keeps Caliban at bay by holding out her staff. Additionally Taymor makes Miranda (white) sexual bait dangled in front of Caliban's (black) lust. Most critics acknowledge Caliban's role as a threatening sexual force (Caccavaio 210; Conan 4; Lehmann, "Turn off the dark" 53; Pask 398). Yet racing Caliban as black opens up many points of criticizing black-white sexuality. First, the myth of insatiable black libido is raised by Caliban's submission to his urges toward Miranda. Adaptations that employ black Calibans acknowledge this:

Irobi clearly has in mind colonial myths of the black man's uninhibited libido, to which the playwright had drawn attention in *Cemetery Road*. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban does not deny attempting to force Miranda; Shakespeare's initial audiences, firm in their conviction of the notion of the rampaging black man, were unlikely to believe him anyway. (Diala 36)

Taymor employs this device in her adaptation of Act I, Scene II where Prospera reminds Caliban that his slavery is because of his attempted rape. A scene with only "[Enter CALIBAN]" is now complimented by:

"Finally CALIBAN emerges out of a deep crevice in the earth.

Standing high above mother and daughter, his imposing presence looms as a silhouette against the bright sky" (Taymor, *The Tempest* 58).

And later,

“CALIBAN dodges past PROSPERA and leans salaciously toward MIRANDA”

(Taymor, *The Tempest* 59).

And Caliban is imposing as he leaps to the center of the shot, revealed for the first time without being obscured by lighting or shadow. He is a powerful black male with rippling muscles who moves very physically, moving his arms and adeptly moving his feet, dancing like a boxer yet angled like a panther ready to pounce. Second, the invocation of rape evokes fears of miscegenation: “The later history of English colonialism – a particularly intensified mobilization of anxieties concerning rape and miscegenation – makes Caliban’s status as a proto-colonized subject of Prospero especially difficult to modify” (Pask 392). Taymor’s Caliban initiates this discussion and possibly these psychological fears yet does not force them or advance them. Greenaway depicts bloody miscegenation as poor Claribel moans in pain while clutching her bloody loins on her marriage bed. Taymor has no depiction of Claribel and like her omission of Sycorax she allows her characters to be defined by their own actions instead of those off-screen. If she had followed Greenaway and depicted a wispy white Claribel consumed by a lustful black African, she would have stoked fears and stereotypes of miscegenation. Her film presents possible fears of black rape and intermarriage while subtly picking them apart and forcing individual introspection.

Taymor’s presentation of black sexuality and black-white relationships provides a new way to engage questions surrounding black fear in Shakespeare. In *Othello* Iago is under Othello’s orders, not quite a servant but definitely serving him, yet despises him and sets out to destroy him. Iago employs Roderigo and a few others just as Caliban employs Trinculo and Stephano as Aaron the Moor employed Demetrius and Chiron. These webs of service are

racialized. Iago's service to a black man with "excessive sexuality" is considered "degenerative and disgusting," implicitly justifying racist language leveled at Othello (Reitz-Wilson 2):

The "gross revolt" of Desdemona (1.1.134),  
Her being in the "gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (1.1.126),  
Othello labeled as a "wheeling stranger" (1.1.136).  
Described as an "old black ram" (1.1.88-89),  
Having "thick-lips" (1.1.66),  
A "devil" (1.1.91), and  
A "Barbary horse" (1.1.111-12)

Like Caliban, who is often called "monster," "mooncalf," "beast," "devil," and others besides his name, Othello too is rarely called by his name, usually described as "the Moor" (Reitz-Wilson 4). That Caliban suffers similar language as Othello is significant considering his race is less explicitly defined in Shakespeare's original yet is strikingly similar:

"Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself" (I.ii.378),  
"Savage" (I.ii.416),  
"Thy vile race" (I.ii.419),  
"This is some monster of the isle" (II.ii.70),  
"This is a devil" (II.ii.99),  
"This is a very shallow monster!" (II.ii.145),  
"Servant-monster" (III.ii.3),  
"The beast Caliban" (IV.i.152-153).

Allusions to savagery, animals, and devils is common among both descriptions. Shakespeare ironically labels Caliban a beast yet gives him a beautiful speech about the wondrous sounds of the island:

Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices  
That, if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked,  
I cried to dream again. (III.ii.134-142).

While Taymor cuts or trims many of the longer monologues or lines of any of the characters, she keeps this speech in its entirety. I believe this is because Taymor wants to highlight the creativity and artfulness of Caliban who despite being caked in mud and carrying wood for his master, he can appreciate the beautiful nature of his home. Is this a man that should be feared? Is this a man who is so different from Prospera's whistful "such stuff as dreams are made on."<sup>23</sup> Thus, imagine a Taymor adaptation of *Othello* that has the confidence to make similar identity moves to examine black-white service to compare cultures. What if Iago was black and Othello white? Iago could be like Caliban – conspiring to ruin his white master with other whites that he can easily fool. What if Othello was Othella? Since the play emphasizes Othello's sexuality, would Iago try to rape Othella? Would Othella be a seductress who breaks Iago's heart? Another point of comparison between Iago and Caliban creates further questions: Iago's success and Caliban's

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<sup>23</sup> See Prospera's speech in IV.i.161-178.



failure. Is Iago a better schemer because he is white or because he is in a tragedy? Why are Caliban's machinations so often chalked up to drunkenness? Iago often does his deals over wine in locales that are awash with liquor while Caliban encounters alcohol once. Would Iago be suspected of drunkenness if he was black? Or a Native American? Furthermore, why is Iago given the motives of being nebulously wronged by Othello while Caliban is forced to carry the baggage of an off-scene, pre-action, rape? Both happen before the events of their respective plays yet Caliban's colors his character while Iago's explains his revenge. Would Iago be labeled a rapist if he was black? All of these questions are possible – and useful – because Taymor's Caliban draws attention to racialization.

### **WHAT DOES CALIBAN WANT TO BE?**

Taymor's creative casting creates many opportunities for all of her characters to be appropriated by those questioning their identity or striving for a mutable identity. Caliban can be used by these groups as a symbol of resisting whiteness, appreciating individuality, and challenging norms. First, Caliban is a black body that resists whiteness and his literary history is a site for interrogating how characters are created along racial lines – and how casting can change that. Whiteness should be understood as a position of power in the power structure that determines norms. Thus, challenging that position and calling attention to the existence of this power structure allows individuals to resist these norms and form their own social mores. Second, Caliban should be understood as his own person, not a product of his mother – he is the symbol of blackness and resistance<sup>24</sup> since he is an agent of the play, an actor who is in the *dramatis personae*. Many interpretations of the play read Caliban as the product of his mother (Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* 216; Thompson 237). Acknowledging Caliban as *his* own, not as

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<sup>24</sup> For further detail into adaptations and rewritings stressing black resistance by Cesiare, Manoni, and others, see Brevik 56, 80; Lanier 47; Royster 6.

belonging to Prospero(a) or Sycorax, allows pockets of resistance where individuals can be themselves without familial baggage or defining themselves through relationships. Third, Caliban should be his own man, with his own unique physical characteristics instead of a beast next to the perfectly masculine Ferdinand. Many critics read Ferdinand as a representation of the perfect masculine whose love balances out Caliban's flawed beastly lust (Brevik 10; Bevington 210; Crowl 179; Pask 392). Reading Taymor's Caliban as unique in being the only black male to live to the end of the play without a death sentence and one who inherits an island (finally) free of white male control creates more possibilities.

The possibility of Taymor's Caliban advances all of Shakespearean film. To appreciate this step, consider two other mainstream Hollywood adaptations: Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993) and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Branagh casts Denzel Washington as Don Pedro, a visiting prince who is not the main character but a prominent one. However this portrayal is not a major step for challenging race in Shakespeare. It does provoke a similar question: is Claudio's fear that Don Pedro will steal Hero now motivated by stereotypes of the black libido? Yet, the film is clouded by a lack of purpose and clarity regarding Don Pedro's identity/role/relationships as a black man (Ryan 52). Denzel Washington's Don Pedro tries to evoke the Shakespearean persona in action and speech yet some slight accents pierce his portrayal and he is expected to be the half-brother of the pasty white Keanu Reeves, all the while he is easily fooled by a simple trick. Is Don Pedro's speech supposed to be black? Is the audience supposed to take a leap of faith that Washington and Reeves are related? Is Don Pedro's gullibility the opposite of the "smart Caliban" theory? Taymor rises above these obstacles by explaining Caliban's speech as taught to him by white colonialists, a language he has made his own and inscribed on his body (Taymor, *The Tempest* 56). Taymor's Caliban is also clever and

despite many defeats, earns his freedom and independence. Additionally, Djimon Hounsou delivers a dynamic performance driven by impressive inflection and powerful physicality while Denzel Washington's performance is muted and flat; his is a passive character. Luhrmann casts Harold Perrineau as Mercutio, neither Capulet nor Montague, but one of the film's dynamos. It does provoke a similar question: is Mercutio deviant sexually because of his blackness? Yet, the film is burdened by stereotypes instead of avenues to challenge them regarding racial violence. Luhrmann's Capulets are Hispanic, led by John Leguizamo's Thybault and his attendant crew (including Vincent Laresca and Carlos Martin Manzo Ojalora) of stereotypical Hispanic gangsters – except for the perfectly Aryan Juliet (Radel 1). Luhrmann's Montagues are white, some excessively so, with several Montagues sporting bleached hair and pale skin that seems surprising given their frequent and scantily clad beach excursions. In *Romeo and Juliet*, there are no explicitly black characters so Mercutio is very clearly made to be black (Radel 1). In *Romeo + Juliet*, the black Mercutio becomes the stereotypical black sacrifice, the first to die, and the most expendable character to eat up screen time. Even though he is expendable, that is written into the script, his performance is memorable and he takes lines and his racial, sexual, and gender performance gives them a turn. His costume at the ball is that of a woman, his sexuality is mutable, and he pushes drugs on the Montagues – is this a representation of black masculinity? Like Harold Perrineau's Mercutio, Djimon Hounsou's Caliban steals many of the scenes he is in. Taymor overcomes these stereotypes by locating her characters in magic, free of racial stereotypes, and grounding actions and histories in the mystique of the island.

## CONCLUSION

Taymor's *Tempest* provides new methods of reading Shakespeare in a way that interrogates hierarchies. First, all roles can be racially recast and reimagined. Taymor's black

Caliban shows how continued resistance can achieve victory over white colonialism. Taymor shows that Djimon Hounsou's Caliban is *his* Caliban, a Caliban who uses the natural flow of Hounsou's body and explains the specific speaking pattern Hounsou employs. If acting roles can be recast *and* characters can be reimagined to represent the identity, history, culture, and relationships of that actor, any actor/director can create a reading of Shakespeare that highlights a specific example of difference. Second, all racial stereotypes – and their effect on racialized relationships – can be unraveled. Taymor's combination of racial recasting with a gender recasting (Prospera) further shows how racial stereotypes about sex can be broken down. If characters can highlight stereotypes or character relationships can create new understandings of past stereotypes, these models can be applied to other Shakespeare adaptations. Third, all character identities can be colored and uncolored. Taymor recognizes that Caliban does not have to be black but that she *makes* him black. *The Tempest* may hint at a specific identity but that does not mean a certain color and while Aaron and Othello may be “black Moors” in Shakespeare, Taymor's choice puts Caliban in that group. If characters can be added to groups yet redefine what it means to be (in) that group, then underrepresented and demonized populations can reshape how they want to be understood.

## CONCLUSION

Julie Taymor's film ends with the lines:

My Ariel, chick,

That is thy charge: then to the elements

Be Free (V.i.359-361).

Shakespeare's fifth act ends with those same lines with Prospero also adding “and fare thou well! Please you, draw near” (V.i.361). So ends the fifth act. But Prospero has more to add

– an epilogue where Prospero relinquishes his power. In some adaptations he breaks his staff while in others he casts away his books. Prospera raises her staff above her head – that black phallic weapon – and casts it into the ocean. It bounces off the cliff wall and waves and just when viewers expect the staff to sink into the water, the staff shatter on the rocks. Taymor’s film cuts to the titles while Beth Gibbons sings Prospero’s epilogue which is conveniently written in rhyming couplets. Prospera’s books sink to the bottom of the water as Beth Gibbons sings, with the last few lines of the epilogue on repeat:

Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free. (Epilogue, 13-20).

I would be remiss if I did not use the framework of feminist and post-colonial criticism to guide my interpretation of why these lines are repeated – and by Beth Gibbons and not Helen Mirren. This is a powerful conclusion to a play that often guides the interpretation of the director’s intent and Taymor has almost erased it entirely. Yet, transposing lines is something she did with Miranda, and changing locations and form is something she did with Ariel – maybe this was intentional and not erasure. The soundtrack lists this song as “Prospera’s Coda” and the music is written by Elliott Goldenthal, Julie Taymor’s longtime partner. Prospero was thought to be Shakespeare so Prospera could be imagined as Taymor and this song was made through and as

an extension of Julie Taymor. Perhaps the song can be read as retrenching the relationships of the play. “My ending is despair” could be a cold but realistic way of noting the sacrifice Prospera makes for Miranda. She leaves an island where she is all powerful so that her daughter will not be alone. She trades her robes and magic for corsets and domesticity. The quality of Gibbons’ voice adds another aspect for it oozes with melancholy and sadness, communicating the somber sacrifice she makes, while the slow rhythm symbolizes a mother who knows what the right decision is but does not want to make it. “Mercy itself and frees all faults” could be a deeply concealed apology to Sycorax, damned in absentia, or an appeal for forgiveness for enslaving Caliban and colonizing the island. She realizes the similarity with Sycorax whose power vanished and wants mercy from Caliban whom she has abused. Here Gibbons’ sorrow sounds out the two mothers loss – their island and their power. “Spirits to enforce, art to enchant” could be a not so subtle nod to Ariel, a ‘thank you’ for the artful magic Ariel has performed at Prospera’s behest. She knows that her revenge would have been unfulfilled and Miranda’s heart unsatisfied without Ariel’s assistance. “As you from crimes would pardon’d be,” following the line asking Caliban for mercy could be Prospera forgiving Caliban for his attempted rape of Miranda if he will forgive her harsh treatment of him. She knows she has done wrong – their shared glance at the end says as much – and she knows the island is now his. All of these extrapolations do not have accompanying evidence because that is not the point. Taymor has set up a film that opens the door to these theories. I simply applied that lens to the eight lines that are repeated at the end. What would reading the epilogue this way mean? Is Prospera’s colonial conquest forgiven? Is it acceptable because she saw the error of her ways? I hope you will indulge me read it as starting that debate.

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