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3-23-17

Essay 2

The Tempest and Colonialism

Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, explores themes of colonialism. The relationship between Prospero and Caliban is a perfect demonstration of the dependence relationship between a colonizer and the native of whichever colony he set his eye upon. Aime Cesaire analyzed and addressed the question of racial identity and equality in *The Tempest* with his own book *A Tempest*. He investigated how Shakespeare's play related to the social codes and conventions by which early modern Europeans defined non-European and non-Christian people and races they encountered. He also explored the more recent history of the reception of Shakespearian drama within non-Western societies and settings in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Throughout the play, there are many different references to colonialism within the characters. *The Tempest* analyzes the imperialistic relationships between England and America but applies it to personal human interaction between the central characters. The idea of ruling a colony lured many people into the idea that having that kind of power over a large group of people is attainable. Master-servant relationships are central in many scenes in the play. Nearly every scene consists of a person in possession of power and authority while another person is subjected to that power. As stronger countries find and rule over weaker more helpless ones, the more powerful nation dominates over the helpless and turn their citizens into workers, making

them change their beliefs, and they get treated like trash constantly because they look different than the people who are ruling over them. As the stronger countries see it, they are justified in colonizing weaker countries because the spread of the European way of life would substantially increase living standards for the colonized. While economic reasons were obviously the primary impetus for colonial expansion, the Europeans believed that they were not only improving the natives' conditions, but they were saving their mortal souls by bringing Christianity to them. Over time, the technologically advanced way of life came to be associated with Europe, and with Europeans. However, not everyone see it through this point of view.

The Tempest has often been interpreted as a play about colonialism primarily because Prospero comes to Sycorax's island, subdues her, rules the land and imposes his own culture on the people of the island. Prospero is not seen primarily as a kind father of Miranda and kind ruler instead he is the guy who is seizing Caliban's Island from him. *A Tempest* by Aime Cesaire is an attempt to confront and rewrite the idea of colonialism as presented in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He is successful at this attempt by changing the point of view of the story. Cesaire transforms the characters and rearranges the scenes to reveal Prospero as the abusive European power and Caliban and Ariel as the oppressed natives. With these powers, he organizes a life for himself, and maintains his control with a combination of threats, spells, and promises of freedom. Caliban is the strongest symbol for post colonialism. Caliban states, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou takest from me." He is forced against his will to serve Prospero. At first Prospero teaches Caliban of his hospitality and language, then in return Prospero was shown all the natural resources on the island. However, Caliban didn't want to have anything to do with Prospero's rule

and tried to rape his daughter. After this incident, they ended up having a master and slave relationship.

In colonial perspective, we see the play through the eyes of colonizers. However, in Césaire's *A Tempest* we get to see the other side of things, Caliban is emerging against from the very beginning of Prospero's power. The hatred towards the colonizer is very great and strong among the colonized. Prospero manipulates everybody and every action in the play. Everybody on the island is manipulated by Prospero the way a puppet master controls his puppets. Caliban as the colonized want to strike back on the colonizer. Caliban is disobedient and creates problems for the colonizer. He attempts to rape Miranda and it is a threat posed to the safety of the colonizer. He tells Prospero that the land that Prospero rules was forcefully taken away from his mother. He says, "I wish it were done". Despite this, Caliban again and again claims that the land is to be inherited on him. It means he seems to be justified in claiming that the island originally belonged to him.

When Prospero tries to teach the language Caliban always refused to recite. Caliban, therefore, remains at the end what he was at the beginning. No change occurs in Caliban's nature. Prospero when he was colonizing men, it was just an illusion that they are working for him. But the idea is failed because Caliban does not learn his language, even at the end of the play. The play shows the resistance of dominance class. Whatever he has learnt, he uses it in cursing Prospero. These attempts by Caliban to protest and resist the colonizer can support the post-colonial interpretation of the play.

Miranda and Prospero's justifications of their enslavement of the savage Caliban, whose "vile race" lacks natural goodness. Unlike generations of earlier readers, post-colonial readers view Prospero's and Miranda's relations with Caliban as a symbol of European colonialism. One that reveals Shakespeare's own doubt toward Prospero's power and Europeans' colonizing activities among non-European natives they encountered in the Americas, and the Caribbean were based on the ground of civilizing the savages. This mission assumed that the natives lacked any culture or formal language until the Europeans brought them the gift of western language and culture. If the natives resisted European paternal rule, then they were labelled as savages, beyond improvement.