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“PLAYS THUS AT BEING PROSPER”:
CALIBAN AND THE COLONISED SAVAGE IN
MID-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN.

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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ABSTRACT:

Representations of Caliban in Victorian Britain took the form of plays, performances, reviews, poems, paintings, cartoons, sketches, and commentaries. These representations predominantly involved an ambivalence between portrayals of Caliban as human, and as non-human. A similar ambivalence is apparent in Victorian representations of the savage. Taking Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos" as an initial example, this thesis applies Homi Bhabha's model of colonial mimicry to these representations of Caliban in order to show that the ambivalence in them is continuous with the ambivalent aim of the colonial mission, which is both to suppress and to enlighten. This ambivalent colonial mission leads Caliban to be constructed within Victorian colonial discourse in an ambivalent fashion, and he is hence both contained within and subversive against that discourse. Caliban acts as a conceptual site at which colonial ideology can be both defended, by those interpretations of Caliban which are continuous with stereotypical Victorian representations of the savage, and challenged, by those representations which are subversive to the colonial ideology which is the basis of this stereotype. The challenges to colonial ideology come from interpretations of Caliban as an evolutionary figure and as a satirical figure. It is in the process of defending the colonial interpretation that the ambivalence inherent in the colonial model is made clear. Thus Caliban can be seen to be, in these interpretations, a representation of this stereotype of the colonial savage, functioning to justify the ambivalent colonial mission.

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INTRODUCTION: CALIBAN

Caliban, first presented by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* (1611),¹ is an intertextual character. Since *The Tempest*, there have been many reinterpretations, continuations, and adaptations of Shakespeare's story and character, from John Dryden and William Davenant's *The Tempest: Or, The Enchanted Island* (1667), through Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos," (1864), José Enrique Rodó's essay "Ariel" (1900) and W.H. Auden's *The Sea and the Mirror* (1945), on into today's society, with such fictional works as Tad Williams' *Caliban's Hour* (1994). Similarly, Caliban has been the subject of many visual interpretations, especially during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Shakespeare's plays were a popular subject for painters, as part of an attempt to create an English school of painting. But as well as these artistic re-interpretations, the story of *The Tempest*, and of Caliban in particular, has excited much critical debate. This debate is best exemplified in recent years by Harold Bloom's collection of pieces entitled simply *Caliban* (1992), and Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan's book, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (1991). So much interest has been directed towards this play and these characters that when, in 1950, Octave Mannoni wanted a metaphor to describe the psychological dependency in the relationship between the colonising French and the colonised Algerians, he entitled his book *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*: since then the relationship between Caliban and Prospero has been an important symbol in post-colonial studies.

¹ All references to *The Tempest* will be to the Oxford edition edited by Stephen Orgel, 1987.

Caliban's status as an intertextual figure in this way makes 'Cultural Poetics' an ideal vehicle for interpretation. Louis Montrose writes that Cultural Poetics "reorients the axis of inter-textuality, substituting for the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history the synchronic text of a cultural system" (17). That is, Cultural Poetics as an interpretative system does not study literary texts in isolation from the society within which such texts are produced and consumed. This contextualisation of literary representations of Caliban is an important part of this thesis' argument.

Harold Bloom introduces his collection by describing Caliban as "the grotesque and pathetic slave of the magus Prospero in Shakespeare's late romance *The Tempest*, in Robert Browning's remarkable dramatic monologue, 'Caliban upon Setebos,' and in W. H. Auden's poem, *The Sea and the Mirror*," identifying the character as the same through all three retellings. There is, however, no critical consensus concerning the nature of this single figure. Bloom writes that he "disputes the currently prevalent account of Caliban, who in the writings of New Historicists, Marxists, and other members of the School of Resentment becomes virtually a precursor of Nelson Mandela, rather than what he is, the weak and plangent sensibility that feels itself to have been betrayed by its former benefactor, Prospero" (xv). In what follows, I largely identify myself as a member of this "School of Resentment"; while the image of Caliban I present is not a heroic one, it is certainly in conflict with Bloom's apolitical account. Bloom wants to interpret the relationship between Caliban and Prospero as a personal one, not a political one: "what, all too briefly, allied Caliban and Prospero was an absolutely personal relationship" (4). I would respond, along with members of the feminist movement from the 1970s, arguing that "the personal is the political!" (Waugh 344).

This thesis investigates portrayals of the fictional figure Caliban in the mid-nineteenth century, showing the way in which they construct and are constructed by the conception of the colonial mission which was prevalent in Victorian society. This conception was dependent upon the ambivalences within the discourse of this colonialism for its meaning and coherence. The ambivalent representations of Caliban as a colonised savage are thus dependent on this ambivalence in colonial discourse, and at the same time, as constructions of a popular Victorian representation of the savage, a cause of that very ambivalence.

In using a previously identified literary figure such as Caliban, with a history dating back to Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Victorian authors and artists could not avoid the literary, political, and social history associated with the concept: any new work featuring Caliban would be dependent upon previous works which also involved Caliban. The sign "Caliban," that is, carries a prefigured signification -- at least, it carries a substantial amount of cultural baggage, in terms of expectations and preconceptions as to nature, focus, and form.

The aim of the first chapter of this thesis is to expose the ambivalences apparent in these presentations of Caliban (each of which is a 're-presentation') of the concept Caliban, particularly between descriptions of him as on the one hand "savage" and "primitive," and on the other hand as "bestial" and "monstrous."

The second chapter focuses on Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos." Using Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry, the ambivalences within this poem's presentation of Caliban can be seen to be consistent with the ambivalent nature of colonial discourse. This chapter shows that those ambivalences within and between portrayals of Caliban which are identified in Chapter One are a manifestation of the ambivalent Victorian attitude to the colonised savage. Further,

the ambivalence in this attitude is a result of the ambivalence in colonial desire, between enlightenment and repression.

The third chapter shows that the ambivalences in mid-nineteenth-century attitudes toward the colonised savage are manifested in representations of Caliban because of the role Caliban plays as a conceptual site of contestation, where the colonial attitude is both challenged and reasserted. In concentrating on the inter-relations between these mid-nineteenth-century representations of Caliban and colonialism, there will be many other important considerations excluded: these constructions are always over-determined, in the sense that there will always be many more explicable causes than can be sensibly accounted for. However, I believe that colonialism is an important factor to investigate here, not only because of its vast influence and its far-reaching effects, but also because it is an influence which has been under-represented in critical studies of these representations of Caliban. Similarly, while *The Tempest* has been acknowledged as an important text in colonial studies, these later representations of Caliban have not received the same recognition.

As a final introductory note, it is also necessary to keep in mind the role of modern society, and this text in particular, in the construction of this history of Caliban and colonialism. As Louis Montrose writes:

[t]he project of a new socio-political criticism is, then, to analyze the interplay of culture-specific discursive practices -- mindful that it, too, is such a practice and so participates in the interplay it seeks to analyze. (23)

That is, the “culture-specific discursive practices” that will be identified and investigated in this thesis are being so identified and investigated from another such

discursive practice, and not an objective position from which final solutions can be seen.

CHAPTER ONE: CALIBAN IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

Caliban was present to the Victorian public in various forms of artistic representation, literary and dramatic interpretation, critical analysis, and political metaphor. In this chapter I will investigate representations of Caliban in each of these different media, focusing particularly on whether such representations portray Caliban as human or non-human. Arnold Shapiro describes Caliban in Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos" as a problematic figure. He asks:

how "primitive" is Caliban? Is he a "brutish half-man," to use DeVane's phrase (p.29), or is he "a spokesman, and a very shrewd one, for what many would consider a highly developed intellectual point of view" (Timko, p.143), or is he perhaps a combination of ingredients, a "savage with the introspective powers of a Hamlet, and the theology of an evangelical Churchman"? If he is a primitive, do we sympathize with him . . . or condemn him. . . ? (54).

Shapiro's answer is that Caliban is a representation of "the man condemned by the Old Testament prophets and psalmists . . . [who] substitutes the letter for the spirit of the law" (55), and after this opening Shapiro shifts the emphasis away from the question of Caliban's primitive nature. Shapiro's answer is not mine. My answer is to interpret Caliban as all of the possibilities which Shapiro mentions, and to focus on the ambivalence between such possibilities in these presentations. As Laurence Perrine writes, Caliban presents us "not with an *either-or* possibility, but with a *both-and*" (125). The answer to Shapiro's question need not be one or the other of the options he suggests. Caliban need not be viewed as simply a primitive or as an intellectual spokesperson, an introspective Hamlet, or an evangelical churchman, but as all of these simultaneously. I will be focusing in particular on the ambivalence between portrayals of Caliban as human, and portrayals of him as non-human: on the one hand, as primitive or savage, and on the other hand, as monstrous or bestial.

The stage versions of Caliban which were available to the public in the mid-nineteenth century exhibit this ambivalence. These dramatic representations are the first of the presentations of Caliban which will be investigated in this chapter. Up until 1838, Shakespeare's version of *The Tempest* had not been performed since the lifetime of the playwright, save for a brief revival by David Garrick in the mid-eighteenth century. John Dryden and William Davenant's reinterpretation of the play called *The Tempest: Or, The Enchanted Island* (1667) made extensive adaptations to Shakespeare's original, with new characters, lines added and cut, changes in plot and role, and an altogether different focus. *The Enchanted Isle* was consistently performed throughout the late seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, and was often assumed by the viewing public to be Shakespeare's own: "it was written and performed as if it was Shakespeare 'altered' or 'adapted'" (Spencer 9).

The changes made to Caliban in writing *The Enchanted Island* relegated him to a lesser role than that which he had held in Shakespeare's *Tempest*. In the original, he was surpassed by only Prospero in the allocation of lines. In much of the early twentieth-century criticism of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Caliban has been interpreted as representative of 'natural man,' 'man in his natural state,' and this natural-ness has been seen as a redeeming feature or saving grace. For instance, Paul Brown is "concerned with the political effects" of Prospero's charge of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda, which he sees as "circumvent[ing] Caliban's version of events by reencoding his *boundlessness* as rapacity" (62, my italics). This boundlessness, as well as Caliban's "savage" nature (which Brown interprets as not necessarily a negative quality), are a result of Caliban's "irreformable" nature: his

status as outside of civilisation — natural. In *The Enchanted Island*, though Caliban is ‘natural’ to the extent that he is uncivilised, he is not representative of the ‘natural man’ for two reasons. Firstly, in *The Enchanted Island* Caliban is not taken to be a man. Caliban and his twin sister Sycorax (Caliban’s mother in *The Tempest*; I. ii. 331) are together described in the cast list as “Two monsters of the Isle” (Dryden 116). This description differs significantly from the *dramatis personae* of Shakespeare’s original play, which described Caliban as “a savage and deformed slave” (Orgel, 95), where the term “slave” implies that Caliban is human.

The second reason that Caliban cannot be seen as a representative of the ‘natural man’ is that there is another character in *The Enchanted Island*, an ‘uncivilised’ man, Hippolito, who represents humanity in a state of nature. Hippolito is beautiful (this part was played by a female actor), learns to be civilised, and falls in love with Miranda’s sister Dorinda; he represents humanity in a form which will rise above its primitiveness, and become civilised. Hippolito and Dorinda are an addition to Shakespeare’s play. *The Enchanted Island* thus has a mirror image of Miranda, the woman who has never seen a man, in Hippolito, the man who has never seen a woman, and the shift in focus from *The Tempest* towards a more basic sexual humour is apparent in the allocation of Hippolito’s part to female actors.

Thomas Shadwell slightly rewrote the Dryden-Davenant play in 1674, adding songs and music, and turning the original into an operatic production. This musical performance, according to the modern critic George Noyes, “was probably the most popular play of the Restoration period” (Noyes 1052). Keeping the same basic plot and structure as the Dryden-Davenant *Enchanted Island*, it also relegated Caliban to a minor role, again classifying him as a monster, describing him and his sister as “The Monsters *Sycorax* and *Caliban*” (Guffey 69).

Dryden and Davenant's *The Enchanted Island* remained, with Shadwell's minor adaptations, the version of *The Tempest* that audiences would have been familiar with from the late seventeenth century until 1838 (Orgel 69), when the original *Tempest* was more permanently returned. The exception is David Garrick's brief restoration of Shakespeare's original.² Until John Philip Kemble reintroduced story-lines, characters, and lines from the Dryden-Davenant version in 1787, effectively returning Caliban once again to the status of monster, Garrick's version was performed sixty-one times at Drury Lane. However, it is likely that, despite the differences between the two plays in Caliban's lines and role, he would remain to Garrick's actors and audience a monstrous character, on the basis of the preconceptions they would bring to a performance from their past experience of the Dryden-Davenant-Shadwell production.

The Enchanted Isle, or slightly modified versions thereof, is what Robert Browning and his contemporaries would have seen as children and as young adults had they attended a performance of *The Tempest*. In these, Caliban's role is limited, and the entire sub-plot with Stephano and Trinculo (called 'Trincalo' in the Shadwell version), was an excuse for lewd songs and rude jokes. With the shipwrecked courtiers taking many titles for themselves such as Duke, Prince, Ambassador, and Viceroy, the scenes involving this subplot, and involving Caliban, satirise commonwealth politics. Caliban is loosely portrayed as rightful owner of the island. When Trincalo wants to rule the island he declares that once he has eliminated Caliban he will marry Caliban's sister Sycorax because "she's heir of all this isle"

² Garrick's version was adapted from Shakespeare's First Folio, with 432 lines cut and 14 added (Stone 5-6), so while not identical to Shakespeare's original, it had none of the extra characters or wholesale changes in plot.

(Guffey 38). The implication made is one of imperialism, of ownership, and a relationship is thus established between Caliban and colonialism. I shall return to this association in more detail in Chapter Two. Caliban, in a lesser role than he had in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, is primarily portrayed as monstrous, but he also plays a part in the human economic exchange of ownership and commonwealth politics.

After seeing a performance of Shadwell's operatic production in 1668, Samuel Pepys described Caliban as a "monster" (Pepys 195). His view is in agreement with the Dryden-Davenant cast list, suggesting that Caliban's portrayal in the musical was one which would encourage an audience to see Caliban as not human. This is a view held long before the mid-nineteenth century, but the play which Pepys describes was largely the same as that which audiences would have seen in the early nineteenth century. However, a description of Caliban's costume from the 1824 Drury Lane and 1827 Covent Garden productions of the same play, roughly 150 years later than Pepys' diary entry, reads "[e]ntire dress of goat's skin; long claws on the fingers; very dark legs; the hair long, wild, and ragged" (cited in Vaughan 180), a costume which seems less that of a monster, than that of a savage man. Much would of course depend on the actor's presentation, but there is some ambivalence in possible interpretations: Caliban is portrayed as a monster, but he is also portrayed as a savage man. While initially these might not seem to be contradictory, a monster is clearly not human, while a savage man clearly is. So Caliban here represents something of a contradiction, or at least a misnomer: human, and yet not human.

This is the major ambivalence in the various representations of Caliban in the middle of the nineteenth century. On the one hand there are representations of Caliban as monstrous or bestial, and on the other hand there are representations of

him as human — savage and primitive, but nonetheless human. The ambivalence between these two basic descriptions is not only apparent between representations of Caliban; it also exists within each individual representation.

It was not until William Charles Macready returned to Shakespeare's text in 1838 that any major change to the Dryden-Davenant version was made to a dramatic performance involving Caliban. With respect to Caliban, the return changed him from a figure of amusement back to one with tragic potential.³ No longer was Caliban set aside from the main story, limited to a role of farce and burlesque; once more he became something of a worthy adversary for Prospero. It is clear from the contemporary reviews that there followed from this shift in representation an increased sympathy in the responses to Caliban: he became more easily identified with, more human. John Forster describes Caliban's first entrance onto the stage in his review in *The Examiner*:

His first discovery in the hole where he is "styed" was singularly picturesque, nor less so was his manner of grabbing out of it to fly on Prospero, whose wand in a moment flung the danger of his fury down, and left him merely *dancing mad* with impotent rage. (70-71)

Here Caliban's desires and actions are curbed, limited, and controlled by the power of Prospero. He is a victim, "impotent," with no power, and Prospero is an oppressor. Prospero asserts his superior power, without showing any moral superiority which could justify either his wielding of such power or the consequent hierarchical structure of the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Of course,

³ Since Kemble's 1787 version, Caliban's lines were all or almost all from Shakespeare. However, in the context of the Dryden-Davenant play, this means that Caliban is a drunken fool with poetic lines. Any identification with savage or natural humanity which could generate sympathy for Caliban will be instead directed towards Hippolito, the 'natural man.'

as the play continues, Prospero's moral superiority is asserted, but the initial picture of Caliban is a powerful one, as Forster's review attests.

In 1847 another theatre company performed *The Tempest*, with the same actor (George Bennet) playing Caliban as in Macready's 1838 production. In the stage directions, Caliban's first entrance is described as follows: "Enter Caliban. Opening L. of Flat / Crawling out on all fours as a Beast, rises and threatens Prospero, who raises his wand and checks him. Caliban recoils as if spell struck." In another scene, in fear of Prospero, Caliban exits "tremblingly"; when Ariel makes Stephano hit Trinculo, "Caliban shows a strong and savage expression of joy"; in II. ii. he rebelliously and indignantly throws down his bundle of wood (Folger *Tempest* promptbook No. 13, cited in Vaughan 181-182). Caliban is explicitly described here as being like "a Beast." However, many of the emotions attributed to him are more human than bestial: to tremble with fear and to be joyful are emotions a beast might express, but to be indignant and rebellious are emotions which seem more human in nature. But there is no strict boundary here. The openness of the potential interpretations remains. There is an ambivalence here too, between Caliban as 'bestial' or 'monstrous,' and Caliban as human.

In the prompt book for an 1854 performance of *The Tempest*, Caliban is constructed to act in a bestial manner at times: for instance, when he loses Stephano's keg of wine, he growls, and paws at Stephano's leg to get it back again. In the prompt copy of Charles Kean's 1857 production of *The Tempest*, Caliban is described in the first scene he shares with Stephano and Trinculo (II. ii.) in the following way: "Cal takes a long pull at the bottle. Trin looks at him in surprise. Cal turns and looks savagely at Trin" (Folger *Tempest* promptbook No. 10, cited in Vaughan 183). The emphasis is on the savage nature of Caliban, but he is clearly

expressing human emotions, and is not a beast or a monster. Clearly the question of what Caliban is cannot be answered easily. He is a beast, but he is also human. He remains ambivalent.

The ambivalence apparent in these dramatic representations of Caliban is also clear in the critical interpretations of Caliban in the early and mid-nineteenth century. In the literary studies of this period, Shakespeare's *Tempest* rather than Dryden's *Enchanted Isle* was the object of study. Eighteenth-century views of the play tended to claim that Caliban's enslavement was justified and even necessary on the basis of his depravity: he was "half daemon, half brute" (Schlegel 395), inferior to and hence logically slave to Prospero. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, in his 1811-12 lecture on *The Tempest*, although demonstrating a more sympathetic view of Caliban than was shown by such eighteenth-century commentators as Schlegel, still presents an ambivalent description:

[t]he character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived: he is a sort of creature of the earth partaking of the qualities of the brute and distinguished from them in two ways, 1. by having mere understanding without moral reason, 2. by not having the instincts which belong to mere animals.—Still Caliban is a noble being: a man in the sense of the imagination, all the images he utters are drawn from nature, & are highly poetical. (*Collected Works* Volume I 364-365)

Caliban is here interpreted as being in some aspects human ("a noble being: a man in the sense of the imagination). But again, Caliban is also portrayed as being in some sense bestial (a "creature of the earth partaking of the qualities of the brute").

William Hazlitt in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817) writes that Caliban is "one of the wildest and most abstracted of all Shakespear's [*sic*] characters, whose deformity whether of body or mind is redeemed by the power and

truth of the imagination displayed in it” (90). This sympathy, albeit limited, is in contrast to another comment by Hazlitt earlier in the same work, in which he paraphrases Schlegel, and describes “the savage Caliban, half brute, half demon” (89). Again we see, as well as an ambivalence between his two comments, an ambivalence within Hazlitt’s second comment itself: Caliban is savage, which means human rather than demon, but also half demon and hence clearly not human, as well as half brute, which could be a human or bestial description. It is as if Hazlitt could not decide how to characterise Caliban, and so compounded several of the negative images available to him, regardless of contradictions between such images. While Coleridge and Hazlitt may disagree about specifics, they are in agreement over several major aspects: concerning Caliban’s nobility or redemption, and the importance of the imagination in his construction, and most importantly, concerning their construction of Caliban as an ambivalent figure.

Coleridge, in an 1818 lecture on Shakespeare seems to have retracted many of the positive things he said about Caliban seven years earlier. He writes:

Caliban, on the other hand, is all earth, all condensed and gross in feelings and images; he has the dawnings of understanding without reason or the moral sense, and in him, as in some brute animals, this advance to the intellectual faculties, without the moral sense, is marked by the appearance of vice. For it is in the primacy of the moral being only that man is truly human.” (Volume II 270)

Here Coleridge describes Caliban as less than human in his lack of “moral sense,” the same as “brute animals”. In the same year Hazlitt published a response to this lecture, in which he defends Caliban against Coleridge’s negative description. In this letter, Hazlitt claims that:

“Caliban is . . . strictly the legitimate sovereign of the isle, and Prospero and the rest are usurpers, who have ousted him from his hereditary jurisdiction by superiority of talent and knowledge. . . . He is the Louis XVIII of the enchanted island in *The Tempest*: and Dr.

Stoddart would be able to prove by civil law, that he had the same right to keep possession of it, 'independently of his conduct or merits. . . .' Even his affront to the daughter of that upstart philosopher Prospero could not be brought to bar his succession to the natural sovereignty of his dominions." (*Complete Works* 207)

To an extent, Hazlitt is setting up this picture to mock Coleridge's stance against Jacobinism.⁴ But when, further on, Hazlitt asks "[w]hy does Mr. Coleridge provoke us to write as great nonsense as he talks?" (207), Caliban's "natural sovereignty" does not seem among the nonsense. As Jonathan Bate writes, "[t]he initial purpose of this [letter] is to debunk Coleridge's 'caricature', [sic] but parts of Hazlitt's self-consciously provocative reading have an irrefutable force" (179). In his important assessment, Hazlitt is "the first to read *The Tempest* in terms of imperialism" (Bate 144), and to view Caliban as a dispossessed native, thereby introducing the colonial theme into criticism of *The Tempest*. There also remains an ambivalence between the two critics who were earlier agreed, concerning Caliban's status: is he a beast, as Coleridge now claims, or a man, as Hazlitt presents?

Macready's 1838 production of the Shakespearean *Tempest* prompted a more sympathetic response from critics other than Forster, cited earlier. Patrick MacDonnell saw George Bennett's Caliban as showing the audience "the rude and uncultivated savage, in a style, which arouses our sympathies" because Caliban as he saw him was "a creature in his nature possessing all the rude elements of the savage, yet maintaining in his mind, a strong resistance to that tyranny, which held him in the thralldom of slavery: Caliban creates our pity more than our detestation" (cited in Vaughan 104-105). Following Hazlitt's interpretation, MacDonnell's emphasis on the elements of tyranny and slavery in Caliban's relationship with Prospero extends

⁴ The French radical democratic movement.

the use of a colonial metaphor in the interpretation of Caliban. According to MacDonnell's interpretation, as a "savage" Caliban is "rude" and unlikely to be strong-willed, but in managing to overcome these 'faults' to resist tyranny and thralldom, he earns the audience's sympathy and identification, and hence he is here described as human rather than monstrous.

This human image of Caliban as a slave is continued in an 1848 burlesque by the brothers Robert and William Brough, called *The Enchanted Isle: or 'Raising the Wind' on the Most Approved Principles*, a play which is described in its own subtitle as "[a] drama without the smallest claim to legitimacy, consistency, probability, or anything else but absurdity; in which will be found much that is unaccountably coincident with Shakespeare's 'Tempest'" (Brough 163). In the *dramatis personae* of Brough's play Caliban is described as "a smart, active lad, wanted (by Prospero) to make himself generally useful, but by no means inclined to do so, an hereditary bondsman who, in his determination to be free, takes the most fearful liberties" (Brough 164). Caliban makes his first entrance "*with a Wellington boot on one arm and a brush in his hand*" and his first lines are in response to Miranda's call "Come here, slave!":

Slave! Come, drop that sort of bother;
Just let me ax, "Ain't I a man and a brother?" (179)

Later in the play, Caliban becomes a revolutionary, and he enters "*marching to music, with a Cap of Liberty on his head, a red flag in one hand,*" claiming:

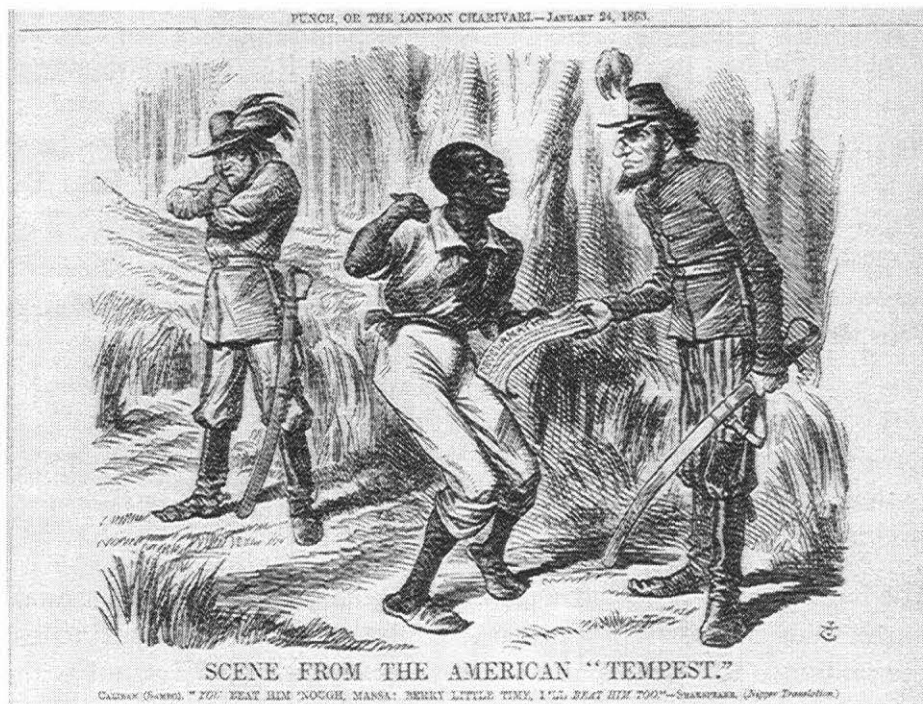
Yes, I'm resolved — I'll have a revolution —
Proclaim my rights — demand a constitution. (186)

Clearly this portrayal is a satirical one, yet the force of this satire is dependent upon the audience holding independent knowledge of both Shakespeare's original, which is being mocked, and of the similarities between Shakespeare's "savage and

deformed slave” and the black “hereditary bondsman” of America. The recognition of this similarity then depends, like MacDonnell’s review, on an acknowledgment of the role of imperialism in the relationship between Caliban and Prospero. By making these links between *The Tempest* and imperialism so explicit, Brough treats Caliban as a very human figure: the interpretation of Caliban presented is again a sympathetic one.

This reasonably sympathetic view of Caliban contrasts with a later cartoon from *Punch* magazine, published in an 1863 issue. This cartoon, shown on the next page, also continues the image of Caliban as a slave. It clearly portrays English sympathy for the confederate cause in the American Civil War. Caliban is used as a means to this end, pictured as he is, as a black American slave according to European stereotypes (knock-kneed, cringing appearance, pidgin-English speech), dependent on and associated with Abraham Lincoln, unattractively caricatured as a Union Officer. This image also makes apparent the obvious conviction that the plight of Caliban in *The Tempest* is similar to the plight of the imperially or colonially oppressed. That the cartoonist chooses Caliban and *The Tempest* to express this viewpoint on slavery suggests that the link between Caliban and colonialism was an appropriate one for Victorian viewers. The difference between the *Punch* picture, and MacDonnell’s sympathy or Brough’s satire, is in the attitude to slavery, and the consequent (or continuous) attitude towards Caliban as a slave. In the cartoon, it is implied that this position of inferiority is appropriate for Caliban, as it is for the blacks in America, whereas the other representations have more sympathy for Caliban. They acknowledge, to some extent, the injustice of his position. The attitude of the cartoon, that Caliban deserves to be enslaved, is justified by a belief in

Figure 1: Cartoon from *Punch* magazine, 24 January 1863.



the inhumanity of Caliban.⁵ In contrast, the more sympathetic views of Brough and MacDonnell recognise Caliban's humanity, and hence the injustice of his enslavement. So again there is an ambivalence within these representations of Caliban as a slave, between human and non-human portrayals.

The link between Caliban's status and the colonisation of America was, in the nineteenth century, becoming more widely recognised. Discussion and speculation concerning the role of the exploration and colonisation of America in Shakespeare's construction of *The Tempest* was widespread. Regardless of the significance of this relationship, the debate concerning the nature of its existence certainly added a dimension of confusion to perceptions of Caliban. For instance, Edmond Malone's posthumous variorum edition of *The Tempest* (1821) claims that Antonio Pigafetta's journal, *The Voyage of Magellan*, influenced Shakespeare's conception of Caliban. Pigafetta's account of Ferdinand Magellan's expedition of 1519-1522 claims that the voyagers met several Patagonian "giants," painted, dancing and singing, who cried to their great devil *Setebos* for help (Pigafetta 11-18). Presumably, these savage giants are an image of the 'New World' of America ("O brave new world, / That has such people in't"; V. i. 183-84⁶): that is, they are (human) Native Americans. Malone claimed that these giants were "the remote progenitor of the servant-monster in *The Tempest*" (Malone 12), but he also recognised many other images as being influential, including mytho-poetical creatures and the devil, so his overall

⁵ Or at least, a belief in his exclusion from civilised Western humanity. Which, as I shall show in Chapter Three, amounts for the Victorian audience to the same thing as a belief in his inhumanity.

⁶ Miranda's comment is directed, of course, in exactly the wrong direction to be a reference to the American New World: ironically, Miranda, trapped for her whole life on a 'New World' island, says it of the Old World of Europe which produced Ferdinand, Antonio, Gonzalo, and the other Europeans. The reference does, nevertheless, invite associations with the American New World.

interpretation of Caliban contains the same ambivalence between Caliban as human and non-human. Similarly, Samuel Weller Singer in 1837 claimed Pigafetta's story as one source for Caliban, but also recognised Schlegel's description of Caliban as a valid interpretation (Singer 4). For both of these commentators then, Caliban remained an ambivalent, contradictory figure.

Representations of Caliban in paintings in the mid-nineteenth century show thematic patterns similar to the dramatic and critical, literary and political interpretations already discussed. Painted representations of Caliban in the period immediately leading up to this time, the latter part of the eighteenth century, were, on the whole, similar to contemporary critical interpretations: that is, they were generally portrayals of monsters or demons. These paintings are mostly from the Boydell gallery collection, a series of commissioned works with Shakespeare's plays as the subject matter. Of those paintings which depict scenes from *The Tempest*, the majority portray a Caliban who inspires fear rather than sympathy. Examples of such paintings are Henry Fuseli's 1789 depiction of I. ii. which shows a monstrous, powerful, menacing, and defiant Caliban, who is nevertheless still under the power of Prospero, or Nicolaus Chodowiecki's 1780 illustration, a portrayal of Caliban as a monstrous, vaguely humanoid, tortoise. There were exceptions to this trend of portraying Caliban as monstrous, such as Reverend Matthew William Peters' 1789 picture, also of I. ii., in which a very human Caliban kneels, gathering wood, but such human identification was uncommon.

By the early nineteenth century, Caliban was being represented as human in a much greater proportion of such artworks. Robert Smirke's 1821 painting, for example, shows Caliban alone, upright, without a deformed physique — he is

decidedly human. Yet he still scowls, has a hairy face and long nails. The same ambivalence, then, as is apparent in the critical commentaries of Coleridge and Hazlitt from a few years earlier and the stage presentations of a few years later, between human and bestial representations, occurs in these artistic representations of Caliban.

This ambivalence between human and monstrous interpretations is also present in the sketches which appeared in illustrated versions of Shakespeare's works published in the early and mid-nineteenth century. Robert Cruikshank's illustration in an 1824 edition of *The Tempest*, of Caliban dancing with Stephano and Trinculo, shows Caliban as a fairly jolly person, if shaggy-haired and shaggy-clothed. John Orrin Smith's sketches from an 1840 edition, which shows a malignant Caliban crawling out of his cave, still present him as a human, albeit savage, rather than as a beast or a monster. In contrast, F. A. M. Retzsch's 1841 illustrations for *The Tempest* portrays Caliban as a monstrous blend of sea-creature ("strange fish"), dog ("puppy-headed monster"), and demon ("born devil"), in a vaguely humanoid shape.

Among these individual paintings and drawings there is an ambivalence between representations of Caliban as human and as bestial monster, and these ambivalences are further reinforced by contradictions within the individual works themselves. In many of the paintings described here as showing a bestial Caliban, the expression on his face is one of human emotion — dignity, or cunning, or rebellion, or sadness, while in many of the paintings here described as showing a human Caliban, his actions are bestial — crawling out of a cave, or clawing the air. The distinction between human and beast is not as clear as it may appear in my discussion: the line between a hairy, clawed, stooping, human Caliban and a hairy, clawed, stooping, bestial Caliban is a fine one.

The confusion of images presented in the discussion above is a representation of the portrayals of the figure 'Caliban' which were available to Victorian society, through Caliban's associations with Shakespeare's *Tempest* and its interpretations and adaptations: a monster, a primitive savage, a slave, a brute, a beast, a man, oppressed, dispossessed, rebellious.

This same confusion of images is also apparent in the reviews and commentaries which were written in response to Robert Browning's poem "Caliban upon Setebos." In themselves, these responses offer further insights into the ambivalences concerning the figure of Caliban. Not only do they suggest ambivalences within the poem, but they also present ambivalences of their own. In particular, many of them have a particular preconceived conception of Caliban which, it seems, Browning ought to have accurately captured. Consider, for example, J. Fotheringham, in 1887:

Caliban . . . is, in fact, one of the most original and delicate [conceptions] in Shakespeare. Trembling on the dangerous edge of crude animalism and even brutality, instinctive, . . . [Caliban] was a critical task even for our greatest poet [Browning]; and his success in the impersonation, both in its consistency with itself and its fitness to the world of Caliban, is wonderful. (356-57)

Browning is here being praised for his ability to impersonate (or mimic) a world through poetry which is not just internally consistent, but which is consistent with the already established fictional world of Caliban. Fotheringham, therefore, clearly has a pre-established conception of Caliban and his world, of which Browning succeeds in presenting a copy. But it is clear that there are inconsistencies between Fotheringham's preconception of Caliban, based on Shakespeare, and Browning's portrayal of him: for instance, on a basic level, Shakespeare's Caliban uses the

language of seventeenth-century England, whereas Browning's Caliban speaks, albeit in pidgin-English, the language of England in the nineteenth century. Hence there are ambivalences within Fotheringham's conception.

Fotheringham claims that Caliban has "the love of mastery and the caprice of the savage" (359), clearly expressing his imperial and colonial preconceptions: the savage, it is implied, loves power, but should never be allowed to exercise it. At the same time, he makes clear Caliban's status as human, albeit savage, rather than beast or monster. But he also claims that the poem is "from those parts of the 'Tempest' [*sic*] which present that strange creature" (Fotheringham 354), indicating that Caliban's nature is not strictly human. So Fotheringham's conception of Caliban has the same ambivalence identified earlier. This ambivalence is indicative of the nature of the cultural history of readings of Caliban.

Fotheringham describes Caliban as "[t]rembling on the dangerous edge of crude animalism and even brutality" (356). But it is not clear where this edge lies: what is it the edge between? At first glance, it seems sensible to say that the review is claiming that Caliban is human, but only just: that he is on the edge of animalism, which is not human. But Caliban is also on the edge of "brutality," and this is not so clearly a bestial trait: animals described as brutal are usually being personified, being giving human motives and intentions.⁷ It would seem that the edge Caliban is on is both the edge between human and animal, and the edge between humane and brutal. The review, however, implies (with its use of the word "even") that to be brutal is worse than being an animal. So the hierarchy of human over non-human becomes confused in this comparison; to be human is better than to be animal, but to be brutal

⁷ The term "brutal" is investigated more fully in Chapter Three.

(and human) is worse. The review is uncertain about whether Caliban is humane and almost brutal, or whether he is human and almost bestial, and about the comparative moral value of each.

A reviewer in *The Reader*, on 4 June 1864, describes Caliban's perception of Setebos as "dimly perceived in his brutish mind" (705). As an indication of the type of being the reviewer holds Caliban to be, this is a fairly clear statement: Caliban is a brute, just as for Fotheringham he was on the edge of brutality. What is unclear, however, is the way the term "brute" relates to the terms that I have been investigating, which have been used to describe Caliban. Does "brute" have bestial and monstrous connotations, or primitive and savage connotations, or in fact both of these simultaneously? All of these things can be implied by the term "brute," and often are at one and the same time. This unexplained ambiguity within the language of the review is consistent with the ambivalence in the figure of Caliban.

R. Bell, in the July 1864 issue of the *St. James Magazine*, says that "clever as 'Caliban' is, it [the poem] is a mistake" on the grounds that "[t]he subject is exceedingly repulsive," and "what grounds can [Browning] . . . set up for mere ugliness — ugliness so extreme as to fill the gazer with instinctive detestation and loathing? What would Mr. Millais make of a gorilla" (486)? With this reference to the painter Sir John Everitt Millais, Bell makes an association which is different, perhaps, to what was intended. The gorilla is an already existing subject (or at least it is a discursive construct of which there are many existing instantiations), which Millais can choose to paint or not to paint. The parallel which Bell constructs encourages us to assume that Caliban is also an already existing subject, one which Browning chooses to inscribe. Bell's decision that Caliban is ugly is based not on the poem but on the pre-existing object Caliban, just as his decision that the gorilla is

ugly is not based on any particular ugly painting, but on the original animal itself. So again, as with Fotheringham's comments, the poem itself is not what is being judged, nor even Caliban as Browning constructs him within the poem. Rather, what is being judged is the preconceived idea of Caliban held by the reviewer. Bell's claim is not that Browning's poem is ugly, just as Millais' paintings are not ugly: but that Caliban, as an already existing figure, is too ugly to warrant being a poetic subject. Again, as in the other reviews as well as the alternate representations of Caliban, there is an ambivalence — in this case, between Caliban as he appears in the poem and Caliban as he is described in a review. Interpretations of Caliban are repeatedly ambivalent. The question remains — who or what is Caliban?

A reviewer for the *Dublin University Magazine*, in November 1864, is more aware of the history which the figure of Caliban carries. The review says that the poem presents us with the "theories of a primitive mind" (577), which is nonetheless "an advance from the state in which we first formed his acquaintance in Shakespeare's 'Tempest ;' [sic] his brutal mind has developed, he has begun to make his surroundings — his present and future — the object of his thoughts" (*Dublin University Magazine* 577-78). Here is recognition that Browning's Caliban is not simply a repeat of Shakespeare's original creation, but is a development — linked, but not continuous. The review does not acknowledge the role of other portrayals of Caliban in prefiguring the image which appears in Browning's poem, but it is expected that a review of this nature excludes these other literary and non-literary pieces from consideration in order to be concerned specifically with 'higher' literature. What can be noted yet again is the use of the ambiguous word "brutal" to describe Caliban.

In engaging in natural theology, as Caliban does in the poem, thinking about Setebos and finding answers to his questions in the natural world surrounding himself, he is thinking “in the manner of savages” (*Dublin University Magazine* 578), and not, apparently, in the manner of Victorian natural theologians. This reviewer claims that Caliban’s monologue represents “the lowest form of feticism [*sic*]” and also comments on “the uncouthness of the style in which [Browning] . . . makes the half bestial savage utter his reflections” (578). Here, we are dealing with the poem quite specifically, in that these comments apply to Caliban’s actions (particularly his speech) within “Caliban upon Setebos.” But descriptions of Caliban are again in conflict. He is a “half bestial savage,” and he has already been, within this review, described as having a “brutal mind.” But is he a savage or not? How bestial is half bestial? And again, is “brutal” a human or a non-human epithet? This ambiguity blurs the line between savage and bestial: the ambivalence between a human and a non-human description of Caliban is further maintained.

It is clear from the discussion so far that my concern is with the concepts of the savage and the primitive as they are applied to Caliban. As a cultural concept of the mid-nineteenth century, Caliban is closely related to contemporary representations of the savage and the primitive. Dorothy Mermin, in her article “Browning and the Primitive,” recognises the relevance of the primitive to “Caliban upon Setebos”:

One of the central organizing principles in Robert Browning’s late poems . . . is the opposition of primitive and modern, savage and civilized, nature and culture. Many of these poems form part of the great intellectual movement that had gathered strength in the preceding decade [the 1860s] and was producing the beginnings of modern anthropology, best represented by Edward Tylor’s *Primitive Culture*. (202)

Browning's poems, Mermin maintains, "shared the common attitude of mixed horror, contempt, and fascination" with the primitive, and they "presuppose the evolutionary view that became current in the seventies: that primitive peoples and barbaric myths represent early rather than degenerate stages in cultural development of the human race, and furthermore that fragments of primitive thought and behaviour survive in higher cultures" (202). For this reason, both Browning's poem and Tylor's book offer textual evidence for the inter-relatedness of these presentations of Caliban and Victorian portrayals of primitive people. Browning's poem is the focus of the next chapter, but I will introduce Tylor's work here in order to establish a similar ambivalence to that presented earlier in the representations of Caliban. This similarity is central to my discussion as a whole.

Two major theories were central to late nineteenth-century anthropological debate: evolutionism and diffusionism. Tylor was among the leading evolutionists, but more importantly, he was also part of a group of writers who, in the middle of the century, began to make structured studies of cultural systems. So while Tylor's work is to some extent pioneering, it is also representative of a school of thought which was part of a "great intellectual movement" (Mermin 202), and to that extent can be seen as representative of Victorian cultural attitudes:

In the decade between 1861 and 1871 there appeared books which we regard as our early theoretical classics: [these included] Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and his *Primitive Culture* (1871). . . . It was McLennan and Tylor in this country, and Morgan in America, who first treated primitive societies as a subject which might in itself engage the attention of serious scholars. It was they who first brought together the information about primitive peoples from a wide range of miscellaneous writings and presented it in systematic form, thereby laying the foundations of social anthropology. In their writings the study of primitive societies and speculative theory about the nature of social institutions met. (Evans-Pritchard 28)

Tylor, as an evolutionist, held the view that “the phenomena of Culture may be classified and arranged, stage by stage, in a probable order of evolution”:

[e]ven when it comes to comparing barbarous hordes with civilized nations, the consideration thrusts itself upon our minds, how far item after item of the life of the lower races passes into analogous proceedings of the higher, in forms not too far changed to be recognized. (5-6)

For Tylor, “barbarous” people are grouped into “hordes,” while “civilised” people form “nations.” Primitive cultures, it is intimated, are to be studied for what they can teach us about our own Western history, not because they offer valid alternatives or interesting interpretations in their own right.

Tylor writes further that:

[t]he educated world of England and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nations at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, . . . [where t]he principal criteria of classification are the absence or presence, high or low development, of the industrial arts. (23)

This ‘standard’ is not, we note, settled in any impartial, objective manner, but is explicitly settled by “[t]he educated world of England and America.” Tylor’s language establishes that these value judgements are imposed on the world by specifically Western civilised nations in an act which denies any alternative interpretations.

The terms “savage” and “primitive” when used in the context of Victorian discussion, do not always refer simply to the “low development of the industrial arts,” as Tylor claims that they do. There is an ambivalence between this meaning and a moral implication, which Tylor also invokes when he claims later that “civilization may be looked upon as the general *improvement* of mankind by higher organization of the individual and society, to the end of promoting at once man’s

[sic] *goodness, power, and happiness*” (24, my italics). The goodness, power, and happiness of “man,” Tylor clearly states, will improve as technology advances.

This presupposition is one which would be more vigorously challenged today than it would have been in Tylor’s time, but my purpose is not to question Tylor’s anthropology. Rather, I intend to show that the same basic ambivalence is apparent in Tylor’s description of the ‘savage’ as is apparent in contemporary descriptions of Caliban. Tylor makes this clear himself when he identifies humanity together as a whole, but then splits this group into separate “barbarous hordes” and “civilized nations,” humanity being represented by the “educated world of England and America,” with the “savage tribes” being the ‘Other’ against which civilisation (and humanity) is judged.

Tylor continues:

The white invader or colonist, though representing on the whole a higher moral standard than the savage he improves or destroys, often represents his standard very ill, and at best can hardly claim to substitute a life stronger, nobler, and purer at every point than that which he supersedes. (26)

Tylor describes the role of the “white invader or colonist,” who brings civilisation to the (savage) ends of the earth. The colonist, when he (because for Tylor, at least, the colonist — and the colonised — is always male) encounters these savages, “improves or destroys” them. While Tylor acknowledges that the colonist often abuses the position his superior moral condition grants him, Tylor’s attitude contains an ambivalence in the colonial ideal: the role of the colonist is, on the one hand, to improve the savage he colonises, and, on the other hand, to destroy this same savage. That is, Tylor identifies the colonial mission in an ambivalent way, as both improving and destroying the savages encountered and civilised by the colonists.

This ambivalence is an important one which I will develop in more detail in the next chapter.

Tylor's work is ambivalent in other places. For instance, he writes:

[w]e may, I think, apply the often-repeated comparison of savages to children as fairly to their moral as to their intellectual condition. (27)

This moral position of the child in Victorian society was an ambivalent one also. Children were seen as morally pure—in a state of innocence, as yet untainted by moral degradation. But children were also seen as born into sin—and they would remain in this state of sin until they were baptised. The ambivalence here in the nature of the child remains when Tylor uses the child as an analogous description of the savage: both the moral purity and the moral sinfulness of the savage can be seen to be asserted by Tylor.

It can thus be seen that the Victorian image of Caliban, both as a preconception within society before the audience or reader approached a work, and within the response of critical consciousness to works once performed or published, was not a homogeneous entity. It involved contradictions, anomalies, ambiguities, and imprecision. Similarly, as is clear from Tylor's work, the Victorian concept of the primitive was a problematic one, and, since Caliban was often described as "primitive" or "savage," an important one for this thesis.

In the next chapter, using Robert Browning's poem as a focus, I will outline a late twentieth-century model which can be used, if not to make a coherent reading of

Caliban in the poem and in other Victorian representations and receptions, then at least to make sense of these conflicts within and between them.