

Post Colonial Interpretations of Shakespeare's The Tempest

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"...do we really expect, amidst this ruin and undoing of our life, that any is yet left a free and uncorrupted judge of great things and things which reads to eternity; and that we are not downright bribed by our desire to better ourselves?" – Longinus

Since the seventeenth century many interpretations and criticisms of William [Shakespeare](#)'s The Tempest have been recorded. Yet, since the play is widely symbolical and allegorical Shakespeare's actual intentions behind the creation of the play can never be revealed. But it is precisely this ambiguity in intention that allows for so many literary theorists, historians, and novelists to offer their insight into the structure and meaning of the play. For many years much of the critical treatment of the play has come from an educated European heritage, like the play itself. However, beginning in the nineteenth century with the re-emergence of the original text of the play and a growing global awareness in Caribbean and African nations, many attitudes were arising about the apparent cultural associations of the play's characters and the largely heretofore

unchallenged European views that had dominated popular ideology. What was once superficially taken as a play about the expansion of European culture into the Americas, was now being explored for its commentary about the inherent dominance and oppression of the natives of the Barbadian islands (the geographical setting of the play), and further as a commentary on slavery and oppression as a whole. The play's main characters, Prospero and Caliban, have come to personify the thrust of the oppressors vs. oppressed debate.

In the introduction to *Critical Essays on Shakesp...*

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...d Alden T. [Vaughan](#). New York: G.K. Hall & Co, 1998. 247-266.

[1] Accounts of the Caribbean islands from the misdirected crew of the *Sea Venture* – a [colonial](#) ship – who in a 1609 storm landed off the Bermudas and took shelter there for the winter.

[2] See p. 8 of Jonathan Goldberg's essay, *The Generation of Caliban*.

[3] See p. 15 of Jonathan Goldberg's essay, *The Generation of Caliban*.

[4] See *El Triunfo de Caliban*, 1898.

[5] See *Ariel*, 1900

[6] Alden T. Vaughan's essay on Caliban in the "Third World": Shakespeare's Savage as Sociopolitical Symbol cites Rodo and Dario's European-American association with Caliban as Monstrous (249)

[7] This perspective references the Longinus quotation at the head of this essay, suggesting that perhaps critics have ulterior motives for their theories rather than simply what they outwardly offer as their rationale.

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