

Caliban in the tempest

Literature



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A beast not honored with shape, a poor credulous monster, strange fish, and hag-born whelp. He is nothing more than this: a servant. In William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* the character of Caliban is enslaved for attempting to rape young Miranda and later even conspired to kill the most powerful man on the island, Prospero. His inhumane appearance and initial lack of language makes him appear savage. Does it not? It is known that he is son of the witch, Sycorax. Prospero even suggested that he may be the offspring of both Sycorax and the Devil himself.

Caliban is often compared to and referred to as a "monster" by other characters, and yet he reveals a very gentle side of himself to the audience. It is vitally important to remember that Caliban is the sole native of the island. The island is his only home. While others see him as a disfigured savage, even wondering on whether or not they could put him on display in order to make money, is it possible that there is more to this character than what is initially perceived?

Is it possible that this deranged, inhumane creature and native is simply a kind soul struggling to find quality of life, respect and love amongst men who do not understand or value him? Caliban's life changed forever the day that Prospero and his daughter washed upon the shores of the island. Being the only life form freely roaming the island, he could have responded to these intruders in a number of ways. Nonetheless, he chose to show nothing but friendship and kindness. Caliban led Prospero through the island and taught him how to survive in this new land.

He even states in a conversation with Prospero these words, " Then I loved thee and show'd thee all the qualities o' the isle, The fresh springs, brine-

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pits, barren place and fertile. ” The two appeared to have developed something like a friendship. Prospero even taught Caliban language. A fair exchange that would seem to represent kinship and equality, and yet Prospero forced Caliban to serve him. His native culture and old ways of life were suddenly taken from under his feet. The reader is quick to forget who the intruder and wrongdoer truly is in this tale.

Throughout history, there is a sad and extensive list of native cultures being occupied and then suppressed by foreign powers: intruders. England is well known for taking these precise measures to overtake land and make it their own. In every one of these situations the natives became looked at as the “ savage” or “ monsters” while the men with power (be it magic or money) were given all of the power. It is fair to assume that Shakespear was using the tale of Caliban and Prospero as a symbol of this very phenomenon that was occurring in his life.

In Caliban’s first speech to Prospero he insists that Prospero stole his island and says that the situation mirrors the way that Prospero’s own brother stole his dukedom from him in the past. Man or beast, Caliban undoubtedly still feels pain, dreams of a better life and wishes for a better to come. Perhaps Caliban desires sovereignty of the isle, perhaps he simply desires happiness. His motivations are unclear. Yet, it is clear that despite his growing hatred of Prospero and outward appearance, he has an appreciation for nature and kindness to others that is unmatched by any other character.

When Trinculo and Stephano are frightened by the strange noises (most likely Ariel’s signing) on the island, Caliban calms them down by reciting some of the most beautiful lines of poetry in the play. “ 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. ” Caliban’s words are full of love and peace. Love for the island, and peace for these frightened men.

It becomes far more difficult to envision this man as a beast knowing that such kind and beautiful words lie behind his rough exterior. Throughout this time with Trinculo and Stephano, Caliban also reveals his wit and cleverness. While it can be said that he is treating them in the same way that he initially treated Prospero, and failing to learn from his mistakes, he may be a bit cleverer than this. Perhaps, and it is very easily so, he is simply using these two men as a means of freeing himself from Prospero.