

From unwilling servant to subservient slave essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In his critical essay, *Art vs. Nature*, Frank Kermode discusses the ideas of art and nature that are seen in *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare. According to Kermode, Caliban is a figure of nature because of his connection to the earth and negative treatment he receives from civilized people based on the fact that he is seen as un-human and savage. Prospero, on the other hand, is a figure of art because of his expansive knowledge and magic not to mention his noble birth.

Because of the large difference that Kermode sets up between Prospero's art and Caliban's nature we see a class system develop where Prospero is the respected nobility and Caliban is the unwilling servant with no way of raising his status. But when the other characters inhabit the island they join the class system as well. Unable to gain Prospero's approval Caliban flees to the first human who shows him version of kindness, Stephano. Because Stephano's status is lower than Prospero's Caliban has more of an opportunity, if not to improve his status, to at least be a human part of the class system on the island.

Kermode begins his essay with a section he calls *Buds of a Nobler Race* where he talks of the nobles being stranded in Caliban's savage environment. Caliban is never once treated like a human during the play; he is nature, animal, servant but never a person. He is seen this way because he is a non-educated savage. Kermode explains the argument that people are like seeds; Caliban is a bad seed and therefore isn't really able to grow or change. He reaches a limit where he can't develop any further unlike Miranda and Prospero who are good seeds because of their breeding and education.

This idea can be seen as a class system on the island, nobles are better and therefore have a higher place in society where as savages are the lowest form and are only meant to serve the nobles. Kermode then begins to explain how Prospero's magic and knowledge become art. Prospero uses both knowledge and nature to make his magic; he has the ability to control his own nature as well as outside elements such as Caliban and Ariel. Sycorax also had the ability to use magic but it was nature based meaning it isn't art.

The English nobles saw themselves as better than others and we see this behavior in Prospero using his magic for his personal gain as well as using Caliban, the lower class, to get what he wants. Caliban is so used to being treated as nothing by Prospero and Miranda that just the presence of outsiders on the island is enough for Caliban to swear his allegiance to them. Caliban was once the ruler of his island. When Prospero first arrived Caliban was a courteous host.

He did everything to make Prospero happy, even showing him all the natural resources for survival. This was his downfall however because once Prospero gained the knowledge of these resources he took control stripping all of Caliban's power and forcing him to live as a servant. Prospero has no respect for Caliban and honestly does not like him much; he is treated as a non-human form that is only there to make his life easier. After all, what's the point of ruling a piece of land if you have no one to rule over?

Caliban wants nothing more than to kill Prospero and take back his island but he, as a lowly servant with no powers, has no chance raising up against the

powerful Prospero. When he first meets Stephano and Trinculo he thinks they are spirits come to attack him because he has never seen other life forms on the island. It isn't until after Stephano forces alcohol down his mouth that he finally realizes they are humans. While they still don't treat him as a human they speak kindly to him, " Four legs and two voices: a most delicate monster" (39).

Stephano is not scared of Caliban and even refers to him as being delicate, he is not used to being compared to something nice. Caliban sees a chance at a better life and swears his allegiance to his new but intoxicated master. Alcohol has a great deal to do with the bond that Caliban forges with Stephano. When they meet Stephano is already incredibly drunk lowering his knowledge, inhibition, and noble persona to a level that, while he still sees himself as a lower class, Caliban could possibly reach.

In any society it is nearly impossible for a slave to reach nobility status but when the noble finds a way to lower his own status an opportunity opens for the slave to work his way up to a higher status. Caliban is used to being around the high and mighty Prospero and perfect Miranda so to have another person closer to his status on the island gives Caliban a sense of belonging he has never felt before.

Stephano isn't scared of Caliban like Miranda and doesn't abuse him like Prospero, he is in awe of the new creature he sees before him and wants to spend more time around it. Not to mention the fact that Stephano gives Caliban the alcohol. Yes it gets Caliban drunk and more willing to blindly follow them but it is the simple fact that he was given something that

resonates with Caliban. From the first moment Caliban met other people all they have done is take everything away from him like his home, power, and freedom. Stephano is willing to not take but give Caliban the very drink that he is the middle of enjoying implying a bond or kinship between the two of them.

Caliban sees Stephano as a god and resolves to “kneel to him” (39). Stephano accepts his role as Caliban’s new master gladly and wastes no time in beginning to act as such. At this point it has been established that Caliban hates Prospero but it is this hate that gives Caliban the fuel to finally put his revenge plan into motion after he manipulates Stephano into agreeing to lead the fight to regain his power. He has been praying and wishing for some way to go against his master because at his current status he could never do it himself.

Stephano is the answer to prayers, a noble and strong man capable of fighting against someone of a higher class and willing to fight for Caliban. Stephano listens intently to Caliban’s plan to take control back from Prospero but isn’t fully interested in fulfilling it until Caliban mentions that not only can Stephano have the most power on the island but as the winner he could take the young and fair Miranda as his bride and rule together. Granted he is drunk when explaining his plan it does sound like it might actually work.

Stephano gladly accepts this plan proclaiming, “Monster I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be king and queen” (49). Stephano believes that by doing what Caliban says he will get power and a beautiful young girl but it is Caliban that will really benefit from this plan, Prospero would be dead. This is

the one instance where we see Caliban holding power in a relationship. He might not be the one who will perform these actions but he did create the plan and will set everything up for it to take place.

This is Caliban's one and only chance to rid Prospero from his life and he is determined to make it work, little does he know Prospero has already sent Ariel to make life very difficult for his new master. It is very ironic that the majority of the plot of this play consists of Prospero seeking revenge for being usurped from his throne due to the fact that the rest of the plot is centered on Caliban trying to do the same thing to Prospero.

Caliban thinks he has only this one chance to usurp Prospero and reclaim his island but fails in his attempt condemning him to the life of an obedient but still savage servant to Prospero just as the people in the lowest class have no way of moving up the levels. Caliban is a bad seed, he can grow as far as Prospero and Nature will let him and he has already reached his peak. There is no happy ending for Caliban in this play he continues to live his life as the un-human but willing servant under Prospero's command.