

The Metamorphoses of Magic: *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* Read from the Perspective of the *Metamorphoses*

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Abstract

The supernatural almost always plays a role in human myth-making. As a specific instance of the supernatural, magic is a significant element in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*. These three works demonstrate the updating of magic in relation to sociopolitical concerns through the intertextuality of one speech. This article examines Medea's speech on magic in the *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's adaptation of it, and Césaire's radical rejection and overhaul of it. For these writers, magic is a myth, or at least pales in significance when compared to human action and agency. None of the authors rejects the supernatural itself, but all of them focus their attention on what humans bring to the table, with or without magic.

Keywords: Agency, Caribbean, Magic, Myth, Ovid, Shakespeare.

1. Introduction

One of humanity's most resilient cross-cultural myths is that of magic. This is not to say that the supernatural in general (or even the more specific term of *magic*) is necessarily a myth, but rather that the very possibility of the supernatural is integral to so much of human myth-making. The element of magic is often central to that process, and this article studies the significance of magic in three literary texts (Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête/A Tempest*) with historical and cultural disparities, but which together demonstrate the development of the use of magic as a literary device. They also reveal how different philosophical preoccupations have influenced the myth-making process.

Comparisons between the *Metamorphoses* and *The Tempest* are as common in Renaissance studies¹ as are comparisons between *The Tempest* and its Caribbean adaptations such as Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* in postcolonial studies.² This article, however, will examine a scene across all three works in an attempt to elucidate a common motif and its different thematic functions in the poem and two plays, not seeking to transcend Renaissance or postcolonial studies but to have them inform one another.

The first of the three works, the Ovidian epic, presents a dizzying array of narratives, themes, and motifs. But two prominent aspects of its many stories are the gods' presence (and their proclivity for revenge) and humans' exploits. At times, these two themes converge in the motif of magic, as in the narratives about the character of Medea, who uses her powers for her own selfish and ultimately evil purposes. In his allusion to this part of Ovid's work, Shakespeare chooses at a crucial moment in *The Tempest* to have Prospero repeat lines of a speech that Medea makes before invoking her magical power. But Shakespeare's creative appropriation of the speech results in Prospero's own renunciation of his magical powers (though not before making one last strategic use of them). As for Césaire, in his anticolonial play that privileges the character of the slave Caliban over the colonizer Prospero, he completely omits Prospero's and Medea's monologues. Instead, Caliban gives a fiery speech that denounces colonization and enslavement and returns power to the disempowered, downplaying Prospero's magical powers and refocusing on natural (human) agency rather than on supernatural powers. In this way, all three writers make significant but widely divergent use of the motif of magic, from its use for evil ends to its function more or less as a *deus ex machina* (or at least as a simple plot device to keep things moving in *The Tempest*) to, finally and most significantly, its undermining in the anticolonial project that must prioritize human action and agency.

2. Ovid's Witch

To situate Medea in the narratives of the *Metamorphoses* requires contextualizing her and her magical powers within the storyline of the poem. The supernatural is omnipresent in the *Metamorphoses* – which is not to say that Ovid simply rehashes legends and myths about the gods. The whole poem follows a structure that begins by calling in question divine powers and presence, then continues by showing how the gods are capricious and vengeful (much like humans), and concludes by praising not the gods but rather the apotheoses of certain mortals, specifically Caesar and, ultimately, the poet himself. Book I of the *Metamorphoses* presents a creation myth in which the world takes shape and becomes ordered: “Chaos, a raw and undivided mass, / Naught but a lifeless bulk, with warring seeds / Of ill-joined elements compressed together” (I.8-11). Its “strife a god, with nature's blessing, solved” (I.20).³ Significantly, Ovid mentions no specific god or gods, just some indeterminate divinity, “a god,” who apparently was able to bring order out of the chaos that existed before the world. This nonchalant attitude towards the gods and cosmology becomes even clearer a few lines later when Ovid again mentions the disorder and shapelessness of the world and its ordering by a god: “So into shape whatever god it was / Reduced the primal matter and prescribed its several parts” (I.32-34). From the indifferent reference to “a god” who created the world, the poet has now switched to an almost

flippant “whatever god it was,” focusing instead on how the Earth came to take shape, regardless of its specific origins or creator.

From this less-than-worshipful beginning, Ovid weaves together his winding tales. The gods are always present, but more for what they contribute to human schemes rather than for the development of any grand divine *telos*. One of the earliest divine interventions, other than the (allegedly divine) creation of the cosmos, comes in the story of Lycaon right after “The Creation” in Book I. The gods are “outraged” and “For sin demand fit doom” (I.199-200). The sin that has outraged the gods, especially Jove, is Lycaon’s testing of the latter’s divinity, particularly his omniscience. Upon Jove’s visit in human form to the Arcadian king and his people, Lycaon “Scoffed at [the] worship” of his subjects and said, “A clear test [...] / Shall prove if this be god or mortal man / And certify the truth” (I.222-224), the test being his serving to Jove the flesh of another human. Jove’s anger and judgment are fierce and swift, turning Lycaon into a wolf and leading to Ovid’s version of the flood narrative. And yet even as the gods convene to discuss the flood as a punishment on the whole world – Lycaon is not the only sinful human since, as Jove points, “in the whole world sin reigns” (I.241) – they cannot help but comment on the importance of humanity to the world:

All deplore the loss of humankind,
And ask what would the future world be like
Bereft of mortals? Who would cense [the gods’] shrines?
Can Jove intend to abandon earth’s domain
To the brute beasts to ravage and despoil? (I.246-250).

Even though Jove promises a new and better human race, and the flood still takes place, the gods’ dependence on humanity in this case gives further cause to look elsewhere for ultimate meaning in the poem than in the divine.

Indeed, Ovid provides a very obvious alternative to the divine for meaning both in his poem and in the world. While the *Metamorphoses* ostensibly constitute a poetic homage to the Roman Empire and its emperor, from beginning to end Ovid gives many clues that his focus lies elsewhere. For example, in the proem, which comprises five introductory lines before the creation story, Ovid invokes the gods as those who “Inspire my enterprise and lead my lay / In one continuous song from nature’s first / Remote beginnings to our modern times” (I.3-5). The seeming innocence of this introduction immediately comes into question through the subsequent posture vis-à-vis the gods, as already discussed above. The fact that the poet does not give credit to any specific god for the creation of the world also creates doubt over whether he really wants to give credit to the gods for his poetic creation. This doubt subsequently allows a subversive reading of the creation account in which the issue at stake is not so much cosmology as it is the creation of poetry and metamorphoses, Ovid being the “god” who arrives on the scene of the chaos and strife of a hodge-podge of legends and narratives with myriad characters and themes in order to weave them together in a literary tapestry “Of bodies changed to other forms” (I.1).

If one jumps from the proem to the poem’s epilogue, Ovid leaves no doubt that his actual praise is directed to literary achievement and ultimately his own creative genius, a sort of deity in itself. Following as it does the pages that recount the apotheosis of Caesar,

the epilogue is significant because of the lines with which it ends. Ovid asserts the immortality, not of the gods or even of Augustus, but of his own poetic invention: "Now stands my task accomplished, such a work / As not the wrath of Jove, nor fire nor sword / Nor the devouring ages can destroy" (XV.871-873). The poet here dismisses the gods, for he says that not even Jove, who was able to wreak so much havoc and revenge on wayward humans such as Lycaon, could ever destroy the *Metamorphoses*. In conjunction with his poetic powers, Ovid also asserts his own immortality. He effectively apotheosizes himself, recognizing first his own mortality but then blithely believing that his legacy will live on anyway: "Yet I'll be borne, / The finer part of me, above the stars, / Immortal, and my name shall never die" (XV.876-878).

This discussion of the supernatural in the *Metamorphoses* shows firstly that the poem is not primarily about the supernatural or divine in itself, and secondly, that the supernatural is not even all that important to Ovid in the end. It is a plot device and a literary and mythical inheritance that he accepts in order to transform it. So in Ovid's telling, one could wonder what becomes of characters such as Medea who have magical powers and are intimately involved in the supernatural manipulation of events in the human world. Medea is a highly developed character. Ovid provides a look into her psyche at the beginning of Book VII throughout her extended soliloquy. She agonizes over her love for Jason, a foreigner for whom she would sacrifice everything. She initially rejects the thought of helping him but then gives in after meeting and falling in love with him. She then uses her magic to help him, first in the challenges her father gives Jason and then in various other ventures, such as restoring his father's youth. One monologue is of particular interest here, because it will be appropriated and reinvented by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* and thus provides an intertextual link between the works. This monologue is the speech to Hecate in which Medea summons up her magical powers:

Ye winds and airs, ye mountains, lakes and streams,
And all ye forest gods and gods of night,
Be with me now! By your enabling power,
At my behest, broad rivers to their source
Flow back, their banks aghast; my magic song
Rouses the quiet, calms the angry seas;
I bring the clouds and make the clouds withdraw,
I call the winds and quell them; by my art
I sunder serpents' throats; the living rocks
And mighty oaks from out their soil I tear;
I move the forests, bid the mountains quake,
The deep earth groan and ghosts rise from their tombs.
Thee too, bright Moon, I banish, though thy throes
The clanging bronze assuage; under my spells
Even my grandsire's chariot grows pale
And the dawn pales before my poisons' power. (VII.200-215)

This speech, which goes on in the same vein for several more lines, reveals that Medea has an inordinate confidence in her powers, even as she appears to recognize that she is

dependent on the gods for them. This invocation, rather than expressing any significant dependence on the deities, rehearses instead Medea's own supernatural achievements. She mentions her power to control natural forces such as the sea, animals, and even the moon, with the occasional nod to the gods' help and an expression of confidence that they will enable her again.

As part of Medea's egotism, the witch also uses her magic for selfish purposes. The self-centered use of magic holds true in Medea's relationship to Jason. She initially uses magic to help him in his endeavors, saving him from almost certain death and also killing his father, Aeson, in order to revive him magically as a younger man. But once Jason abandons her for another woman, she plays to perfection the role of the spurned lover. She turns vengeful and burns his new wife and even kills her own children. Throughout all of these twisted adventures and generally horrific uses of magic, which Ovid refers to as "her witch's tricks" (VII.299), Medea is flying around the world on her magical dragon-drawn chariot, "Sent down from heaven her purpose to fulfil" (VII.220). At key moments when she should pay the price for her sins, such as after killing her own (and Jason's) son, "winning thus a mother's vile revenge" (VII.401), she is whisked away from any potential retribution in the magical chariot: "Her dragon team, / The Sun-god's dragons, carried her away / To Pallas' citadel" (VII.402-404). When Medea finally appears to have gone too far in the use of her magic by attempting to kill Theseus, rather than facing any punishment whether from men or gods, she just vanishes: "Medea fled, swathed in a magic mist / Her spells had made" (VII.427-428) – one final self-centered, self-preserving use of magic that conveniently removes her altogether from the storyline. Though Ovid lets her get away like this, and never makes her the object of divine revenge like other evil characters in the *Metamorphoses*, presumably because of her own divine-like powers, his portrayal of Medea is nonetheless entirely unsympathetic. This portrayal calls into question the usefulness, or at least the morality, of human dabbling in the supernatural. It also raises doubt over the morality of the gods, by whom Medea is so obviously empowered.

An intermediary figure between Medea, the witch, and Ovid, who as a self-proclaimed immortal poet appears to have little use for the supernatural, is Orpheus. His brief appearances in Books X and XI of the *Metamorphoses* provide a stepping stone from Ovid's portrayal of Medea in her complete sellout to magic to the poet's portrayal of himself. In the process, the figure of Orpheus also creates a transition from the theme of magic to that of art and the potential relationship between the two. Like Medea, Orpheus recognizes his dependence on the gods, but unlike her, he also demonstrates his humanity and a less self-centered relationship to the divine. In his opening song on the lyre, Orpheus addresses the gods of the underworld, imploring them to allow him to be reunited with his wife:

Over humankind
 Your kingdom keeps the longest sovereignty.
 She too, when ripening years reach their due term,
 Shall own your rule. The favour that I ask
 Is but to enjoy her love; and, if the Fates
 Will not relieve her, my resolve is clear
 Not to return: may two deaths give you cheer. (X.35-41)

Though known for this ill-fated attempt to reunite with Eurydice, Orpheus is also known for his divine gift of song. Indeed, Ovid introduces the figure into his *Metamorphoses* more for his inspired musical talent than for the underworld story. Orpheus represents the poet-singer who is human and yet almost divine. He serves the gods in the use of his artistic abilities, and also assists Ovid's purposes by recounting a series of ill-fated love stories (not unrelated to his own tragic loss of his wife), such as those of Hyacinth, Pygmalion, and Venus and Adonis. Particularly in relation to Hyacinth, it is interesting to see not only Orpheus' relation to the gods (chiefly Apollo) but the reflection of his own lost love and subsequent tragic death in the difficulties that Apollo faces in his love for Hyacinth and the death of the latter. Beyond the universal themes of love and death, this tight parallelism between the experiences of Orpheus and Apollo with love contributes to Ovid's undermining of the gods and the supernatural. Orpheus may have performed "his minstrel's songs and charmed / The rocks and woods and creatures of the wild" (XI.1-2), but he could not prevent his wife's or his own death. His powers were thus limited.

If Medea's selfishness and evil use of magic destine the witch to insignificance in Ovid's poem, Orpheus' more positive connection to the supernatural still destine him to failure, or at least mortality, as an artist. Both Medea and Orpheus contrast with Ovid's own divine-like literary prowess that can actually create beauty and order in a world of chaos and strife and, in the process, immortalize the poet himself. They contrast with the poet not only in their travails and ultimate failure, but also in their dependence on the gods, for Ovid does not depend on the supernatural at all in his literary creation. In fact, Brown argues that a significant point of comparison between Ovid and Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is "the identifications [Ovid] makes between himself and the 'creators' in the *Metamorphoses*, whether gods or art" (Brown 3). This is a deeper meaning of the *Metamorphoses* and a point to be analyzed in the text of the *Tempest* as well – the poet as creator-god. In the end, Ovid's poem thus suggests that magic may be nothing more than a compelling myth.

3. Shakespeare's Magician

If the supernatural is omnipresent but finally undermined in Ovid's poem, magic, or its more sinister cousin sorcery, is the lifeblood of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. As a key plot element, magic is essential to *The Tempest*. Without it, Prospero might never have ended up on a distant island, nor would a tempest have shipwrecked his treacherous brother, Antonio, on the island along with the king of Naples, Alonso. Even the highly improbable reunion of all of these key figures on the island could not result in any kind of reconciliation without a final act of magic (a bit *à la* Medea).

Before exploring magic's essential role in advancing the plot of the play, however, it should be mentioned that its contingency and limits are also frequently emphasized, as in the *Metamorphoses*. Prospero, as a magician, only came by his great powers because of his learning. He was not born a magician, nor does he have familial relations to the gods as in the case of Medea's parentage with the Sun-god. Even in regard to plot elements that depend on magic, the magician attributes his fate in part to God, speaking in terms of traditional Christian theology. He makes this very clear when Miranda asks him, "How

came we ashore?” and Prospero replies, “By providence divine” (1.2.159). Similar to Medea’s powers, then, his magic is also dependent on God or the gods.⁴ Quite differently from Medea, however, he shows a lot more self-control in the use of magic. Even if it is essentially selfish in its application (the entire play is about Prospero’s revenge on his enemies and the restoration of his dukedom), the goal is at least just and the use of magic is more measured. Concerning the tempest, for example, Prospero is careful not to let anyone actually die in the storm, as he reassures his distraught daughter after she observes the sinking vessel:

Wipe thou thine eyes, have comfort;
The direful spectacle of the wreck which touched
The very virtue of compassion in thee,
I have with such provision in mine art
So safely ordered, that there is no soul –
No, not so much perdition as an hair,
Betid to any creature in the vessel
Which thou heard’st cry, which thou sawst sink. (1.2.25-32)

Such an extreme yet controlled use of magic is a far cry from Medea’s reckless killing of everyone from kin to enemy. To pursue this contrast further, as well as to address the climax and to propose a reading of *The Tempest*, the most important scene is Prospero’s speech renouncing his magical powers immediately before he assembles the people he shipwrecked in order to restore justice and reclaim his dukedom. Shakespeare borrows directly from Medea’s speech in *Metamorphoses* to conjure the gods to help her in her flight on the dragon chariot, but with significant differences. More than a meticulous comparison of all of the differences of vocabulary and syntax in the two speeches, an analysis of the broad contours of the two speeches will delineate the important differences between Ovid’s and Shakespeare’s use of magic in their narratives and the relationship between that thematic element and the writers’ self-understanding as artists.

Like Medea, Prospero does call on natural and divine forces as he prepares for a final magical *tour de force*. As he begins his speech, he is tracing a circle, in which he will be able to control his brother and the other shipwrecked nobles in order to make them understand and accept the truth of the injustice of his situation. Also like Medea, he spends some time rehearsing his own past magical exploits. Just as she controlled the sea, wild animals, and even the moon, Prospero can also say,

[...] I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And ’twixt the green sea and azured vault
Set roaring war. [...] (5.1.41-44)

This magic of his is what he calls his “potent art” (5.1.50). Nonetheless, unlike Medea, he is much less self-focused, or at least less self-congratulatory, and the ultimate purpose of his speech is quite different from the purpose of hers. Whereas Medea conjures up further powers to continue on with her supernatural exploits, Prospero is winding down his magical meanderings:

But this rough magic
 I here abjure, and when I have required
 Some heavenly music (which even now I do)
 To work mine end upon their senses that
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,
 Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound
 I'll drown my book. (5.1.50-57)

With these lines, Shakespeare both adroitly distinguishes the magician Prospero from the witch Medea and also sets the stage for a final and convenient use of magic. In regard to the distinction between Prospero and Medea, Shakespeare's creative appropriation of the Ovidian text puts magic on the table for discussion only to show how it could potentially be used for good instead of evil. Even so, the fact that in abjuring his "rough magic" Prospero has to resort to it one final time undermines his sincerity. Destroying the books, Caliban assures Stephano, is really the only way to be sure that Prospero will never again resort to magic, regardless of what the magician may imply in his Medea-inspired speech. In helping Stephano and Trinculo plot Prospero's death, Caliban tells them,

First to possess his books, for without them
 He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
 One spirit to command. They all do hate him
 As rootedly as I. Burn but his books. (3.2.92-95)

According to Caliban, then, destroying Prospero's books would be much more effective than any physical violence to Prospero's person. Without them, Prospero would be reduced to a "sot."

From a purely literary perspective, magic is perhaps the greatest defect of the play, simply because it makes for a highly contrived plot. No part of the story happens (or could happen) without convenient (both for the magician and for the playwright) waves of the wand, as it were. Before taking this criticism too far, however, the intertextuality with the *Metamorphoses* must be remembered, as it is also at work in the passage of Prospero's speech, redeeming something of Medea's supernatural legacy. Whereas Ovid works to undermine the significance of the supernatural by showing its twisted nature and maleficent effects, Shakespeare is working to downplay the supernatural by showing that what really matters is human virtue. Although Prospero uses magic effectively and justly, he also knows when to leave it. As previously mentioned, though magic is in one sense essential to *The Tempest*, in another sense it is peripheral because in the end human understanding and virtue must resolve human conflict – and if magic can play a helpful role, then so be it.

In relation to the portrayal of art in *The Tempest* and to Shakespeare's own understanding of his craft, magic is even more significant than in the actual plot of the play. As Ovid uses supernaturally empowered figures such as Medea and Orpheus in order to construct his view of the truly immortal poet, Shakespeare is also using Prospero to portray in some sense what he is doing as a playwright. Stephen Greenblatt says that anxiety is Shakespeare's

primary creation and that, in *The Tempest*, it is precisely the theme of magic that allows the playwright, through Prospero, to create and manipulate anxiety: “Prospero’s chief magical activity throughout *The Tempest* is to harrow the other characters with fear and wonder and then to reveal that their anxiety is his to create and allay” (Greenblatt, 142). Greenblatt shows that Prospero exercises real power in manipulating through magic the anxiety of his fellow characters but also that the magician’s power is limited. The magician is able to shipwreck his enemies and, in the process, to provoke their anxiety not only for their own well-being but also for the welfare of the group, as they are split up when they make it to the island. In addition to his brother and the other shipwrecked characters, Prospero also exerts psychological influence over Miranda, Caliban, and Ariel, revealing Miranda’s virtuous heart and Caliban’s deep-set rebellion. As Greenblatt points out, Prospero’s powers are thus limited, since not all of the magician’s opponents come around to appreciate him at the end. “As Prospero’s failure to educate Caliban has already shown,” Greenblatt writes, “the strategy of salutary anxiety cannot remake the inner life of everyone” (Greenblatt, 146). And in regard to Antonio, “Prospero will have to content himself [...] with the full restoration of his dukedom” rather than a complete change of heart in his brother (Greenblatt, 146).

Given that Prospero’s magic comes from books, the link between the magician and the playwright should be clear. In addition, the unmistakable references to stagecraft provide definitive confirmation that Shakespeare in some way sees himself in Prospero. In Act IV, for example, Prospero proposes a masque in honor of Miranda and Ferdinand to bless the betrothal. He summons spirits to perform the masque, before returning to his plot to recover his dukedom. In Act V, in the play’s climax, he does not simply explain everything to the various parties but pulls them into a circle where he can again control the stage to bring about his *dénouement*. Even though the magic of *The Tempest* results in a contrived plot, this plot is the very tool the playwright is using to show the influence not of magic itself but rather of creative genius. In this way, as Shakespeare presents Prospero as a stage magician, he is also subtly presenting himself as the real magician in appropriating sources and manipulating characters. He is thus not unlike Ovid, even if his self-representation is not as direct as Ovid’s in the epilogue of the *Metamorphoses*, because like Ovid, he does not ultimately need recourse to the divine as do characters as disparate as Medea, Orpheus, and Prospero.

4. Césaire’s Free Agent

The element of magic in Césaire’s *A Tempest* stands out in comparison to the Ovidian and Shakespearean sources because of how downplayed it is – almost absent. The supernatural in general does not seem to matter much to Césaire not only because his purpose is so obviously anticolonial but also because that focus leads him to highlight human agency as opposed to any supernatural intervention. An analysis of how magic is portrayed or suppressed, particularly in comparison to *A Tempest*’s primary literary source, will serve to highlight Césaire’s message against colonialism but from a slightly different perspective from what is usually done in literary and political critiques. The obvious connections between Shakespeare’s work and almost all of the Caribbean appropriations

of it, of which Césaire's stands out, depend on the anticolonial discourse of the Caribbean. Perhaps largely due to this phenomenon, as well as general postcolonial tendencies in literary studies, Halpern points out in his 1994 essay that by the 1990s the colonial reading of *The Tempest* had become "a dominant, if not *the* dominant code for interpreting *The Tempest*" (265). But just as a colonial reading of *The Tempest* is not the only interesting approach to the work, so a strictly postcolonial reading of *A Tempest*, one that focuses exclusively on Césaire's Caliban and his anticolonial politics, is not the only valid one. Reading Césaire in light of both *The Tempest* and also the *Metamorphoses* will reveal not only the postcolonial distinctiveness of the Caribbean text but also Césaire's own self-understanding as a poet and playwright. In other words, his text can be read at the two levels of how the motif of magic is represented in *A Tempest* and of how this relates to Césaire's literary art.

From the beginning, Césaire switches the portrayal of the characters of Prospero and Caliban. Prospero, rather than appearing as a wronged and dignified nobleman who happens to have at his command a savage slave, is here presented as capricious and cruel. Caliban, for his part, rather than being the barbarous slave who seethes against his master even as he serves him, is portrayed as a wronged nobleman in his own right on his island. Césaire achieves this effect by highlighting and extending the dialogues between Prospero and Caliban, as well as between Caliban and Ariel. By reimagining Caliban, Césaire demonstrates how the monster that Shakespeare created can still serve, to appropriate a phrase from Halpern, as "anti-colonial hero" (Halpern, 283). According to Halpern, the choice by Caribbean intellectuals such as Roberto Fernández Retamar to zero in on Caliban as a hero "not only betrays a striking indifference to matters of gender, but falls into an ideological trap set by *The Tempest*," the trap of thinking that (colonial) violence can be answered by violence, as in Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda (283). But Halpern's reading is too literal, or at least too dependent on Shakespeare's *Tempest*, on the basis of which Halpern assumes that Caliban really did try to rape Miranda. In Césaire's retelling, the dialogue between Prospero and Caliban is more ambiguous and implies that Caliban may not have actually tried to rape Miranda and that the very notion of rape had actually been introduced by the colonizer.

In addition to its reimagined Caliban, Césaire's Caribbean *Tempest* also changes the purpose of Prospero's schemes – rather than returning to his dukedom, the magician gradually realizes that what he wants is to dominate the island completely (as well as to dominate Caliban, as chief representative of the island). This shift in focus also nullifies the need for magic as a plot device. Beyond the initial tempest and, above all, Prospero's dependence on Ariel to carry out his bidding, the conflict in *A Tempest* is between Prospero and his slave rather than between Prospero and his brother. Throughout the play, Caliban eloquently expresses the wrong he has suffered and the freedom for which he longs and plots to regain, while Prospero belligerently and tyrannically insists on nothing more than complete submission. This change in focus from *The Tempest* leads to a significant shift in the scene of interest here, Prospero's speech in the first scene of Act V, based on Medea's speech.

This important speech to summon magical powers disappears in the anticolonial play. Prospero does make a short speech, and he does rehearse some of his magical exploits, but the centerpiece of the equivalent passage⁵ is a speech by Caliban. And just as Prospero borrowed from Medea's speech to arrive at a very different conclusion, so Césaire's Caliban appropriates the speech of Shakespeare's Prospero. In *The Tempest*, Prospero announces the end of his use of magic; in *A Tempest*, Caliban announces the end of his subjugation to another human, and a lesser one at that, even proclaiming his ultimate crushing defeat of his subjugator:

For years I bowed my head
 for years I took it, all of it—
 your insults, your ingratitude . . .
 and worst of all, more degrading than all the rest,
 your condescension.
 But now, it's over!
 Over, do you hear? [...]
 Prospero, you're a great magician :
 you're an old hand at deception.
 And you lied to me so much,
 about the world, about myself,
 that you ended up imposing on me
 an image of myself [...]
 And I hate that image . . . and it's false!
 But now I know you, you old cancer,
 And I also know myself!
 And I know that one day
 my bare fist, just that,
 will be enough to crush your world!
 The old world is crumbling down! (61-62)

This passage turns the tables, not just on Prospero but even on magic, or supernatural intervention in the affairs of humanity. Caliban rejects outright Prospero's domination, including his presumably magical manipulations of Caliban and Ariel, and declares his naked fist as all that is necessary to crush Prospero's world.

As significant and powerful as this speech is, what it replaces also makes a huge impact in the comparison at hand. Prospero never renounces his powers or regains any position of dominance or authority over Caliban as he does in *The Tempest*. After Caliban's fiery attack against the colonizer and a proclamation of his own dignity and freedom, Prospero rehearses a few of his exploits, but in a self-doubting manner, as if perhaps what he has done has been wrong or in vain. The magician himself expresses this doubt after Caliban has harangued him and finished by telling him simply that he hates the magician. Prospero retorts petulantly, "Well, I hate you as well! / For it is you who have made me / doubt myself for the first time!" (63). His magic, coupled with his dehumanizing mission, comes up short in this analysis – and changes drastically the outcome of the play, for Prospero realizes that he cannot leave the island; to do so would be to cede it back to Caliban and

admit that his slave managed an effective revolt. And so he stays, even as everyone else returns to Italy. Tragically for him but triumphantly for Caliban and humanity, Prospero is reduced to a husk of the authority figure that he was. In the very last scene, Césaire has him stuttering and yelling and jerking around the stage blindly, as Caliban sings offstage a triumphant chant to liberty: “FREEDOM HI-DAY! FREEDOM HI-DAY!” (66).

There is no room for Medea in this play, but as can be seen in this ending to the play that has Caliban singing happily and freely, Orpheus is definitely in Césaire’s thoughts. The power of song as Caliban takes back his island completes the reimagining of *The Tempest*. And in this Orphic echo, Césaire must have in mind another literary allusion, more recent than Shakespeare’s play but one that still harkens back to the Orpheus legend. In *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, Césaire and the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédor Senghor advanced a distinctly African voice in the *négritude* movement, inspired by surrealism and African oral tradition. Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a famous introduction to this first collection of *négritude* poetry and based his title, “Orphée noir” or “Black Orpheus,” on the legendary character’s descent into the underworld in search for Eurydice. But in Sartre’s psychoanalytical version, the black poet is Orpheus going into himself in order to forge anew his identity:

The themes of return to the native country and of re-descent into the glaring hell of the black soul are indissolubly mixed up in the *vates* of negritude. A quest is involved here [...]. And I shall call this poetry “Orphic” because the negro’s tireless descent into himself makes me think of Orpheus going to claim Eurydice from Pluto. (Sartre, 22)

The collection that “Black Orpheus” prefaces is poetry, and Césaire is not the only poet included, but the voice he recovers in his poetry from the 1930s to the 1950s at the height of anti-colonialism and decolonization is the same voice with which his Caliban of 1969 speaks. Caliban rejects entirely the identity imposed on him by the colonizer and, in a demonstration of his own linguistic and literary capacities, sings his liberty. As Sartre pointedly asks in the question that opens his preface, “When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for?” (13).

5. Conclusion

Literary relations may be too mild a term to describe much of what goes on in literary allusion and intertextuality, particularly when writers dispute with or revise earlier works. In the case of Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest*, the writer draws on both Ovid and Shakespeare – who also adapted aspects of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in his turn – in order to make a radical sociopolitical point. The common theme traced through all three texts has been the motif of magic and its different manifestations for good and evil, or its absence, in human affairs. The intertextuality traced through all three texts has been focused on a speech, and how it is significantly different in each text, as well as on the metamorphoses of the Orphic song. But in relation to the theme of magic, the texts have to be read on two distinct levels. First, in regard to magic alone, the differences between the texts emphasize the authors’ views on human involvement in magic and sorcery or, more broadly, their views on how humans should and should not act. Although Césaire makes the most radical departure in choosing to sideline and de-emphasize magic, the three texts are not

ultimately all that different because magic is not the deciding factor in any of them. The deciding factor is always human agency, either what humans do with magic or what they do on their own. Medea, for example, chooses to use magic for evil purposes. Prospero uses magic to make things happen (most of which are probably good or just) but falls short of what he could do with it positively because his vision is severely limited to his own welfare and does not consider that of Caliban or Ariel. These latter characters' tragic condition is what inspires – or enrages – Césaire to skip over the magic and instead empower his alternative protagonist to reclaim his liberty and identity. In the end, it is not magic but humans' own strengths and failings that contribute to their happiness or misery. The myth of magic is thus exposed as a mirage because what matters is not the myth in itself but the myth-makers.

In relation to this reading of magic, there is a secondary level of meaning that has less to do with the human relationship to the supernatural and everything to do with the different writers' self-understanding as artists. Magic serves as a thematic element that reveals to them and their readers what they can be as literary masters. Ovid, at the end point of his poem that includes retellings of the Medea and Orpheus legends, ultimately presents the poet and only the poet as truly immortal. Shakespeare sees the playwright as the creator of literary worlds and the manipulator of the emotions of characters and audience alike. Césaire, as representative of disempowered humans, clears the way to a rediscovery of the human voice. When he sidelines the supernatural, he does so in part to highlight his Caliban's agency but also to show his own literary merits as a black poet and playwright who has discovered his voice and is capable of appropriating a text as canonical as *The Tempest*.

In the end, all three men write in very different eras and, thus, very different sociopolitical contexts. But all three authors are responding to the political follies and social problems that they face in their contexts. The tool, or weapon, for all of them to face those contexts is their art, through which they discover their voices and make sense of their worlds. They do not seriously question the supernatural *per se*, but they do express significant skepticism about the power of magic when compared to the significance of human agency and human creation.

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Notes

¹ For recent examples, see Peter Hulme and William H. Sherman, eds. *The Tempest and its travels*. (London: Reaktion, 2000). See also Susan Wiseman. *Writing Metamorphosis in the English Renaissance: 1550-1700*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014).

² For an overview, see Rob Nixon. "Caribbean and African Appropriations of 'The Tempest.'" (*Critical Inquiry* 13.3, Politics and Poetic Value [Spring, 1987]): 557-578.

³ This article follows standard citation practice by giving book and line numbers for Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; scene, act, and line number for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; and page numbers for Césaire's *A Tempest*.

⁴ The view of the divine in *The Tempest*, though influenced by the Protestant theology of 17th-century England, is no more univocal than in the *Metamorphoses*. Like Ovid, Shakespeare conjures various gods of antiquity, such as Jove by way of Ariel, or Ceres and Juno in a divine dialogue.

⁵ The passage in Césaire's work is only roughly equivalent. Although Césaire follows Shakespeare fairly closely, he does not use all of the same acts and scenes, having only three acts, for example, to Shakespeare's five.

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