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## **Bringing Down the Island: Rebellion, Colonial Hierarchy, and Individualized Leadership in Nuñez's novel *Prospero's Daughter***

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*“Bringing Down the Island: Rebellion, Colonial Hierarchy, and Individualized Leadership in Nuñez's novel Prospero's Daughter” offers an analysis of Elizabeth Nuñez's (2006) novel Prospero's Daughter and Aimé Césaire's A Tempest (1969), both of which draw upon multicultural tradition of European and Caribbean literatures, retelling Shakespeare's The Tempest (1611). The paper is concerned with the ways in which leadership has been transformed from the original story, through Césaire's text, and into Nuñez's. Each work acts as an agent of leadership in literary and social terms, attempting to enact paradigmatic shifts away from hierarchy and classification and toward individualized transformational leadership.*

“Dissent,” argues Paul Toscano (2008), “is holy because without it there can be no consent” (p. 170). Dissent manifests in a variety of forms, including policy, violence, rhetoric, and the production of subversive cultural artifacts. The focus of this discussion will be on the last of these, specifically, on the way in which works of literature function as artifacts of cultural leadership. Kevin Morrell (2010) suggests that “One way we can recapture a sense of interdisciplinarity in the study of leadership is by reexamining rhetoric,” which, he continues, “can apply to the study of texts as well as talk” (p. 89). Works of literature are created to express objectives to an audience, who serve as potential followers of the ideological premises contained therein. Why, then, should they be any less capable of leadership than persons, simply because they lack a specific consciousness? John W. Gardner (1990) describes leadership as “the process of persuasion or example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue the objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 1). Cultural artifacts can, quite independently of the people who originally created them (although they most often do so by design), serve this same purpose of “Persuasion or example.” In this paper I examine a trajectory of works whose composition dates range from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, each of which seeks to revise the paradigms of its predecessors in an attempt to engage in the transformative leadership of its audience.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1611, William Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, adapting the framework of the narrative of the *Sea Venture* to the Bahamas into a tale about power, leadership, and rebellion on an isolated island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Over three hundred years later, the story, which focuses on the triumph of Prospero over his adversaries and rebellious servants, was retold on Martinique in 1969 by playwright and political activist Aimé Césaire. In 2006, Elizabeth Nuñez rewrote the story yet again, borrowing from

both Shakespeare and Césaire in *Prospero's Daughter*. If Shakespeare's text presents an orthodox ending in which the duke regains his kingdom, makes alliances with the King of Naples, and subdues the rebellion of his servant, Caliban, Césaire's text offers a counter-cultural play about the triumph of the oppressed as Caliban's final line, "Freedom hi-day!" echoes across the stage. Nuñez takes both these narratives and alters them still further, moving away from the allegorical abstractions of early modern theater and psychodrama to focus her readers' attention on the figure of the silent daughter, giving Virginia an individual and transformative voice that encourages readers to transform their social positions and conditions. The novel's conclusion situates transformational practice as a personal and intimate act capable of overcoming the strictures of institutionalized power-structures; more interestingly, though, the novel itself acts as an agent of leadership in both literary and social terms, making use specifically of its narrative voice to force changes in perspective on its audience in an attempt enact a paradigmatic shift away from institutionalized hierarchy and toward individualized transformational leadership.

In Shakespeare's play, although Caliban rebels against Prospero's leadership, Prospero triumphs over his adversaries, leading with both judgment and mercy. But Shakespeare's leading man is not nearly as orthodox as this makes him appear – his cruelty to Caliban and Ariel, his commodification of Miranda, and his questionable judgment concerning his dukedom (both before the action of the play and in allowing his usurping brother to remain free and unpunished at its conclusion) all mitigate Prospero's seeming triumph. The play concludes with a ceding of power to the elements and the audience – a transformation from near-omnipotence to servitude. In short, Prospero only has power because Shakespeare's audience agrees to grant it to him – a not-so-subtle reminder to James I (the king on the throne of England in 1611) that he, too, rules by "the help of your good hands" (Epilogue.10).<sup>1</sup>

Césaire's twentieth-century revision retains Caliban's rebellion, but refocuses it as the center of *Tempest's* action: the revision is less about mercy and passing power on to one's children, and much more about oppression and coercion. Césaire's Prospero is a cruel tyrant whose actions go unmitigated by mercy or temperance throughout the play. At the play's conclusion, while Shakespeare's Prospero leaves the island and Caliban behind, Césaire's Prospero remains in a desperate effort to retain his control over the one person he was never able to fully oppress. In their conflict – which rages across the island – we find Césaire's assertions of equality: Caliban is a match for Prospero in power and intellect, and ultimately defeats him because Caliban has nothing more to lose. In the coopting of Shakespeare's original text, Césaire uses and refigures the language of Western colonization and transforms it from within, reshaping the narrative of colonization from the triumph of Western ideology to the impending overthrow of its oppression.

Nuñez's novel adopts and adapts both these versions of the story to give – in her final section – voice to the nearly-voiceless Miranda of both earlier texts. While maintaining the racial dynamic introduced to the story by Césaire, Nuñez is unsatisfied with the anthropocentric narrative of colonization told by both the English – encapsulated in her first section, "The Englishmen" – and the male rebel – "Carlos." In the struggle between Gardner (her Prospero) and Carlos (Caliban), Nuñez finds the untold and silenced voice of Virginia (Miranda) who wants to expose the perfidies of the former and undercut the brutality of the latter. Carlos and Gardner are incapable of resolving their conflict, Nuñez argues, because their power-struggle seeks to dominate rather than transform – Carlos uses Gardner's language, metaphors, and science in an effort to supplant the Englishman (as he was himself originally supplanted), but supplanting does not break the cycle of oppression, it merely shifts power from one authoritarian leader to another. Virginia alone seems capable, in Nuñez's narrative, of transforming the power-dynamic of colonized and colonizer into a fruitful hybrid willing to embrace both cultures into a unified and highly personalized whole.

These narratives of oppression and rebellion provide examples of ethical and unethical leadership behaviors, but in the process they themselves also engage in the practice of leadership by persuading their respective audiences to reevaluate the status quo of colonial oppression and authoritarianism. Through a critical examination of the texts, we can discover the ways in which each author attempts to participate in this persuasive leadership practice. In addition, we can observe the importance of a cultural legacy to the

perpetuation and even transformation of existing social paradigms, and discover the need to engage with our own cultural past in order to transform both the present and the future.

### SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST* (1611)

Critics of Shakespeare's play have identified it variously with a depiction of colonialism in Ireland, the Caribbean, and North Africa, in addition to labeling it a commentary on the invasiveness of Scottish nobles to the English court under James I. The purpose of this paper is not to reach a conclusion on Shakespeare's explicit intentions. Rather, my design is to discuss how others – Aimé Césaire and Elizabeth Nuñez – have made use of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. With this purpose in mind, I want to examine the type of leader Shakespeare created in Prospero.

Prospero is the ousted Duke of Milan, overthrown by his own brother and abandoned on a mostly unpopulated island with his young daughter. On the island itself, Prospero is functional king, although frequently accused of tyranny by one of his not-quite-human servants, Caliban. By virtue of his magical abilities – and cloak, staff, and books – Prospero commands the spirits of the island, including the elemental Ariel, and Caliban, the offspring of Sycorax, the island's late mistress.

As a duke, Prospero was – even by his own admission – a rather spectacular failure. Prospero narrates the story of his fall from power to his daughter, Miranda, explaining how Antonio supplanted him:

PROSPERO My brother and thy uncle, called Antonio –  
I pray thee mark me, that a brother should  
Be so perfidious – he, whom next thyself  
Of all the world I loved, and to him put  
The manage of my state, as at that time  
Through all the signories it was the first,  
And Prospero the prime Duke, being so reputed  
In dignity, and for the liberal arts  
Without a parallel; those being all my study,  
The government I cast upon my brother  
And to my state grew stranger, being transported  
And rapt in secret studies.

...

I thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated  
To closeness and the bettering of my mind  
With that which, but by being so retired,  
O'er-prized all popular rate, in my false brother  
Awaked an evil nature, and my trust,  
Like a good parent, did beget of him  
A falsehood in its contrary as great  
As my trust was, which had indeed no limit,  
A confidence sans bound. He being thus lorded,  
Not only with what my revenue yielded  
But what my power might else extract, like one  
Who, having into truth by telling of it,  
Made such a sinner of his memory  
To credit his own lie, he did believe  
He was indeed the duke, out o'th' substitution  
And executing th' outward face of royalty  
With all prerogative.

(1.2.66-78, 89-105)

What is perhaps most noteworthy about Prospero's fall from power is that it was not initiated by Antonio, but precipitated by Prospero's own withdrawal from the state. Although Antonio did force Prospero to leave Milan in a boat with his daughter in order to secure his position, Prospero had already functionally abandoned his leadership role before Antonio took action.

Most of Prospero's machinations throughout the course of the play are an attempt to reclaim that lost dukedom after his brother conveniently happens to sail past the island on the way back from a wedding in Tunis. At the play's conclusion, having shamed his brother for not only usurping Milan but being complicit in a plot against the King of Naples while on the island, Prospero reclaims his dukedom. Yet that is not the leadership with which the play is ultimately concerned.

Prospero, often identified with Shakespeare himself, is the orchestrator, author, and director of the action of the play (and also of the masque within the play), and it is as the leader of the audience and the action of the drama that I wish to examine him. Nothing happens on or near the island without Prospero's explicit permission and control – the tempest itself is his creation, the romance between his daughter and Ferdinand (the King's son) is brought about by his schemes, and even the attempt against the life of the King of Naples is instigated because Prospero spells the King and Gonzalo to sleep.

Leadership studies students identify Prospero as a Machiavellian, manipulative figure of coercive leadership, particularly in his dealings with Caliban and Ariel. They dislike the way in which Prospero orchestrates everything on the island, and they are particularly horrified by his treatment of his servants, especially Ariel, who has done nothing to earn Prospero's disdain:

ARIEL Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains,  
Let me remember thee what thou hast promised,  
Which is not yet performed me.

PROSPERO How now? Moody?  
What is't thou canst demand?

ARIEL My liberty.

PROSPERO Before the time be out? No more!

ARIEL I prithee  
Remember I have done thee worthy service,  
Told thee no lies, made thee no mistakings, served  
Without or grudge or grumblings. Thou did promise  
To bate me a full year.

PROSPERO Dost thou forget  
From what a torment I did free thee?

ARIEL No.

...

PROSPERO Thou liest, malignant thing; thou hast forgot  
The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy  
Was grown into a hoop? Hast thou forgot her?

ARIEL No, sir. ...

PROSPERO Thou, my slave,  
As thou report'st thyself, was then her servant,  
And – for thou wast a spirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,  
Refusing her grand hests – she did confine thee,  
By help of her more potent ministers  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine, within which rift  
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years...

Thou best knowst

What torment I did find thee in: thy groans  
Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts  
Of ever-angry bears...

It was mine art,  
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine and let thee out.

ARIEL I thank thee, master.

PROSPERO If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak  
And peg thee in his knotty entrails till

Thou hast howled away twelve winters. (1.2.242-251, 257-260, 270-279, 286-289, 291-296)

An “airy spirit,” Ariel fulfills Prospero's commands, providing the main source of Prospero's power throughout the play. It is Ariel who creates the tempest, Ariel who separates the nobles upon their arrival on land, Ariel who conjures up a banquet, transforms into a harpy, and bespells Gonzalo and Alonso to sleep. In fact, there is very little that Prospero does without Ariel's assistance, yet Prospero occupies the dominant position in their relationship.

This is often attributed by scholars to Ariel's lack of humanity, although his questions and comments to Prospero often seem to indicate that despite being literally inhuman, Ariel might be more humane than his master. After Prospero has Ariel chase the nobles about the island, Ariel reports that

ARIEL Your charm so strongly works 'em  
That, if you now beheld them, your affections  
Would become tender.

PROSPERO Dost thou think so, spirit?

ARIEL Mine would, sir, were I human.

(5.1.17-20)

At Ariel's behest, Prospero relents, but the audience sees that the spirit-slave has more empathy for human beings than does Prospero. As a leader, then, Prospero is problematic. While an early modern audience might not sympathize with Ariel, a spirit, as does a modern audience, the humanity of the actor portraying him would nevertheless lend him some pathos, particularly given the spirit's desire for Prospero's affection and praise throughout the play.

The more vexing figure – and one who reappears in a much more altered context in revisions of the play – is Caliban, also Prospero's slave. Unlike Ariel, whose lack of humanity is never in question, there is uncertainty throughout the play as to whether Caliban is human, part-human, or not at all human. He is described as a devil, a bastard, an Indian, and a fish-monster, and Prospero dismisses him as animalistic and even demonic, a “thing of darkness” (5.1.275). Caliban is dangerous within the context of the play precisely because of his refusal to conform to clear categorization. He is monstrous not because of his violence or his inhumanity, but because he combines the animalistic with the human, the brute with the civilized man. “The monster,” explains Jan Kott (1987), “is a hybrid. In classical tradition, monsters were the fruit of forbidden and illicit relations between man and gods or between man and animals; in the Middle Ages they were the offspring,” as Prospero accuses Caliban of being, “of liaisons between witches and the devil” (p. 73). Caliban's monstrosity, however, is unstable, fluctuating with the audience's sympathy for him, both within Shakespeare's play and in later revisions of it.

The play's introduction of Caliban as a victim of racism and colonial oppression resonates with a modern audience, although there is scholarly debate as to whether Shakespeare's contemporaries would have responded similarly. Prospero summons Caliban, saying, “Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself / Upon thy wicked dam; come forth!” (1.2.320-321), initiating the following exchange:

CALIBAN As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed  
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen  
Drop on you both. A southwest blow on ye

And blister you all o'er.  
PROSPERO For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps,  
Side-stitches, that shall pen thy breath up; urchins  
Shall forth at vast of night that they may work  
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinched  
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging  
Than bees that made 'em. (1.2.322-331)

The cause for Caliban's resentment is that Prospero has done to him what Antonio did to Prospero in Milan, at least according to Caliban's version of the narrative:

CALIBAN This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first  
Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me  
Water with berries in't, and teach me how  
To name the bigger light and how the less  
That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee  
And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle:  
The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile.  
Cursed be I that did so!...  
For I am all the subjects that you have,  
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me  
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me  
The rest o'th'island. (1.2.332-340, 342-344)

Prospero's justification for his imprisonment of Caliban is that "thou didst seek to violate / The honour of my child" (1.2.348-349), a justification which is unsubstantiated, but which Caliban does not deny. The implication – more fully fleshed out in later revisions – is that Prospero's kinder treatment of Caliban led him to believe that he was worthy of Miranda, a violation of the supposed "natural order," although the nature of his "violation" (whether rape or simply sexual interest) is unclear in Shakespeare's text.

It is unsurprising, then, that Caliban takes the opportunity to attempt rebellion as soon as he can – with the help of Stephano and Trinculo, he plots to overthrow and kill Prospero. However, his "army" is comprised of a drunk and a fool, and meets with failure and frustration in the end when they become distracted by the rich clothing Prospero puts out for just that purpose. Caliban recognizes their foolishness too late to remedy his rebellion, and expresses regret for his actions, although it is unclear from his speech whether he regrets his rejection of Prospero's authority or his choice of compatriots:

CALIBAN I'll be wise hereafter  
And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass  
Was I to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool! (5.1.295-298)

The play concludes with Prospero's forgiveness of his brother and the other nobles for their conspiracy against him, with the strong implication that his demand for the return of his dukedom will be met, despite the fact that Antonio goes unpunished for the original usurpation. In the final act, Prospero also frees Ariel, per his promise, and prepares to depart the island. Caliban's fate goes unremarked-upon, a point which has led to speculation that he, too, "wins" in the end – after all, with Prospero's departure, the island would revert back to his control.

But what is most interesting for my purposes is less the individual instances of leadership in the play as the composite whole these instances combine to present in Prospero. He is patriarchal; occasionally cruel; sometimes merciful; biased towards those of his own race, class, and gender; and reliant on magic

and on his servants more than his own abilities to enforce his power. In short, Prospero is neither heroic nor charismatic, even in Shakespeare's original depiction. In fact, our dislike for Prospero contributes to our recognition of the play's leadership work because it enables us to recognize that he cannot continue to lead without the willing participation of his followers.

This final realization has led to the persistence of the image of Prospero as malicious and manipulative in modern retellings of the play, most notably in the Caribbean narratives of Césaire and Nuñez. The reason is twofold: first, because *The Tempest's* island setting, basis in the historical voyage and wreck of the *Sea Venture* in the Bahamas, and the master-slave relationships cater perfectly to a discourse of colonialism; second, because Prospero is a figure of quasi-divine authorial leadership rooted in the dominance of the Caucasian male, and, specifically, the imperial English male. Authors like Nuñez and Césaire wish to explode both paradigms as outdated, oppressive, and in need of revision. So despite the patriarchal depiction of authority in the play, Shakespeare is not seeking – as readings of later revisions seem to imply – to authorize authoritarianism. Rather, as Anita Patterson suggests in *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (1989), “*The Tempest* reintroduces one of the central problems of populism: what is the role of education” – ours, Prospero's, Miranda's, and Caliban's – “in political society, and what does it contribute to social justice?” (p. 157).

### **CÉSAIRE'S *A TEMPEST* (1969)**

I will not spend a great amount of time on Césaire's *A Tempest*, principally because the plot of the play is not significantly altered and the modernization of the language (and its translation into French) as a tactic does not require lengthy illustration. The fact that Césaire chose to update the language of the play is significant, however, from a postcolonial theoretical perspective; as Homi Bhabha explains in *The Location of Culture* (1994),

The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.... It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered *inter dicta*: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them. The question of representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority. (pp. 88-89)

By using his own language to replace and mimic Shakespeare's text, Césaire (and, later, Nuñez) engages in explicit criticism of the paternalistic attitude that “Shakespeare,” as author-function, has come to represent. For the colonized, “Shakespeare” stands for colonial education, the White Man's language, history and tradition forced upon the oppressed children of another culture. To mimic “Shakespeare” is to reclaim and refigure colonial history and culture as *post-colonial*; Césaire's act of rewriting *The Tempest* – like Caliban's rebellion within the play itself – is a refusal to remain within the proscribed cultural boundaries of the colonial oppressor. “In effect,” explains Joseph Khoury (2006), Césaire, like “Caliban[,] is engaging his master in mimicry in order to resist him” (p. 26). Judith Sarnecki (2000) elaborates this point:

What Caliban does to Prospero in Césaire's play becomes the mirror image of what Césaire has done to Shakespeare: mastering the master. Prospero has often been perceived as the *porte-parole* or alter-ego of Shakespeare. Césaire implicitly makes this comparison, recognizing that the playwright, like Prospero, is a kind of magician who uses words to conjure up images to entertain and mystify his spectators. But the mystification that Césaire particularly wants us to recognize is that of racial superiority. (pp. 281-282)

Shakespeare's Prospero was the master artist whose language controlled the play; in Césaire's revision, that role is instead Caliban's, because it is Caliban who is capable of changing Prospero's language into his own.



Resistance – rebellion, dissent – lies at the core of both Césaire’s and Nuñez’s work. While Shakespeare’s Prospero closes with an appeal for consent from his audience, Nuñez and Césaire, more explicitly, call for its opposite. Both revisions attempt to cope with the problem of dissent: that it can be both disruptive and generative, as Brian Martin (2008) notes, “both lauded and loathed”:

It is lauded when it is in the glorious, unthreatening past....Dissent is especially lauded when dissenters emerge victorious....It is also more easily lauded when it is geographically distant....But closer to home dissent is less attractive – at least to those whose power position is threatened by it. (p. 22)

For Césaire, dissent is primarily linguistic, rooted in cultural tradition and, paradoxically, in the cultural appropriation of another’s tradition. Broadly speaking, culture – and Shakespeare in particular – was kept distant from the African-descended population of Martinique; Césaire’s appropriation – cultural counter-colonization, if you will – sought to engage in a leadership act designed to reframe the culture of the colonizer into a hybrid that places both colonizer and colonized on equal cultural footing. Lawrence M. Porter (1995) explains that

As a form of cultural action, [Césaire] wrote three plays that presented accessible, inspirational models of blacks’ struggles for independence. The international context of the plays aimed to remind Martinicans that morally, at least, they were not alone, and that their own striving for justice could in turn inspire others. Theater made Césaire’s statements accessible even to the illiterate. (p. 361)

The act of revision, then, is profoundly political, and Césaire’s play is specifically created, A. James Arnold (1978) remarks, as “a symbol of [colonial] history” (p. 239) in which the Old World must inevitably give way to the New.

In addition to its language, Césaire’s *Tempest* makes two notable alterations. The first is to its characters: Césaire changes Ariel from spirit to “mulatto slave,” and Caliban from “a savage and deformed slave” (*Dramatis Personae*) to simply “a black slave” (p. 3), and adds Eshu, an African god, to the masque.<sup>2</sup> The second alteration – and the one which concerns us more here, is to the play’s ending. At the play’s conclusion, Prospero says to Caliban, “I pity you,” and Caliban replies, “I hate you” (p. 63). Prospero attempts to assert his power and authority over nature, but falters at the end, ultimately deciding – as Caliban had suggested – to stay on the island rather than return to Milan:

I have uprooted the oak and raised the sea,  
I have caused the mountain to tremble  
and have bared my chest to adversity.  
With Jove I have traded thunderbolt for thunderbolt.  
Better yet – from a brutish monster I have made man!  
But ah! To have failed to find the path to man’s heart...  
if that be where man is.

(To Caliban:)

Well, I hate you as well!  
For it is you who have made me  
doubt myself for the first time.

...

My duty, thus, is here,  
and here I shall stay.

(pp. 63-64)

Caliban says nothing in return to this pronouncement, whether content or discontent. Césaire then includes the passage of time, demonstrated, the stage directions tell us, by a partial lowering of the

curtain. Then, “*In semi-darkness Prospero appears, aged and weary. His gestures are jerky and automatic, his speech weak, toneless, trite*” (p. 65). He says,

Odd, but for some time now we seem to be overrun with opossums. They’re everywhere. Peccarys, wild boar, all this unclean nature!...Well, Caliban, old fellow, it’s just us two now, here on the island...only you and me. You and me. You-me...me-you! What in the hell is he up to? (*Shouting.*) Caliban!

(*In the distance, above the sound of the surf and the chirping of birds, we hear snatches of Caliban’s song:*)

CALIBAN FREEDOM HI-DAY! FREEDOM HI-DAY!

(pp. 65-66)

The final lines of the play are Shakespeare’s, but taken from the middle of the original script when Caliban sets out with Stephano and Trinculo to rebel against Prospero. Césaire preserves, in these lines, the elation of rebellion against the power that has so long kept Caliban a slave, juxtaposing the exuberance of the song with Prospero’s aged fragility. Allegorically, the rule of colonialism is aging, reaching the end of its allotted time, and the song of freedom is spreading, giving rise to a new age of independence.

It is this allegorical reading of a people and a nation on the verge of independence – for Césaire, only in hope – that sets the stage for Elizabeth Nuñez’s novel. Set in 1961 on the eve of Trinidadian independence, *Prospero’s Daughter* addresses not only the racial elements prominent in Césaire’s play and the questions of colonial and patriarchal authoritarianism introduced in Shakespeare’s, but also gives voice to the largely silent female present but often forgotten in both works.

#### **NUÑEZ’S PROSPERO’S DAUGHTER (2006)**

Nuñez’s novel, mimicking the act-structure of Césaire’s play, is divided into three distinct voices: the institutional, third-person, impersonal voice of the English empire contained in the first section, “The Englishmen”; the first-person voice of the oppressed rebel, in “Carlos”; and the concluding, nurturing voice of the otherwise largely silent object of dispute between colonizer and colonized, in “Virginia.”

In “The Englishmen,” we are introduced to Detective Inspector John Mumsford, agent and embodiment of British Imperialism. Allegorically speaking, Mumsford stands in for the text of Shakespeare’s play itself: unapologetically British, old-world, the representative of institutionalized leadership and *logos*. He, like the play, has also been imported into a new context and a new place, and is being hermeneutically reshaped by the experiences of the native population while nevertheless clinging to his origins and traditions. Mumsford, for all intents and purposes, functions as a third-person narrator for most of this section; like the audience, he is an external spectator drawn into the story of colonialism after it has already happened.

As an agent of the Empire, Mumsford is a part of colonial power, but he is not the novel’s Prospero; he is, however, caught up in the impending tempest of revolution – not a literal storm, like the one that opens Shakespeare’s play, but the metaphoric storm of rebellion present in Césaire’s. Prospero, we learn from the epigram to chapter one, is a doctor, reflective of Shakespeare’s protagonist as a learned man. The epigram reads:

*He tell a lie if he say those two don’t love one another. I know them from when they was children. They do anything for one another. I know. I see them. I watch them. I tell you he love she and she love him back. They love one another. bad. He never rape she. Mr. Prospero lie. Signed Ariana, cook for Mr. Prospero, doctor.* (p. 3)<sup>3</sup>

The first voice in the novel belongs to Ariana – Ariel – a native islander of African descent. Mumsford immediately discounts the veracity of her letter on the basis of her language, preferring a narrative of rape

because it conforms to the oppressor's characterization of the islanders as, Camille Buxton (2011) observes, "sensual and prone to concupiscence" (p. 208).

Mumsford also does not recognize – or understand – the reference to Prospero. Nevertheless, he corrects her: "He was Dr. Peter Gardner – Gardner, a proper English name – not Mr. Prospero, doctor, as she had scrawled next to her name" (p. 8). Ariana is redefining who Gardner is based on a narrative identity – using (as Nuñez is) the imperial text in order to rewrite the narrative of oppression into one of rebellion. Mumsford, however, does not know that the narrative is his, rather than hers: "Prospero had no particular significance to Mumsford, though he had guessed correctly that it was the name of a character in a story. What story (it was a play by Shakespeare, his last) he did not know" (p. 8). In short, the institution stifles any sense of history or identity by subsuming it within organizational sterility. Mumsford does not understand his own cultural history, nor does he (of course) recognize that he has no place in the narrative of rebellion and oppression about to be told within the novel itself (as a retelling of *The Tempest*, in which his character has no corollary). However, Mumsford is important to *this* story, demonstrating the importance of individual leadership in the process of transforming an institutionalized narrative from one of oppression to liberation.

Mumsford's importance to the narrative of transformative leadership in the novel is reliant upon his relative unimportance to the overall hierarchy. Although he is a part of the machinery of Empire, he is a follower rather than a leader; yet as a follower, he has the power to choose which ideology to support. At the novel's beginning, he is an imperialist through-and-through; despite the attempt to enforce the ideology of imperialism on Trinidad, Mumsford notes that the island – as a geographic representation of individuality – rejects it:

he had resigned himself to accepting, he was not in his beloved England. He was here, on this mixed-up, smothering, suffocating, sultry island, on this stifling, god-forsaken, mosquito-ridden, insect-infested, sweat-drenched outpost, with its too, too bright colors, its too, too much everything: too much rain in the rainy season, too much sun in the dry season, too much blue in the sky, too much green in the grass, too much red in the creeping flowering plants, too much turquoise in the sea, too much white on the sand. Too, too many black people. (p. 10)

His thought processes distinguish and discriminate between English and islander, black and white, natural and civilized. And he clings to the institution of imperialism because it grants him status as its follower. The institution affords privilege along with stricture, the benefits of permitting the institution to continue, whereas independence from the institution is categorized as being lower-class and uncontrolled, bestial (from within the institution):

"You can improve your class, your station in life. In the colonies, young man, every Englishman is a lord."

Yes, Mumsford thought, remembering, the Empire was still standing, crumbling, weakened at the knees – they had lost India, most of China, Africa was slipping from their hands, and there were rumblings in the West Indies and the East Indies – but there were still years left for an Englishman in the colonies. (pp. 11-12)

The hierarchical assumptions of Empire are not only reinforced in the microcosmic setting of the island, but amplified by the divisor of racial difference. Yet the extreme disparity enforced by imperialist ideology led to precisely the events it was put in place to countermand, just as Prospero's attempts to subdue Caliban seem only to reinforce his desires to rebel, in both Shakespeare's and Césaire's texts.

Mumsford in fact explicitly links the case on Chacachacare (the island where Carlos, Gardner, and Virginia live) with the movement for Trinidadian independence:

“What goes-on?” Mumsford took the chance to ask.

“Colored people getting too big for their shoes,” the commissioner said.

And because on that point Mumsford could agree, he didn’t press him for more, he didn’t ask, as he wanted to, if he didn’t think the people in Trinidad owed a debt to England for the progress they had made, and, if owing England, they shouldn’t be willing to remain, as the French colonies of Martinique and Guadeloupe were willing to remain, a loyal Crown colony. (p. 23)

The allusion here to Césaire (and Martinique) serves as a reminder to those who recognize the connection that the colonies may not have been “content” to remain colonized; rather, they felt they had no choice or were not permitted their independence. The pressure placed on the Empire by rebellion has caused retaliatory strictness on the part of the institutionalized leadership on Trinidad:

If the commissioner had not insisted, if Ariana had not sent a letter by the boatman full of her malicious lies, if (and this was the most compelling of all the reasons) Trinidad was not all riled up with talk about independence and colored people were not looking for any excuse to blame their failures on England, there would have been no need for him to go. (p. 24)

Mumsford’s opinion – that the fault lies with the islanders rather than the English – is obviously not shared by Nuñez, nor (most likely) by a contemporary Western audience.

Unlike Césaire’s revision, written in the tumultuous period during which Nuñez’s novel is set, *Prospero’s Daughter* does not depict the immediate social concerns of its own time; rather, it reflects back on an historical decade whose culturally-based assumptions about racial superiority have since been dismissed as unjustified bigotry. Nuñez chose a liminal time during which colonialism was transforming into cultural diaspora as immigration became increasingly possible and popular for the Empire’s colonial subjects, as Mumsford describes:

But the talk in those years in the streets where he lived in England was about the coloreds, the flood of immigrants from the colonies, coming to England now that the country had been battered. “Reverse colonization,” his father called it. “They come to take what we have worked for.”

Signs warned dark-skinned immigrants that they were not welcome. *No dogs. No coloreds.* Some were more humiliating: *Pets. No coloreds.* But nothing stopped these sons and daughters of the Commonwealth. They came in droves from India, Pakistan, China, Africa, the West Indies, from every corner of the world where the sun set on the lands the British had colonized, trusting in the propaganda of the Mother Country, believing in her gospel of fair play and justice. When asked, their response was naïve. Their oil, tobacco, cotton, sugar, bananas had made the Mother Country rich. Surely it was their turn. (p. 63)

Reverse colonization functions as a kind of transformative leadership – but also as the consequence of cultural imposition. England taught its colonies that what was “good” was English, and so when they wish to improve their cultural status, they then move to England in order to embrace what they have been acculturated to believe is “better.”

The purpose behind the historicity of the novel is to recalibrate the reader’s awareness: *Prospero’s Daughter* is a narrative of oppression and rebellion, although not (or at least, not only) the one we expect to read. While the second section of the novel is narrated – predictably – by Carlos (Nuñez’s Caliban), the reader gradually comes to realize that while Carlos may be justified in his rebellion against Gardner-Prospero, he is not the individual leader capable of enacting transformational change on Chacachacare. While his rebellion is justified within the context of the novel, the narrative history of Prospero and

Caliban limits Gardner and Carlos: their tradition and investment in the dyadic nature of colonialism refuses to allow either to willingly cede power to the other, or to accept the other as equal.

Even in rebellion, Carlos speaks the same literal and figurative language as Gardner, reads the same books, and draws upon the knowledge and technology of Empire. Carlos frames his rebellious claims on the house and Chacachacare in imperial, monarchic terms:

So I let Gardner be the king of my castle. For that was how my childish mind conceived of his relationship to me. He was king, but the castle was mine. When I was old enough, when I had learned enough from him, I would assert my right to rule it. (p. 139)

Like Shakespeare's Caliban, Carlos is trapped by the ideology that has oppressed him; not necessarily because he must (like Caliban) remain a servant, but because even as "Mister Carlos" (which the other servants sometimes call him), he still subscribes to the imperial hierarchy, represented by Gardner, he claims to want to escape.

In *Prospero's Daughter*, Peter Gardner is the monster, a doctor responsible for the deaths of his patients in England, a master and father guilty of sexually assaulting both Ariana and Virginia. The embodiment of colonial oppression, Gardner exhibits both the ostensible refinement and the seamy underbelly of imperial dominance, which has no place in a rapidly-expanding global world. Yet Gardner is, as Virginia reminds us, still her father; his is a necessary part of the transformative process. This need for oppression – for crisis – is what lies at the center of the novel's struggle to come to terms with postcolonial leadership. For all his monstrosity, Gardner is vital to the personal development of both Carlos and Virginia. Similarly, Shakespeare – as the cultural icon of the English and Western literary canon – is necessary to the creation of both Césaire's and Nuñez's texts. In essence, the crises produced by colonialism – like the individual crises produced by Gardner's abuse and exploitation – not only allow for but actively engender transformational leadership.

In the novel, this leadership comes from personal experience and individual action, rather than organized rebellion or policy. Nuñez's solution to the cycle of mastery and rebellion occasioned by imperial oppression becomes evident in the third and final section, "Virginia." In this section, Nuñez gives voice to the one character in both Shakespeare's and Césaire's plays who is given little to no opportunity to speak for herself. Nuñez renames Shakespeare's Miranda "Virginia," after the Virgin Queen Elizabeth of England, the colonized land, and – most importantly for Gardner – her own virginity. To Gardner, Virginia is a commodity to be bargained for and sold, the means by which he can re-achieve the status he lost when he fled England – just as Shakespeare's Prospero uses Miranda to regain his dukedom.

Interestingly, while Virginia's relationship to Carlos is one of genuine love, he, too, seems to objectify her to a certain extent; he loves her in part because she reminds him of his English mother, in part for herself, but also in part because she belongs to (and rejects) Gardner. Possession of Virginia becomes the focus of the conflict between Gardner and Carlos, and the reason for Gardner's accusations of rape, just as the colonized land is the desire and site of conflict in the struggle between Empire and islanders on Trinidad.

But while Miranda (for both Shakespeare and Césaire) is largely silent, Virginia has her own individual voice. In fact, it is Virginia, rather than Carlos or Mumsford, who serves as the ultimate representative of personal and authentic leadership in the novel, in two specific ways. First, on the level of the narrative, and second, as an avatar for leadership enacted through artistic and cultural artifacts. On the level of narrative, Virginia is responsible for transforming the people around her: in particular, Carlos and Mumsford.

Carlos recalls that the first time he saw Virginia, she touched his freckles – a source of mockery and derision from Ariana and Gardner – and smiled, a simple gesture that, he says, created "a bond struck instantly between us...a kindness she extended to me that I greedily accepted. For I *was* self-conscious of the tiny brown dots...Only a few months earlier Ariana had convinced me that they were hideous" (pp. 124-125), a mark of his hybridity. Later, when they are older, she asks him to "Tell me about our history,"

a question that prompts the reflection that “Her skin was pale, her hair blond, her eyes blue, but she said *our*. Not *your*. *Our* history, she said” (p. 189). Although she learns history and literacy from Carlos, Virginia is the transformative figure in their relationship; she leads by example, demonstrating that society – even of English descent – has the capacity for positive transformational change. Because of Virginia, Carlos – unlike either Shakespeare’s or Césaire’s Calibans – is ultimately capable of finding a place within society, rather than remaining excluded from it. Because of Virginia, the island in Nuñez’s novel has a future separate from either isolation or Empire.

Perhaps even more significant, however, is Virginia’s transformational influence over Mumsford, the representative of institutionalized imperialism. Her testimony to Mumsford on Carlos’s behalf causes the charges against him to be dropped, but, more importantly, the interview changes Mumsford’s assumptions about and attitude toward racial difference. Prior to this point, Mumsford refers to Carlos as either “Carlos” or “savage”; after speaking with Virginia, he begins to call him “Codrington” (Carlos’s last name) and even “Mr. Codrington.” When Carlos claims the house and property after Gardner’s death, Mumsford does “not contest his claim” (p. 306) to own property, a substantial difference between the novel and the plays that preceded it.

At the novel’s conclusion, Virginia explains the end of imperialism, not in terms of violent, or even non-violent, rebellion, but in terms of the transformed culture that will emerge from it. She says, as she describes Mumsford’s departure for England, that “Independence was on the horizon, politics in the favor of people born here. Englishmen,” like Mumsford, “were returning home. By the following year they” – not we – “would lose another colony” (p. 306). When Mumsford comes to say his farewell to her, he tells her not to marry Carlos, saying that “Kind should stay with kind”:

“Carlos is my kind,” I said.

He narrowed his eyes at me.

“Carlos is human and I am human,” I said.

Othello and Desdemona. Was Shakespeare thinking of the prejudice of his day when he wrote their tragic story? It was no coincidence, Carlos said to me, that not long after Queen Elizabeth I issued a Royal Proclamation ordering the arrest and expulsion of “Negroes and blackmores,” Shakespeare told his story about a white woman in love with a Moor. It was fear that drove the queen to this extreme: too many English men and women marrying Africans. But love had its way. By the end of the eighteenth century there were half a million black people living in England.

I had not missed the shy smile that crossed Carlos’s face when he told me this. Nor did I forget that more than once he had commented on my mother’s sealed lips, in the photograph on my bureau, seemed to conceal a secret. Was that secret the lips themselves, full lips I had inherited, which, when they parted, made fishermen forget they wanted to burn candles?

The inspector scratched his head, perplexed. “It’s a new world,” he said. “I do not understand it.”

“A brave new world,” I countered.

(pp. 307-308)

Like Miranda leaving the island in Shakespeare’s play, Mumsford – not Virginia – is unprepared by his authoritarian upbringing for the “brave new world” of postcolonialism. Yet he is more able and willing to attempt this understanding because of Virginia, unlike Gardner, who chose suicide over life in a hybridized, postcolonial world.

This passage also illuminates the second way in which Virginia serves as a figure of transformational leadership: Virginia, like the novel itself, is the child of an older time and place, a male-dominated and Eurocentric society in which she should have no place. *Prospero’s Daughter*, like Césaire’s *A Tempest* before it, participates in a political and social form of leadership that uses art and culture to seek to change the world out of which it was created. In this sense, Nuñez herself is Prospero’s cultural daughter, just as Césaire is his son, rebelling against the tradition that struggled to keep them restrained. And yet despite

their rebellions, both Césaire and Nuñez still love the Shakespearean father who gave them life: *A Tempest* and *Prospero's Daughter* do homage to *The Tempest* even as they reshape it. In so doing, they participate in a tradition of rebellion that is intrinsic to Shakespeare himself – a tradition of populism that requests of the followers, rather than the authoritarian leaders, a personal form of transformational leadership that requires them to become active citizens capable of accepting, rejecting, condemning, and forgiving the political, social, and cultural leaders who sometimes fail them.

Cultural artifacts, unlike individual leaders, can long survive the agents and moments of their creation. Gardner (1990) explains that

Leaders cannot be thought of apart from the historic context in which they arise, the setting in which they function (e.g., elective political office), and the system over which they preside (e.g., a particular city or state). They are integral parts of the system, subject to the forces that affect the system. They perform (or cause to be performed) certain tasks or functions that are essential if the group is to accomplish its purposes. (p. 1)

This is similarly true of literature, but while it cannot be fully disconnected from its context, it can be – and often is – pulled out of that context and given a new one. Shakespeare's final play has not only survived, but transformed with each successive revision and performance, continuing to work its "rough magic" on the stage, on the silver screen, and in the pages of other authors' texts. By de- and re-contextualizing each work in turn, we come to see not only the efficacy of literature in the process of continual change from 1611 to 1969 to 2006, but also those ideological frameworks that have bent, but not broken in the intervening four centuries.

This phenomenon relies on one of the most fundamental principles of leadership as we have come to understand it – that the leader must rely on followers in order to be ratified as leader. Whether or not Prospero speaks with Shakespeare's explicit voice, he is making a point about leadership within a dramatic – and artistic – context; the work itself is engaging in an act of leadership, demanding the audience's attention and approval in order to do its work. And despite the problematic nature of Prospero's leadership, the audience applauds at the end of the performance – the nature of the epilogue reminds them (and us) that we are not actually applauding Prospero, but the actor behind his portrayal and the ideological mission of the play itself to remind us, as its followers, that we are not all-powerful, that the world around us changes, and that we all have the opportunity – like Césaire's Caliban and Nuñez's Mumsford, Carlos, and Virginia – to let go of the rigidity of hierarchy and embrace individual transformation:

Now my charms are all o'erthrown,  
And what strength I have's mine own,  
Which is most faint. Now, 'tis true  
I must be here confined by you,  
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,  
Since I have my dukedom got  
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell  
In this bare island by your spell;  
But release me from my bands  
With the help of your good hands.  
Gentle breath of yours my sails  
Must fill, or else my project fails,  
Which was to please. Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer,  
Which pierces so that it assaults

Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.

(Epilogue.1-20)

## ENDNOTES

1. Edition of *The Tempest* referenced throughout may be found under Shakespeare, W. under References. In-text citations indicate act, scene, and line numbers.
2. Edition of *A Tempest* referenced throughout may be found under Césaire, A. under References.
3. Edition of *Prospero's Daughter* referenced throughout may be found under Nuñez, E. under References.

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