4 ‘Oh brave new Caliban’

Postcolonial Perspectives on Adès’s The Tempest

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For over four centuries, musical versions of and compositions inspired by Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* have proliferated. At the same time, rewritings and critical interpretations of the play have formed their own parallel *Tempest* corpus: looming especially large in the last half-century are those that tease out the work’s colonial and postcolonial themes. That operatic adaptations have generally not succeeded is well known, but more importantly, the genre has yet to be a significant vehicle for interrogating *Tempest*’s (post)colonial possibilities. Thomas Adès and Meredith Oakes’s *The Tempest* (2003–4) is that rare thing, a successful contemporary opera, but it also represents a hitherto relatively unexplored meeting of these two threads of artistic interest in the play. This chapter offers a complement to existing music-analytic readings of the opera by placing the work in dialogue with colonial and postcolonial readings. In particular, I examine Adès and Oakes’s complication and reimagining of the play’s hierarchical power relationships between Caliban, Ariel and Prospero. Jyotsna G. Singh’s recent overview of scholarly interest in and stagings of Shakespeare in the Global South argues that the plays are used in these contexts ‘to tell stories of disparate lives, often in non-Western arenas or in culturally contested milieus in metropolitan centres’.[1] Adès and Oakes’s opera is inescapably embedded in scholarly and performance spaces of Western privilege. It is vital, therefore, to pay attention to how the opera intersects with the long lineage of critical Shakespeares from diasporic and historically marginalised voices.

With this in mind, I first give an overview of the ‘constellation of Calibans’ figuring in this history.[2] Second, I focus on Oakes’s transformed text and Adès’s musical setting at three key moments in the opera: the first appearances of Caliban and Ariel, Caliban’s Act II aria and the substantially modified ending; I touch also on the aesthetics of the opera’s contrasting stagings. I argue that throughout the opera, Caliban actively and

[1] Jyotsna G. Singh, *Shakespeare and Postcolonial Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 127.

[2] Here, I paraphrase Nadia Lie and Theo D’Haen, ‘Preface’, in *Constellation Caliban: Figurations of a Character*, ed. by Nadia Lie and Theo D’Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. i–iii.

consistently articulates ideals of freedom and political agency, a freedom attained at the opera's conclusion that is at least in part catalysed by his own power. Finally, I propose that critical appraisal of the opera's cultural and political contexts is indispensable for a fuller understanding both of this adaptation and of broader themes in contemporary discourses of colonial legacies in twenty-first-century Britain.

Calibans Reimagined

Postcolonial reimaginings of *The Tempest* since the mid-twentieth century have grown so numerous that Nadia Lie and Theo D'Haen referred in 1997 to the rise of 'Calibanology'.[3] There is not space here to map out the extensive and fascinating array of theoretical, literary and theatrical invocations of Caliban.[4] Within the rich and extensive history of multidisciplinary critical attention to the play, five major modes of postcolonial engagement can be identified through which the figure of Caliban might be surveyed:

1. Literary adaptations which alter the play's drama from a (post)colonial viewpoint, by authors of colonial, formerly colonial and/or diasporic backgrounds;
2. Novels, films, etc. inspired by but not directly adapting the play;
3. (Critical) theatrical stagings;
4. Literary, psychological and philosophical analyses of *Tempest* by authors of colonial, formerly colonial and/or diasporic backgrounds;
5. Critical analyses of works in modes 1–4.

Classic techniques of postcolonial writing that are employed in all of these categories may include, among many, 'writing back' through 'subversive strategies employed by post-colonial writers … not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place'.[5] Theoretical concepts including Edward

[3] Ibid., p. i. The term 'postcolonial' itself has attracted considerable scrutiny since at least the end of the last century. See, for instance, Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 10.

[4] For a recent overview, see Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, eds., The Tempest*: A Critical Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

[5] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 32.

Said's 'contrapuntal reading'[6] have been applied to *Tempest* to reveal the text's 'reliance on, and endorsement of, the political structures and institutions of imperialism through clues that might otherwise go undetected'.[7] For *Tempest*, such 'clues' may include the context of colonial explorations of late Elizabethan England, as well as the representation and perceptions of people of colour in early modern Europe.[8]

Invoking Caliban specifically throughout these five postcolonial modes has continued to be a central pursuit for, among others, authors, literary theorists and philosophers. Octave Mannoni offered one of the earliest deployments of Prospero and Caliban as symbolic proxies for coloniser and colonised,[9] a psychological analysis which proved formative for subsequent thinkers, if subject to necessary and extensive critiques, especially by Frantz Fanon.[10] For Mannoni, Fanon and the next generation of postcolonial writing from Caribbean authors in the 1960s, their position within ongoing colonial conflicts and the eventual processes of decolonisation inevitably shaped how they approached the political and psychological potential of *Tempest*'s themes. Within this history, Paget Henry's survey of Afro-Caribbean philosophy describes Caliban as 'one of the most enduring narratives of Caribbean identity to emerge from European literature and philosophy',[11] and reframing that identity in the context of mid-century independence movements was a crucial part in reappropriating Caliban to 'write back' against empire.

George Lamming's influential *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), for instance, interrogates 'the circumstances of my life, both as a colonial and exiled descendant of Caliban', and more broadly invokes Caliban's position in *Tempest* as a strategy to read historical and modern colonial politics through the play's narrative.[12] In the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Braithwaite's collection *Islands* (1969), the poem 'Caliban' similarly functions, as Eric Doumerc observes, 'as a journey into the past in order to

[6] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[7] Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia, *Edward Said*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 99.

[8] Two recent excellent studies which illuminate these themes in early modern England are David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2016) and Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

[9] Octave Mannoni, *Psychologie de la colonisation* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1950).

[10] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), particularly pp. 26–7, 87.

[11] Paget Henry, *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 4–5.

[12] George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p. 13.

make an act of possession and thus reclaim the Caribbean as home'.[13] Braithwaite extemporises on the play's parody of Caliban's speech ('Ban, ban, Caliban', II.ii.1229)[14] in a multitude of overlapping sonic and historical associations, from slave ships to Caliban as a carnival steel pan player. The sound 'Ban' becomes 'bangs' of both drum and limbo stick, but also the 'stick is the whip / and the dark deck is slavery', perhaps evoking Prospero's magic staff.[15] For the next generation of Caribbean and Latin American intellectuals, Caliban continued to be deployed both as a metaphor for (re)writing colonial histories and as a strategy to decentre the hegemony of 'Northern intellectual production'. Pioneered by the Cuban author Roberto Fernández Retamar's essays on Caliban and *Tempest* beginning in 1971,[16] this is described by César A. Rodríguez Garavito as the 'Calibanist turn' ('el giro Calibanesco') in which 'the Calibanist thinker recovers the intellectual tradition of the South'.[17] This *giro* was so extensive as to be described as a 'School of Caliban' by José David Saldívar.[18]

At the same time as philosophers and writers were drawing on the symbolic potential of Caliban (and usually Ariel and Prospero), postcolonial theatrical reimaginings of *Tempest* drew on similar techniques of what Rob Nixon calls 'repeated, reinforcing, transgressive appropriations of *The Tempest* … which in turn served as one component of the grander counterhegemonic nationalist and black internationalist endeavors of the period'.[19] Aimé Césaire's *Une tempête* (1969),[20] casting Caliban and Ariel as a black slave and a mulatto slave respectively, remains one of the most

[13] Eric Doumerc, 'Caliban Playing Pan: A Note on the Metamorphoses of Caliban in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Caliban"', *Caliban: French Journal of English Studies*, 52 (2014), 239–50 (p. 249).

[14] All quotations from Shakespeare's *Tempest* are given in the format Act, Scene, line, following the First Folio (1623). William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Folio I (1623), ed. by Paul Yachnin, Internet Shakespeare Editions, University of Victoria, https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/facsimile/overview/book/F1.html. Modernised spellings are used but contractions preserved.

[15] Edward Kamau Braithwaite, *Islands* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 37.

[16] Roberto Fernández Retamar, 'Sobre cultura y revolución en la América Latina', *Casa de las Américas*, 12/lxviii (1971), 124–51.

[17] César A. Rodriguez Garavito, 'Prólogo' to Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Todo Caliban* (Bogotá: ILSA, 2005), pp. 13–24 (p. 17). All translations are my own.

[18] José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 123.

[19] Rob Nixon, 'Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*', *Critical Inquiry*, 13/iii (1987), 557–78 (p. 557).

[20] Aimé Césaire, *Une tempête: adaptation pour un théâtre nègre d'après 'La tempête' de Shakespeare* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).

significant rewritings. Among stagings of the play, Jonathan Miller's production in 1970 for the Mermaid Theatre, London, is widely considered the first to present a (post)colonial interpretation, denoting Ariel and Caliban explicitly as black slaves.[21] In the late 1970s and 1980s, *Tempest*s such as Derek Jarman's 1979 film and Philip Osment's play *This Island's Mine* (1988) subtly intertwined these themes with the contemporary political subtexts of Thatcherite England, especially homophobic legislation and burgeoning gay rights advocacy movements.[22] Trevor Griffiths's survey of stagings from the seventeenth century to the 1980s illuminates historical entanglements of changing perceptions of race in Britain with Caliban's place in *Tempest* productions,[23] and while this extensive history cannot be recounted here, many of its key elements are perceptible in Adès and Oakes's opera.

Adès and Oakes's *Tempest*

How can this rich corpus of Caliban invocations be used to contextualise this opera? Neither librettist nor composer has expressed that their *Tempest* advances a colonial- or postcolonial-inspired interpretation: Oakes has publicly dismissed that notion,[24] and Adès is generally reluctant to engage in discussions of his work's political significance. In a recent discussion with the pianist Kirill Gerstein, debating the stereotyped dearth of a strong British musical tradition in the nineteenth century led Adès to quip that Britain was 'very busy enslaving the rest of the world for a long time!' When Gerstein suggested that 'this is the price of colonialism', Adès replied, 'I'm much more comfortable if we leap back to just a mile less that way down the road, to Purcell's time.'[25] In this context, I read Adès's

[21] Subsequent British productions which continued this theme include Adrian Noble's (1998) and Rupert Goold's (2006), both for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

[22] On Jarman, see Jim Ellis, 'Conjuring *The Tempest*: Derek Jarman and the Spectacle of Redemption', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 7/ii (2001), 265–84. Chantal Zabus compares Jarman's and Osment's *Tempest*s in 'Against the Straightgeist: Queer Artists, "Shakespeare's England", and "Today's London"', *Études anglaises*, 61/iii (2008), 279–89.

[23] Trevor Griffiths, '"This Island's Mine": Caliban and Colonialism', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 13 (1983), 159–80.

[24] Meredith Oakes, in Paul Archbold, 'Philip Hensher and Meredith Oakes in Conversation with Paul Archbold', presentation at 'Be Not Afeard: Language, Music and Cultural Memory in the Operas of Thomas Adès', Senate House: London, 25 April 2017.

[25] Thomas Adès in conversation with Kirill Gerstein. Kirill Gerstein, 'Thomas Adès: "Roots, Seeds & Live Cultures" – "Kirill Gerstein Invites" @ HfM Eisler Berlin', online video interview, 18 June 2020, YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0kHP_npxJA.

indifference to (post)coloniality as a frame for the opera as a desire to avoid 'uncomfortable' topics as well as a perception of British colonialism as a predominantly nineteenth-century phenomenon, rather than a significant historical context for Shakespeare and Purcell's work.

Adès's self-distancing from such discussions exists in tension with how the opera nevertheless participates in the critical discourses surrounding the play's political, cultural and historical significance. As will become apparent in the interrelated realms of production aesthetics, narrative and music, this *Tempest* consistently valorises ambiguity but in doing so shies away from commitments to overt critical stances in its adaptation. Adès's approach to creating the opera reflects this tendency: for instance, he is adamant that it simply captures the 'generalised atmosphere that the play produces',[26] rather than setting Shakespeare's text to music. Emphasising his ambition to avoid a modernised version that would be 'half-timbered, mock Tudor', Adès further argues that he does not 'take the famous text at all' in the opera.[27] Moulding Shakespeare's plays into feasible operatic forms has occupied composers, librettists and scholars for centuries.[28] Adès appears to sidestep traditional tensions through 'a translation that would be faithful to the spirit and atmosphere of the original'.[29] Yet the opera exists co-dependently with 'the famous text', not just in Oakes's (in)fidelity to it but because for most audiences, the opera is read *against* the play, in what it has changed and reinterpreted. My following discussions focus on these transformations rather than on the adaptation as a whole, which has been reviewed elsewhere.[30]

Transforming Ariel

Before I turn to Adès's Caliban, an account of the operatic relationship between Prospero and Ariel is useful, for it is indicative of Adès and Oakes's approach to the narrative's fundamental concepts of servitude and

[26] Thomas Adès and Tom Service, *Thomas Adès: Full of Noises – Conversations with Tom Service*, paperback ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 2018), p. 159.

[27] Ibid., p. 128. This comment is also part of an acerbic commentary on Benjamin Britten which should be taken with a large grain of salt.

[28] See, for example, Michael Graham, 'Shakespeare and Modern British Opera: Into *The Knot Garden*' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2017).

[29] Adès and Service, *Full of Noises*, p. 158.

[30] See, for instance, Drew Massey, *Thomas Adès in Five Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 66–9.

power. These are themes integral to the play's colonial contexts, and their redefinition in the opera is key to its narrative transformations. Oakes's libretto delineates Caliban's and Ariel's dramatic identities and their relationship with Prospero, the putative 'master', in ways that both align with and diverge from the long history of postcolonial *Tempest* reimaginings. If ostensibly bound, magically, to Prospero, Ariel is demonstrated throughout the opera to be consistently beyond the reach of his full power. This entails a fundamental shift in the arc of the drama as a whole; as Christopher Fox noted, 'the play turns on Prospero's powers . . . in Adès and Oakes's version, it is these spirit creatures who achieve transcendence'.[31]

In the opera, Ariel and Prospero's first interaction from Shakespeare's Act I, Scene ii is split between two scenes in the opera (Act I, Scenes 3 and 5). Ariel's servant status remains in Prospero's words as he hails 'Spirit, servant', but rather than have Ariel respond 'All hail, great master!' (I.ii.300), Oakes writes a long solo passage, set by Adès as a dramatic introduction to the role's vocal acrobatics: 'Fear to the sinner / Fire to the impure' (etc.), swooping dramatically from E_5 to E_6 on 'Fear'.[32] From the outset, we are introduced to an operatic Ariel whose voice tears through the musical fabric, an Ariel far from subservient and obedient, but one whose physical and sonic existence exceeds human bounds and human bonds.[33] While the opera does not fully erase Prospero's control over Ariel, from their first interactions it is evident both sonically and textually that Ariel wields significant power.

The remainder of Shakespeare's discussion of Ariel's 'employment' establishes Ariel and Prospero's relationship as a mix of indentured servitude and slavery. Prospero refers to Ariel as his slave multiple times, but also portrays the relationship as primarily transactional, slipping between 'servant' and 'slave'. Unlike Caliban, Ariel is also given an explicit promise of freedom by Prospero, who agrees that 'after two days I will discharge thee' (I.ii.429–30). Both are enslaved through magical forces, but also through the psychological guilt of indebtedness; Prospero consistently

[31] Christopher Fox, 'Tempestuous Times: The Recent Music of Thomas Adès', *Musical Times*, 145/1888 (2004), 41–56 (p. 54).

[32] Ariel's textual nuances discussed here are not immediately audibly perceptible, requiring the aid of both surtitles and libretto. All text quotations from the opera are taken from the separately published libretto, Meredith Oakes, *The Tempest* (London: Faber, 2004).

[33] A note on the gendering of Ariel: it is unclear in the play, and stage productions play with this in various ways. Other recent settings of Ariel's songs such as Kaija Saariaho's *Tempest Songbook* (2000) explicitly gender Ariel's voice as female. Adès's Ariel is ambiguous, though the vocal part is female. I use the pronouns 'they', 'them' and 'their' to indicate their Ariel's existence outside an imposed gender binary.

comments that they are not performing the expected gratitude for the improvements he has made on their situations in life. He reminds Ariel: 'Dost thou forget from what a torment I did free thee?' (I.ii.375–6), referring to their time with the 'foul witch Sycorax' who confined them in a 'cloven pine, within which rift imprison'd, thou didst painfully remain a dozen years . . . It was mine art, when I arrived and heard thee, that made gape the pine, and let thee out' (I.ii.404–5, 419–21).

Shakespeare's text thus projects the pervasive trope of the 'grateful slave', which George Boulukos argues is dependent on the notion 'that Africans can be induced not just to accept slavery, but to embrace it, to be overwhelmed by ecstatic gratitude toward someone who continues to claim mastery over them'.[34] Ariel and Prospero are consistently placed in this position in the play, their gratitude thematised as debt and thus dependency. Paula Dumas similarly assesses this trope in eighteenth-century British plays and novels, where 'the commonly used image of the grateful slave challenges the idea that slavery is necessarily cruel or evil'.[35] In Shakespeare's text, Ariel is 'freed' from Sycorax's enslavement to a purportedly better life with Prospero, their gratitude then driven home in their grovelling compliance at the end of this dialogue: 'I thank thee, master . . . Pardon, master; I will be correspondent to command, and do my spiriting gently' (I.ii.431–2).

Oakes's text clearly challenges these tropes in Act I, Scene 5. Prospero reiterates frequently his 'gift' of freedom ('Sycorax died / Lest you forget / Left you inside / I prised you out') and insists on Ariel's gratitude ('Fickle spirit . . . Is this your thanks?'). The operatic Ariel, however, persists in demanding liberty and refuses to show gratitude even though remaining bound under Prospero's magic. First, they emphasise that they are owed ('Shall I be paid? . . . It's due! My release . . . my fee, my ransom, my freedom'), and when Prospero counters with guilt from past debts, Ariel doubles down, demanding release: 'I have been captive with you twelve years / I must be active / In higher spheres . . . I only thrive / In liberty!' Adès's setting hears Prospero and Ariel sing alone, then in a combative duet, the end of which is shown in Online Ex. 4.1. They are rhythmically and harmonically at loggerheads, their lines suggesting contrasting patterns of accentuation and coinciding only on a unison

[34] George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 3.

[35] Paula E. Dumas, *Proslavery Britain: Fighting for Slavery in an Era of Abolition* (Cham: Springer, 2016), p. 86. My thanks to Julia Hamilton for introducing me to Dumas's and Boulukos's work.

D at the climax – spilling into Adès's dramatic setting of Ariel's song 'Five Fathoms Deep' (Oakes's version of Shakespeare's 'Full Fathom Five'). Michael Halliwell interprets Ariel's voice in the opera as a metaphor for the 'cruel imprisonment and even "torture" of the character' by Prospero, arguing that he '"silences" language and thus strips the character of his humanity who struggles through "inhuman" vocal effort to assert himself'.[36] Yet throughout the opera, Ariel challenges rather than submits to Prospero's will, and I hear, rather, Ariel's voice as perpetually exceeding the bounds of his control.

Transforming Caliban

Oakes's libretto performs similar alterations to Caliban's first presentation in the opera. As with Ariel, it is in the nature of Caliban's response and challenge to Prospero's purported authority that the most substantial transformations to his character's dramatic role can be found. Prospero's insults remain ('Don't ask questions, slave / Know your place'), but Oakes's Caliban counters lucidly. Caliban's claim to the island is roughly identical: 'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, which thou tak'st from me' (I.ii.470–1) becomes 'This island's mine / I am king / Yet you treat me like nothing.' Both Calibans assert that they performed a service of care to Prospero upon his first arrival. Shakespeare's 'When thou camest first, . . . then I loved thee, and showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle' (I.ii.471, 475–6) becomes 'When I first found you, you were weak / Crouched by a rock, your child in your cloak.' In contrast, the operatic Caliban strongly emphasises that it is Prospero who owes *him*, asserting, 'I came to save you / I was your friend / . . .All I had you were given / But now you have forgotten . . . You are ungrateful.' In challenging who is really indebted to the other here, Oakes neutralises Prospero's powers of manipulation and control.

Notably, the passage on Miranda and Prospero's 'gift' of language to Caliban in the play, in which Miranda 'took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour one thing or another; when thou didst not, savage, know thine own meaning, but would gabble like a thing most brutish' (I.ii.495–8), is cut entirely. Most postcolonial *Tempest*s interrogate this

[36] Michael Halliwell, 'The Sound of Silence: A Tale of Two Operatic *Tempest*s', in *Silence and Absence in Literature and Music*, ed. by Werner Wolf and Walter Bernhart (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 196–219 (p. 208).

moment, as it encapsulates both the notion of imperial conquest as beneficial to the colonised – weaponised gratitude – and Caliban's resistance ('You taught me language: and my profit on't is, I know how to curse', I.ii.504–5). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that the process of 'decolonising the mind' involves addressing the place of language in 'the domination of the mental universe of the colonised'.[37] When Césaire's Caliban cries 'Uhuru!' (the Kiswahili word for 'freedom' or 'independence') in response to Prospero's summons, for example, it is a powerful symbol which, as Steve Almquist observes, 'gives Caliban a voice, specifically an African voice, and it contributes to Césaire's overall project in creating a diasporic textual counter to Shakespeare'.[38] There is nothing in Oakes's text and Adès's music, however, to suggest that Caliban's 'mental universe' has ever been 'dominated' by Prospero, unlike Césaire's and others' focus on language in reappropriating *The Tempest*.

Excising the 'gift' of language removes, however, one of the key aspects which Shakespeare used to establish Miranda and Caliban's relationship, for it is in response to his and Prospero's dialogue on his attempted rape that she responds with the crucial passage on her teaching Caliban. While there is no suggestion in the libretto of any sexual assault, Caliban is still described as exhibiting stalking and predatory behaviours towards Miranda, and later demands her as his wife and queen in Act III, Scene 3 ('Give me your daughter / We'll have Calibans'). This aspect of the narrative exemplifies the opera's unevenness in its critical stance. Spectators are, for the most part, presented with an empowered and respected Caliban, yet his sexual harassment of Miranda appears barely changed. Oakes writes Prospero's disgust at Caliban's attraction to Miranda as rife with eugenicist implications during the Act III confrontation ('Have you thought of my daughter's honour / Burdened with such a husband . . . Poor beast / Last in the race'). That we should be *sympathetic* to Caliban here is clear, but it is left ambiguous as to whether the accusations against him are in fact entirely baseless. That Prospero's final insult, 'You have no future', will be disproven in the opera's conclusion does not detract from the fact that Caliban's own discussion of Miranda does little to dismantle lingering stereotypes centred on his racialised identity: the hyper-sexualised native who preys upon innocent white

[37] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1981, reprinted 1986), p. 16.

[38] Steve Almquist, 'Not Quite the Gabbling of "A Thing Most Brutish": Caliban's Kiswahili in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*', *Callaloo*, 29/ii (2006), 587–607 (p. 588).

women.[39] Although morally perfect characters rarely make fascinating operatic subjects, the fact that those stereotypes are left (mostly) unchallenged reflects some of the blind spots in this adaptation.

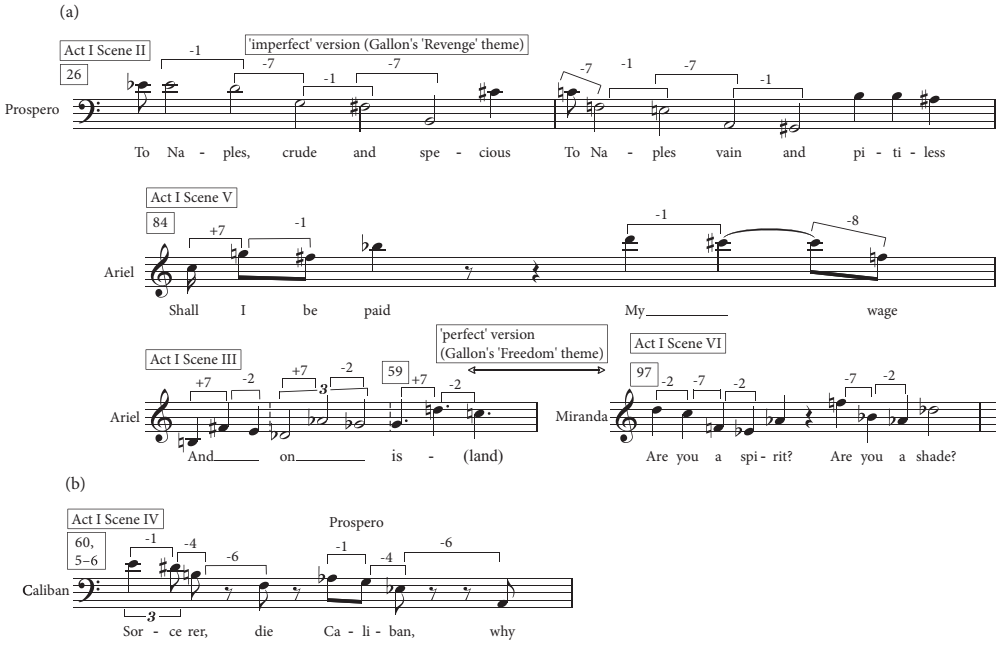
The lack of linguistic separation between Caliban and Prospero/Miranda in Oakes's text is ambiguous in purpose, neither explicitly suggesting that their implied cultural differences have been erased nor offering a new status regarding their communication. Caliban in the opera needs neither to defend his mother tongue nor to be in his coloniser's 'debt', but it is left unclear how Oakes and Adès conceive of the intersection of language, culture and power in their interpretation. We could think of the opera's characters operating in their own 'musical language' – Miranda and Ferdinand's sweetly simple lines exemplifying their youthful naivety, Ariel's sky-scraping coloratura the voice of the superhuman. Caliban, a high tenor, rarely adopts the gloomy descending lines Adès writes for Prospero, instead singing with what Halliwell calls a 'mixture of lyricism and rhythmically harsh and jagged lines with large interval leaps'.[40]

On other occasions, however, just as their use of language is often not differentiated, Caliban and Prospero match one another musically. This is evident in their very first interaction, and also brings us to a crucial musical detail that is present throughout the opera: a short motivic fragment consisting of variations on a tone and a fifth. Emma Gallon has extensively analysed leitmotivs in the opera, naming two 'Revenge' (alternations of descending semitones and perfect fifths) and 'Freedom' (alternating ascending whole tones and perfect fifths).[41] In Prospero's music throughout Act I, we hear primarily the 'Revenge' version, while in Ariel and Miranda's music the 'Freedom' motive, a 'perfected' version of the descending motive, is already pre-empted, a sonic emblem of the operatic Ariel's resistance to the 'grateful slave' trope. Example 4.1a shows several instances of what I refer to in this chapter as the 'fifths' motive throughout Act I, marked by brackets with intervals denoted in numbers of semitones. The motive's inherent propensity for interlocking

[39] Extensive scholarship exists on this racist trope throughout colonial histories as well as in contemporary culture. Rebecca Kumar touches on these questions specifically in *Tempest* in '"Do You Love Me, Master?" The Erotic Politics of Servitude in *The Tempest* and Its Postcolonial Afterlife', in *Early Modern Black Diaspora Studies: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Cassander L. Smith, Nicholas R. Jones and Miles P. Grier (Cham: Springer, 2018), pp. 175–96.

[40] Halliwell, 'The Sound of Silence', p. 210.

[41] Emma Gallon, 'Narrativities in the Music of Thomas Adès' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Lancaster University, 2011), p. 268.



Ex. 4.1 *The Tempest*. (a) Interlocking 'fifths' motive throughout Act I in 'perfect' and 'imperfect' versions; (b) Act I, Scene 4, Caliban and Prospero's overlapping musical 'language' in modified 'fifths' motive

sequences can also be discerned.[42] In other references to this motive in the opera, especially in the ending, I consider the 'perfect' version to consist of alternating tones and perfect fifths, whether ascending or descending. In Ex. 4.1b we see that Caliban and Prospero's first dialogue presents identical intervallic content, a modified version of the 'fifths' material, thus illustrating their entanglement.

Before the ending of the opera, the passage that reflects most strongly on the status of Caliban's 'savage' language is his centrepiece Act II aria. Oakes's text follows Shakespeare closely, compressing 'Be not afear'd / This isle is full of noises / Sounds and sweet airs which give delight and hurt not' (III.ii.1492–3) to 'Friends, don't fear / the isle is full of noises / Sounds and voices / It's the spirits' (etc.). Adès's writing powerfully evokes Caliban's humanity and self-possession and is full of extraordinary lyricism. For Ian Bostridge, 'Caliban's capacity for a sort of nobility is knitted into his music and underlined in the plot', which he understood explicitly

[42] See also Scott Lee, 'Musical Signification in Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*' (unpublished PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2018), especially p. 150.

as expressing the postcolonial potential of the opera, something it 'seems at first sight to sidestep. In a sense, however, it pushes it to the limit.'[43] Caliban's lyrical aria is thrown into even sharper relief by its placing at the apex of frenzied ensemble passages, in which, drawing on all the power of the opera chorus's mob psychology, the orchestra and voices whip up into a wild, dissonant fever ('Higher and higher / Who's there? / It's air! / Haunted coast / It's a ghost'). Caliban enters unobtrusively into this chaos, singing 'Friends' on G_4 for twelve beats before rising to A_4 at the climactic moment when the orchestra erupts in a luxuriant A major, shown in Online Ex. 4.2 in reduction. (Caliban's vocal line is also dominated by the 'perfect' version of the 'fifths' motive, as indicated in brackets.)

In the play, Caliban's voice is associated with incoherence and inhumanity, his mother tongue demeaned to the status of brutish gabbling, a *langue barbare*. Not only is this counteracted by Oakes's removal of all these references, but so too is Caliban musically and vocally set apart in this lyrical, emotionally powerful aria. Halliwell's analysis reads in this moment that the ensemble is '"silenced" by Caliban's high A',[44] drawing attention not only to the metaphorical and literal power of Caliban's voice but implicitly also the fact that the power *to silence* is decentred from Prospero. My appraisal of the aria's effects admittedly rests on valorising standards of 'beautiful' sound in which conventional Western tonality is associated with positive qualities. If it does sound as 'a hymn to music itself, rather than the ravings of a drunk savage', as Massey describes it,[45] it is less comfortable to accept that we should not need Caliban to excel and delight in A major in order for his humanity to be rightfully acknowledged.

Caliban's ultimate failure in the play is rooted in an apparent unwillingness to transcend his station, written as simply exchanging one master for another ('I thy Caliban / For ay thy foot-licker', IV.i.1893–4). His claim for dominion ('This island's mine') is ridiculed in Shakespeare's characterisation but presented as a viable possibility in the opera – and one which will be fulfilled in the final scenes – partly by Oakes's firmer assertion of Sycorax as queen, not just mother.[46] The aria establishes Caliban's 'public' voice on the island – as distinct from his interactions

[43] Ian Bostridge, 'Me and My Monster', *Guardian*, 6 February 2004, Friday pages section, p. 8.

[44] Halliwell, 'The Sound of Silence', p. 212.

[45] Massey, *Thomas Adès in Five Essays*, p. 67.

[46] Oakes offers more detail about Sycorax than the play, although she is not physically present. Jarman's film provides a rare example of Sycorax being presented as an actual character. On the erasure of Sycorax in postcolonial *Tempests*, see Irene Lara, 'Beyond Caliban's Curses: The Decolonial Feminist Literacy of Sycorax', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 9/i (2007), 80–100.

with Prospero – as lucid, eloquent and compelling to the court (we hear Gonzalo address him as 'Sir', for example). In the opera's treatment of Stefano, Trinculo and Caliban's plot to usurp Prospero and establish Stefano as 'king', to which the narrative moves following the aria, Caliban is no dim fool; instead, as Bostridge put it, the other two 'are clearly Caliban's stooges'.[47] Oakes makes this explicit at the beginning of Act III when, although nominally supporting Stefano's bid for the throne, Caliban's aside positions him as the true puppet master: 'By my art you are deceived / Do your part, I'll be free.' The appropriation of the notion of 'art' from Prospero is a pointed reinforcement of Caliban's increased agency, as well as asserting that his freedom will come as a result of his own skill and cunning, not as a gift given from a 'benevolent' master.

In the opera's four distinct productions to date, the aesthetics of Caliban's physical appearance alternately work with and against these transformations in text and score. In Tom Cairns's Covent Garden productions (2004 and 2007), Bostridge's Caliban is not especially othered visually, wearing a distressed, shiny suit to match Simon Keenlyside's Prospero in his tattered suit jacket. In Ludger Engels's Budapest production (2016), Caliban and Prospero wore fully 'human' attire (trousers, brogues, sweaters and suits), Caliban in a flowery shirt, oversized sheepskin jacket and John Lennon sunglasses. Conversely, in both Jonathan Kent's (Santa Fe, 2006) and Robert Lepage's (Metropolitan Opera, 2012) productions, Caliban's empowerment, especially in his aria, is undercut by a reliance on 'savage' visual tropes. William Ferguson appeared barely clothed and dirtied at Santa Fe, and Alan Oke, singing at the Metropolitan Opera, as a feathered surrealist Papageno. Despite the fact that it is the Italian court who are the 'strangers' to the isle, in the opera's reconfiguration of Ariel and Caliban, most productions nonetheless have focused on the strangeness of their onstage bodies.[48] While I cannot here examine fully all the directorial choices, it is striking that none of the four productions opted to engage any form of colonial or postcolonial aesthetic. Even in the European *Regietheater*-inflected staging in Budapest, there seems to be little impetus for directors to engage with the opera's political potential.[49]

[47] Bostridge, 'Me and My Monster'.

[48] See Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, passim, and her treatment of the ideas of the 'stranger' and 'alien' in colonial encounters.

[49] I am not aware of how closely Adès and Oakes were involved with the staging of each production, although Adès often served as conductor, so I do not attribute the aesthetics to their control.

'Who was here?'

The opera's final scenes form the crux of the transformed destinies of Caliban, Ariel and Prospero. Adès and Oakes replace Shakespeare's solo Epilogue for Prospero with an entirely new scene that has no counterpart in the play. The action preceding the end itself is also substantially changed, consequently altering how the various subplots in the narrative are concluded. In the play, the end of Act V centres on the resolution of Prospero's relationship with the court and on Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage preparations, Ariel's freedom and Caliban's pardon from Prospero. Oakes divests these elements from one another: rather than crumble apologetically ('How fine my master is! I am afraid he will chastise me', V.i.2255–6), Caliban is absent entirely. The Italians' narratives are wrapped up in Adès's setting of a sentimental, passacaglia-style a cappella chorus, with only Antonio's bitter riposte souring the air of reconciliation.

This tableau-style finale has the air of an ending, but while it offers a conclusion to part of the narrative, it is followed by two more endings: Prospero's exit, and Caliban's and Ariel's final scene. The chorus is also perceptibly trite as an ending moment, because the opera so far has considerably diminished the significance of the plot threads now coming to an end. Gallon characterises the opera's structure as presenting 'four narrativities [which] overlap with each other and unfold at different rates'.[50] They are also palpably hierarchised. Miranda and Ferdinand's relationship functions in the play as a compelling dramatic catalyst for Prospero's transformation and redemption as father and Duke, but the vast majority of their interactions are cut in the opera (notably the opening scene of the play's Act III and the masque in Act IV). Ferdinand does not discover Miranda's name until the end of the opera's Act II, their romance distilled into the subsequent duet, which structurally concludes the business of their relationship at the end of Act II. Diluting the dramatic power of the Italians' narrative arc is also a strategy derived directly from classic postcolonial *Tempest*s such as Aimé Césaire's, reduced, as A. James Arnold argues, 'to the status of a secondary plot', and in which Césaire deliberately 'trivialized the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda'.[51]

Shakespeare affords Prospero the last word in every sense in his musing, stately Epilogue ('Now my charms are all o'erthrown / And what strength

[50] Gallon, 'Narrativities', pp. 283–4.

[51] A. James Arnold, 'Césaire and Shakespeare: Two Tempests', *Comparative Literature*, 30/iii (1978), 236–48 (pp. 242–3).

I have's mine own', Epilogue, 1–2). Excising this passage strips Prospero's final moments of magnanimous philosophical pondering; it is replaced with scattered remarks in the preceding scene ('Pride, pride, all will die') and his resignation to a bitter future ('I'll drown my book / I'll break my stave / I'll rule in Milan / Beside my grave'). For Prospero to exit here would be a show of resolute, if depressing, respectability – an impression amplified by Adès's setting of *ff* minor chords, heavy with brass, on 'stave'/ 'rule'/'Milan'. Instead, freeing Ariel with the breaking of his staff, he is suddenly bereft and unsteady, breathlessly pleading, 'Stay with me Ariel / Save me Ariel'. Prospero's dramatic arc tends to be discussed in terms of his move towards forgiveness, mercy and redemption, but these elements are barely perceptible in the concluding scenes.

Having radically altered how the themes of power and servitude guide the narrative, in its conclusion the opera focuses on affirming Caliban's and Ariel's futures, with Prospero no longer a presence on the island. Act III, Scene 5 presents Ariel's voice floating unseen, and only Caliban physically onstage, questioning what has gone before:

> Who was here?
> Have they disappeared?
> Were there others?
> Were we brothers?
> . . .
> They were human seeming
> I was dreaming.

Caliban's questioning suggests the possibility that the preceding action was illusory, an interpretation amplified in Robert Lepage's production, where the theatre-within-a-theatre conceit nests the idea of artifice within the entire narrative.[52] (Santa Fe's alfresco theatre, on the other hand, probably worked well to capture this space of imagination and freedom that Caliban and Ariel inhabit at the end.) For Heather Wiebe, Lepage's setting productively reflected what she felt to be the opera's innate hermeticism, its 'sense of enclosure, its airless and oppressive character', an effect 'of ossification'.[53] While I agree with this impression, Caliban's downstage

[52] Both Halliwell and Massey also discuss the affinities between Adès and Oakes's ending and the concluding parts of W. H. Auden's epic *Tempest*-inspired poem *The Sea and the Mirror* (1942–4), particularly in the latter's extraordinarily long soliloquy for Caliban's and Ariel's postscript, which also explores similar themes of theatricality and artifice. See Halliwell, 'The Sound of Silence', and Massey, *Thomas Adès in Five Essays*, pp. 62–92.

[53] Heather Wiebe, 'Prospero's Ossified Isle: Thomas Adès's *The Tempest*', *Opera Quarterly*, 30/i, (2014), 166–8 (p. 167).

emergence in the final scene, away from the false onstage theatre, to me rends open that claustrophobia. Alan Oke delivered his lines towards the audience, the only illuminated presence amid the vastness of the Metropolitan Opera's stage, faded to black.[54] Oakes suggested that the island is potentially an external manifestation of Prospero's psyche, but his absence from the ending works against this idea.[55] Oke's performance in particular struck me as a perfect embodiment of the utopian vision of his post-Prospero existence, suggesting conversely that if anything it is in *Caliban*'s imagination that the action has occurred.

The transition from Scenes 4 to 5 of Act III is marked by pervasive harmonic indeterminacy which lends weight to the feeling of slipping out of (or into?) reality. Example 4.2 provides an annotated reduction from Prospero's exit (Oakes's change from 'Now my charms are all o'erthrown' to 'Now I've no art') to Caliban's first line in Scene 5. The harmonic progression strongly implies a resolution in C major, but deviates at the last moment from a perfect fifth (D–A) to octave D♭s in the first bar of the last scene, a semitonal expansion outward indicated by arrows on Ex. 4.2. The effect, sonically and dramatically, is of dissolution, of suddenly entering a different world. The melodic content of the final scene is entirely suffused with interlocking presentations of the 'perfect' version of the 'fifths' motive, as indicated in brackets, which constitute the majority of the orchestral accompaniment until the end. Gallon summarises the importance of the 'Freedom' leitmotiv as 'growing to encapsulate different kinds of freedom as the work unfolds, namely, freedom in nature and love, and freedom from servitude, captivity and parental control'.[56] Its overwhelming presence in the ending is a sonic encapsulation, therefore, of these intersecting freedoms, heard in Caliban's long, lyrical lines and Ariel's voice heard singing only the vowels of their name (A-i-e).

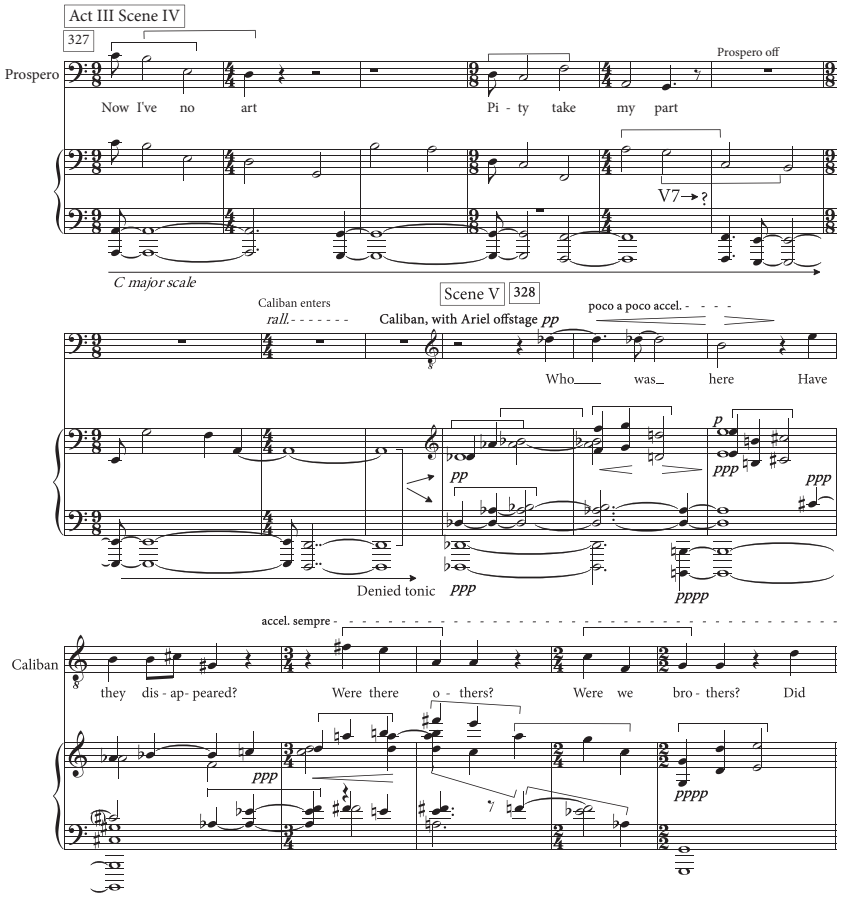
As the opera draws to a close, the dream/reality ambiguity persists. Ariel's insistence that they 'must be active in higher spheres' is fulfilled to the letter, freed from human language entirely and from humanity itself;[57]

[54] The passage in question can be found between 2:00:08 and 2:01:08 on the Metropolitan Opera's recording of *The Tempest*, produced by Robert Lepage and directed by Gary Halvorson, DVD (Deutsche Grammophon DVD 0040 073 4932, 2013).

[55] Oakes, in Archbold, 'Philip Hensher and Meredith Oakes in Conversation'. Jarman's film presents this interpretation with Prospero asleep in his crumbling manor. Ellis argues that 'this is only one version of England, which Prospero is attempting to dream his way out of'. 'Conjuring *The Tempest*', p. 280.

[56] Gallon, 'Narrativities', p. 266.

[57] Although it is beyond the bounds of my analysis here, there is considerable scope for investigations into how the category of 'human' is interrogated through this operatic Ariel, especially through the lens of recent work in posthumanism and on 'queering the non/human'. See e.g. Norren Giffney



Ex. 4.2 *The Tempest*, Act III, transition between Scenes 4 and 5, 327–328 +8, harmonic slippage from C to D♭, prevalence of interlocking perfect 'fifths' motive

they are 'the wind, an elemental force of nature'.[58] Caliban's position is equally though differently ambiguous. While Oakes's text hints at the restoration of a natural order, it is full of questions, stretching towards an unknown horizon still yet beyond; towards, in Waldo McNeir's poetic characterisation of Shakespeare's epilogues, 'a clouded but perceptible afterwards'.[59] Caliban's repeated self-naming is a vivid manifestation of

and Myra J. Hird, eds., *Queering the Non/human* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); and Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen, 'Has the Queer Ever Been Human?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 21/ii–iii (2015), 183–207. Further exploration of how Adès and Oakes's Ariel plays into tensions between posthumanist feminism and decolonial critique would also be apt.

58 Adès, interview with Andrew Ford on 'The Music Show', *ABC Radio National*, 9 October 2010, quoted in Dominic Wells, 'Plural Styles, Personal Styles: The Music of Thomas Adès', *Tempo*, 66/260 (2012), 2–14 (p. 7).

59 Waldo McNeir, 'Shakespeare's Epilogues', *CEA Critic*, 47/i–ii (1984), 7–16 (p. 15).

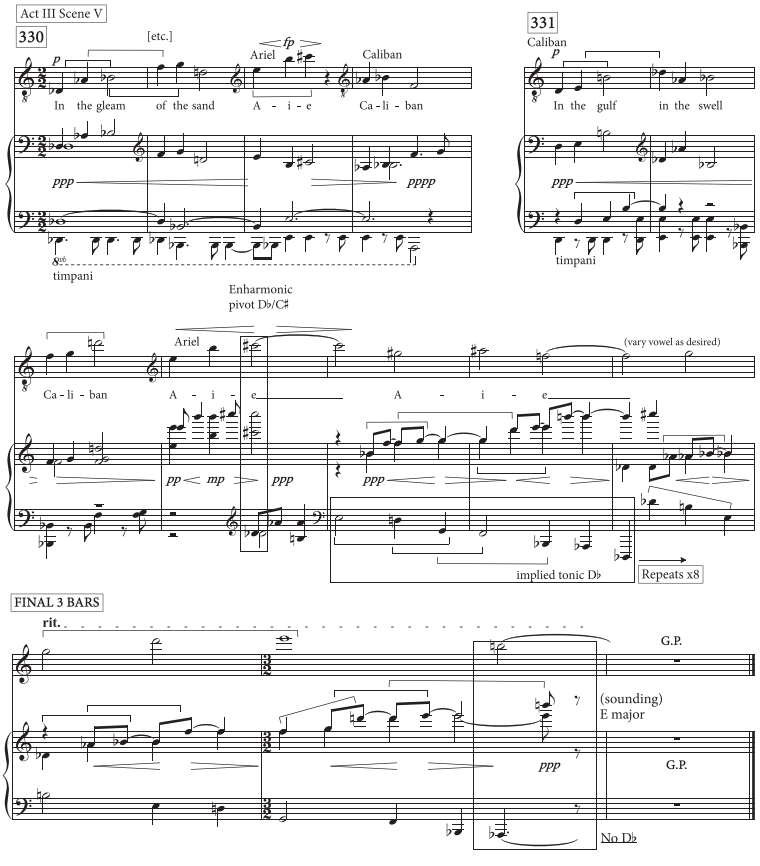
his liberation, and the uncertainty of his future is full of hope: it is Caliban 'in the gleam of the sand / in the hiss of the spray / in the deep of the bay / in the gulf in the swell'. In Priyamvada Gopal's recent study of resistance in the British Empire, she challenges the notion that liberty flowed primarily from 'progressive' imperial agents to its subjects, wherein 'decolonization emerges *ab nihilo*, magical consequences of imperial policies developed in a vacuum immune to anticolonial pressures'.[60] In the opera, unlike Ariel, Prospero does not free Caliban. We could believe, then, that his freedom is a product of the 'anti-colonial pressures' he has applied in the form of sustained resistance to Prospero. It is his island, and he *is* the island, but the implications of both the opera's past action and the futures it barely hints at are left deliberately foggy.

Unlike the disruption and long-term scars that colonialism leaves behind, an operatic utopia is achieved in the space of a few bars. If for much of the opera Caliban's identity is still irrevocably framed through his relationship with Prospero, this ending presents us with what Gayatri Spivak's classic essay on subalternity describes as a utopian political ideal, where 'oppressed subjects speak, act, and know for themselves'.[61] Caliban's voice seems to evaporate as he repeats his name for the last time, reaching a falsetto D_5 which merges seamlessly with Ariel's entry. Example 4.3 shows Caliban's and Ariel's final moments. The unanticipated flatward shift to D flat in the earlier scene transition proves to be more than a momentary disjunction, returning in the bass register as a prominent pedal in the final passages. Brackets show the continued presence of interlocking 'fifths' motives. Beginning at 331, a bass progression repeated nine times descends from E_3 to rest on $D♭_1$, tonal ambiguity being maintained through its enharmonically functioning also as C♯. The last iteration of the bass progression forgoes a final D♭ to rest on a (sounding) first-inversion E major chord, supported by Ariel's last notes, but the music evaporates, not resting in any one tonality.

I find it unsatisfying to believe that the fictional world of the opera is *doubly* fictional, dreamed up by Caliban (or Prospero). Instead, we as spectators, scholars, performers and directors can participate in Caliban's space of imagination as he wonders what might have been and what could still be.

[60] Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 11.

[61] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 212–314 (p. 276).



Ex. 4.3 Caliban's and Ariel's final lines, ambiguous harmonies and interlocking perfect 'fifths' motive throughout the ending of *The Tempest*

As Caliban sings and voices himself as a person in his own right, his own mind is free to wander and stretch into the 'clouded afterwards', luxuriating in the sound of Ariel's voice lingering just beyond the falling curtain.

Tempestuous Futures

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that greater critical attention to this *Tempest*'s intersection with the many literary, critical and philosophical afterlives of Shakespeare's play is needed. Perhaps especially in light of Adès's reluctance to engage openly in the political discourses in which many of his works inescapably participate, my analyses here have aimed to open up paths for historically and culturally informed approaches to this opera and to

Adès's music in general. Examining *The Tempest* in this manner offers a valuable example to situate operatic analysis productively within broader discourses of colonial legacies, race and politics in modern Britain and further afield. Halliwell proposes that Caliban's and Ariel's liberated ending can be interpreted as 'suggesting the ephemeral nature and ultimate failure and, indeed, final silencing of the colonial project'.[62] Yet the more I return to the opera, the more it seems that its many ambiguities – especially the open horizons of the ending – reflect not a 'final silencing' but a potentially productive, unstable space in which we might probe the symbolic, legal, psychological and physical violences that the 'colonial project' continues to exert today.[63] As Nadine El-Enany has recently demonstrated, moreover, Britain's imperial past is more than a matter for historians; she argues that through racialised legal practices the country is a 'contemporary colonial space'.[64] When Caliban was appropriated for the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics, it was as part of an atemporal, imagined space of British identity that recast the 'isle full of noises' not as an exoticised location in a colonialist fantasy but as Britain itself.[65] For Lamming, Braithwaite and others, Caliban functioned in the 1960s as a vehicle to interrogate their Caribbean identity at the tail end of British colonial rule, but sixty years later his place in the director Danny Boyle's vision of universal hope contrasted uneasily with the ceremony's staged arrival of the *Empire Windrush* as a symbol of British 'inclusivity'.[66] As Caliban thus continues to be invoked symbolically in divergent contexts, and with productions of and music inspired by the play not appearing to be lessening in popularity, there is much room to consider how as teachers, scholars and listeners we might use this operatic *Tempest* to think through constructions of past and present, and the myriad possibilities for it to enrich musical, social and historical knowledge in the twenty-first century.

[62] Halliwell, 'The Sound of Silence', p. 215.

[63] Alex J. Gapud's recent ethnographic study in Bristol gives an excellent indication of perceptions of empire today: 'Displacing Empire: Aphasia, "Trade", and Histories of Empire in an English City', *History and Anthropology*, 31/iii (2020), 331–51.

[64] Nadine El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 28.

[65] This segment of the ceremony was titled 'Green and Pleasant Land' and featuring Kenneth Branagh dressed as Isambard Kingdom Brunel and reciting Caliban's Act II 'Be not afear'd' speech, accompanied by Elgar's 'Nimrod'.

[66] Akala also scrutinises the 2012 Games, referring to the BBC's coverage of the men's 200 m final, before which a problematic short film was broadcast on the subject of evolutionary biology, eugenics and athletic performance; see *Natives: Race, Class, and the Ruins of Empire* (London: Two Roads, 2018). The subsequent *Windrush* scandal of 2018 also paints this part of the ceremony in a very different light.