Thirty years of theories of intertextuality, inaugurated by Julia Kristeva in her ground-breaking work of the late 1960s and early 1970s, have made literary critics acutely aware of the potency of appropriations of earlier works in the formulation of political critiques against existing power structures. The act of taking extant discourses and reworking them so as to turn such discourses against the power they serve to legitimize, has become a frequently celebrated instance of postcolonial cultural politics. A problem that is frequently raised, however, by non-Western literary critics when discussing oppositional approaches to canonical European literary works, is that of assimilation. Non-Western critics agree that it is necessary to offer resistant readings of the Western canon, angled from a non-Western point of view, in order to open up new avenues of cultural perception and to change the long-standing cultural legitimization of socio-economic practices that disadvantage the non-European world. Such reappropriations of European literary works carry with them the danger, however, of being contaminated by a set of cultural paradigms that the appropriators originally intended to criticize. How is it possible to make one’s own a text from the imperial culture without absorbing, through the very process of critical confrontation with texts that have legitimized imperialism, the distorting structures of perception that the act of appropriation intends to combat? How does one, for instance, appropriate texts by Shakespeare, a dominant icon of Western culture but at the same time actively reinterpreted and reappropriated many times, both in the Western and non-Western worlds? Thus, the Indian critic Ania Loomba discusses the perils of appropriating Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* for an anti-imperialist project, commenting that: “The aesthetic is too valuable to be surrendered without a struggle... and too contaminated... to be appropriated as it is” (142).

The impulse behind such reflections is a concrete one, namely, the imperative to continue with a project of cultural, economic, and political transformation in the non-European world, and the concomitant need for caution vis-à-vis appropriated cultural models that may hamper the process of change rather than advance it. This need is all the more pressing as it becomes clear to what extent neo-colonialist structures continue to exert pressure on the culture, economies, and politics of developing countries. Even the academy has displayed its inclination to co-opt the “New Literatures” as an annex to the traditional canon.1

In this paper I wish to address the question of postcolonial cultural resistance through strategies of reappropriation and active reworking by looking at a concrete example of transformation: that of the play greeted so skeptically by Loomba, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and the 1969 version produced by the Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire, *Une Tempête*. Césaire’s rewriting of Shakespeare can, I
think, stand as an example of how change can be performed so as to resist assimilation or recuperation, of how the process of change can generate a continuing process of cultural transformation.2 This specific case study is all the more significant given the persisting dominance of Shakespeare as epitomizing European culture and the symptomatic character of attempts to confront that domination: as Helen Gilbert observes, “Writing back to The Tempest is by no means new; in fact this project has become so widespread in postcolonial literatures that it would seem politically passé were it not for the ‘bardolatry’ that continually revalidates the imperial canon while excluding more local texts” (29). I will argue that Césaire’s appropriation of Shakespeare successfully eludes assimilation because the Martiniquan dramatist knows how to exploit the subversive potential in the Bard himself. The problem of assimilation is immediately manifest in Césaire’s Une Tempête. As soon as one attends a performance of the play or opens a copy of the script, one is confronted by relations of colonial and postcolonial dependence in the very title of Césaire’s drama: “D’après Shakespeare. Adaptation pour un théâtre nègre” (7). The title announces first a relation of dependence, and only secondarily a process of change. From the outset, it would appear, the play conforms to a certain history of derivative, secondary types of non-Western cultural production, parasitic upon Europe. The universal figure of Shakespeare casts his shadow over the particular and local “théâtre nègre.” It would thus appear justified to ask whether Césaire, in appropriating Shakespeare as his model, albeit in order to displace the Bard’s cultural centrality by means of a new setting and insertion in a new cultural paradigm, has not simply confirmed stereotypes of the marginality and parochiality of Third World literatures.

Certainly, similar criticisms have been made before of Césaire, notably in the context of his concept of cultural regeneration under the banner of “la Négritude,” in particular by Maryse Condé. In an important interrogation of Césaire’s ethic, she asked whether the creation of a black aesthetic did not in fact imply the assumption of a cultural paradigm, which is itself a function of the colonial relationship—that of the Negro, a concept created by the West, she claimed—such that the process of liberation was hindered rather than accelerated by the model chosen (Condé 413). The tenor of this criticism was taken up in the specific context of The Tempest adaptation by other writers such as Georges Ngal, who asked in 1970 whether, “si Shakespeare est toujours aux côtés [de Césaire] celui-ci a-t-il vraiment réussi à introduire son univers dans l’île de Prospero?” (179). Ngal accuses Césaire of having fallen into the trap of an “imitation trop poussée du dramaturge élisabéthain” (179), which prevents the adaptation from escaping from the influence of its model. This is, however, an objection, which the play itself goes some way to answering. It is namely in the play’s active harnessing of elements of transformation already at work in Shakespeare’s earlier drama in order to enact an ongoing process of change, I would suggest, that Césaire’s text evades recuperation by an immobilizing European cultural paradigm.

Responses to Césaire’s creative and iconoclastic translation of Shakespeare can be divided into two groups. The first consists of the critical reception of the play
in the years immediately following and, sometimes more recently, its first production in 1969. The second belongs to a set of revisionary readings of the cultural impact, particularly in the Third World, of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The problems of assimilation and recuperation, however, have received no adequate treatment in either of these categories of critical responses to *Une Tempête*.

The first group tends to work with an inadequately problematized and analyzed version of Shakespeare, a version of the classic that serves merely as a foil for Césaire's reworking, and thus remains intact as an exemplar of Western cultural hegemony. The second group, broadly speaking, concentrates on the diachronic contrasts between respective reappropriations by Third World writers, playwrights, and poets of the Caliban/Prospero duo, necessarily giving scant attention to Césaire's appropriation of Shakespeare, the emphasis being upon a contestatory tradition. Once again, the Shakespearean text tends to remain curiously inert in this configuration. In so far as the critics have neglected, till now, to present an alternative version of Shakespeare in their examination of the particular Césaire-Shakespeare dynamic—a version of Shakespeare that has been developed coherently elsewhere in literary studies by critics working with new historicist and cultural materialist models—they have failed to address one half of a dialectical relationship between Shakespeare's and Césaire's texts. A closer examination of the truly dynamic nature of this intertextual relationship can, I think, do much to counter accusations of assimilation or recuperation in Césaire's artistic practice, thereby contributing to a more accurate picture of oppositional cultural practice in the Caribbean.

The problems inherent in the extant analyses of the Césaire-Shakespeare dynamic are, it seems, of two orders. The first is the tendency to leave Shakespeare analyzed and to use the Shakespearean text, when reading Césaire, as a mere label in opposition to Césaire's strategies. Even as detailed and thorough a reading of Césaire's modification to the Shakespearean text as that of Gérard Durozoi identifies countless elements of Shakespeare's drama merely in order to demonstrate Césaire's novelty—but without articulating the links which make of those elements of the original a functioning whole productive of social meanings. This (wholly understandable) bias in Césaire's criticism gives rise to the second problem: the apparent readiness to take for granted the ahistorical, extra-contextual status of Shakespeare, his "unmatched universality" to quote one reading of Césaire's Shakespearean adaptation (Smith 398-99). Georges Ngal, typically, comments, "Shakespeare est un pretexte. C'est du drame des Negres qu'il s'agit" ("Aimé Césaire" 173). Such a move, in foregrounding the political context of the Césaire rewriting, displaces Shakespeare from the analysis altogether, in a sort of Bloomian patricide which, paradoxically, simultaneously confirms the universal status and authority of the literary Father to the extent that no alternative reading of paternity is offered. Thomas A. Hales' claim that "il n'est point besoin d'avoir lu la Tempête pour comprendre sa [Césaire's] version de la piece" seems to result in his own lack of interest in offering a reading of Shakespeare's text ("Sur Une Tempête" 24). Lilian Pestre de Almeida's brief mention of Shakespeare's "wit" functions merely as the counterpoise to Césaire's verbal creativity ("Un puzzle" 124). Similarly, she
notes the “ambiguity” of the Shakespearean text and the rich multiplicity of its “codes” but declares her intention not to probe further in that direction (“Le jeu du monde” 94-95). Her rendering of these “ambiguities” reveals an attitude similar to that of Ngal, in a commentary upon Césaire’s Une Saison au Congo, where he describes Lumumba as “un être Shakespearien: le grotesque, le pathétique se côtoient sans se gêner” (“Le théâtre” 634). Such a characterization arises out of a concept of literature according to which the work of art is an artifact which reconciles opposites, harmonizes conflicts, remaining thus at safe distance from the turbulence of social and political life. Shakespeare, in these readings, continues to figure, albeit implicitly, as the poet of perennial human questions and universal values, a status he possesses unchallenged across European culture. Daninos claims, in his analysis of Césaire’s play, that Shakespeare “évoque métaphoriquement les passions qui agitent le coeur de l’homme en tout temps et en tout pays et qui rendent sa vie si tumultueuse” (153), and sees in the original text a purely metaphysical, and thus ahistorical, problem. Durozoi’s attribution to Shakespeare “l’ambition de synthétiser sur scène le sens total de l’histoire” is symptomatic of this trend (14). Such readings neutralize the historicity, the instability, and productive possibilities of the Shakespearean text, thus eliding one half of the rewriting operation Césaire undertakes in conflictual partnership with his predecessor dramatist. Even a critic such as Eric Robert Livingstone, who indicates his awareness of recent reappraisals of The Tempest, does not integrate such analyses into his own reading of Césaire (192).

One reading of Césaire’s adaptation, that of Joan Dayan, is notable for its insistence upon the way in which Shakespeare’s text is reinvented by Césaire’s, such that the latter’s text takes its place in “a process of continuing complications” (140) of Shakespeare. Dayan draws attention to Shakespeare’s “subversive decentering of power and legitimacy” (129) and of his “[grasp of] the full irony of the colonial experience” (128), but in such a way as to reinforce the reification under which the Shakespearean text labors in these analyses. The decentering described remains ahistorical (decentered for whom? in the context of which cultural paradigms of otherness? against the background of which colonial practices?) and purely immanent, produced by an academic reading of the text but hardly grounded in a real process of work upon the linguistic strategies which legitimize colonization. The question of the political moment in which and for which the Shakespeare text was produced is consistently elided in the context of the Shakespeare-Césaire relationship, thus flattening out what is in fact a dialectical process of productive instability. This discrepancy is all the more surprising in critics speaking of a postcolonial dramatist who relentlessly obliges them to address his own political context and engagement. Ngal says that “L’intention de Césaire est donc visible: le cri de Caliban contre Prospero est celui du Nègre dressé contre l’Occident. Prospero, c’est l’Occident, Caliban, le Nègre. Mais derrière celui-ci se profile l’immense cortège de tous les sous-développés du Tiers-Monde placés face à ce même Occident” (“Aimé Césaire” 171). Hale provides more specific contextual indices for Césaire’s dramatic aesthetics, reading them in the light of criticisms made of Césaire in the Assemblée Nationale for inadequate display of gratitude for gifts of
Western culture ("Sur Une Tempête" 33-35)—a paternalist, colonialist strategy already modelled in Shakespeare's drama. Une Tempête has likewise been read in the context of Martinique's continuing dependence upon France and the political ambiguity inherent in that situation, and Césaire himself pointed towards the Black American allusions in the play. Such contextualisation is, however, absent with regard to the Shakespeare of Césaire's rewriting, an absence, I will argue, which elides the productive mainspring of the process of rewriting undertaken by Césaire.

The tendency to accept implicitly the unquestioned status of Shakespeare's play The Tempest as a cultural artifact immune to critical scrutiny when addressing the issue of its adaptation for a Caribbean context, is deeply problematic. The character of Shakespeare, as a cultural icon, has played a role that is by no means negligible in the maintenance of the ideologies underpinning colonialism in its nineteenth- and twentieth-century manifestations. Several studies have shown how much the triangle of Caliban, Ariel, and Prospero has been entangled with the development and maintenance of European imperialism throughout a four century-long history. The elision of Shakespeare as an object of analysis in the discussion of Césaire's Une Tempête implies (paradoxically, in the context of a play which energetically contests colonial hegemony) the acceptance as paradigmatic just that "universal" standing which justified the teaching of Shakespeare on the curriculum of colonial schools as a bearer of values reinforcing the acceptance of colonial ideology. To leave unquestioned the ideological employment of Shakespeare is tantamount to tolerating the ongoing import of foreign values into the subaltern culture by the colonizing power.

The ideologically laden character of such "universal values," such as the opposition of "nature and culture" or "chaos and order," can be illustrated by an example from the prominent critic Frank Kermode. He states, "Caliban is the ground of the play. His function is to illuminate by contrast the world of art, nurture, civility" and further, that "Caliban represents . . . nature without benefit of nurture; Nature opposed to an Art which is man's power over the created world and over himself; nature divorced from grace, the senses without the mind . . . he is a 'naturalist' by nature, without access to the art that makes love out of lust; . . . he is born to slavery and not to freedom, of a vile and not of a noble union; and his parents represent a vile natural magic which is the antithesis of Prospero's benevolent Art" (Kermode xxiv-xxv). Kermode's assumption that values such as "nature" and "culture" function on a universal, non-specific plane elides the political character of the oppositional relations he accepts as structuring the play's meanings and the real import of such structures in the culture of imperialism. G. Wilson Knight is more explicit in speaking of Britain's "colonizing, especially her will to raise savage peoples from superstition and blood-sacrifice, taboos and witchcraft and the attendant fears and slaveries, to a more enlightened existence. Little ingenuity is needed to find correspondences with Prospero, Ariel and Caliban" (255). These are the types of mechanisms that go unquestioned when, for example, Ngal uses a supposedly "Shakespearean" critical terminology of harmonious coexistence of opposites which sits uneasily alongside the same critic's clear exposition of the manifestly political
content and militant intention of Césaire’s dramatic writing. The implicit assumption of the unproblematic status of the Shakespearean text evident in the extant critical reception of Césaire’s *Une Tempête* is a strange capitulation to the claims of European culture to be universally valid, a capitulation paradoxical among critics explicitly concerned to privilege the particularity of their own cultures over the imposition of cultural norms from Europe. Moreover, this reading of Shakespeare elides an important aspect of the dynamic generating Césaire’s own critic of Western culture and his dynamic privileging of Third World cultural heritages celebrated by “Négritude” and its avatars. Such a reading of Shakespeare neglects the possibility that Césaire’s own situation as a writer in a very particular context led him to a perception, perhaps only partial, perhaps intuitive rather than historically or theoretically elaborated, but nonetheless crucial for his own response to Shakespeare, of the Renaissance dramatist’s own particularity. Césaire’s rendition of Shakespeare draws attention to the points where Shakespeare’s text is anchored in a set of strategies which are themselves responding to the contradictory demands and pressures of an historical context. Indeed, I will attempt to show that Césaire’s text, in its difference from Shakespeare’s, is generated out of those very points of contradiction; that the twentieth century politicized version of Shakespeare gains its creative impulse from a sensitive reading of the points at which Shakespeare’s drama is not universal, but rather intensely particular, and thereby unavoidably political.

Césaire’s own reading of *The Tempest* reveals a very different appreciation of Shakespearean drama from that of most of his critics: “J’ai essayé de démythifier la Tempête... En relisant la pièce j’ai été frappé par le totalitarisme de Prospero... Je m’insurge lorsqu’on me dit que c’est l’homme du pardon. Ce qui est essentiel chez lui, c’est la volonté de puissance.” It is hardly surprising that Césaire as a Député for Martinique and as the author of two plays about colonial and postcolonial power struggles, *La Tragédie du Roi Christophe* and *Une Saison au Congo*, should have been sensitive to the imbrication of the dramatic text in relations of power. Césaire as a reader (and subsequently as an adaptor of Shakespeare, I hope to show) brings the question of power back into understandings of the Elizabethan dramatist. This may appear to be a platitude today, but is startlingly contemporary when one considers what Shakespeare criticism was saying as a general rule in the 1960s. Listen to Anne Barton, for example, praising Prospero’s ethics of pardon: “Prospero stands, through much of the play, as a successful substitute for heaven. As a judge of good and evil, handing out reward for the one and punishment for the other, he is accurate and scrupulously fair. This is the way the gods should act” (44). In contrast, Césaire’s reading of *The Tempest* produced a Prospero who, in opposition to the moral high-ground occupied by Shakespeare’s character, proclaims unashamedly, “C’est mon humeur—Je suis la Puissance,” and implements that power by means of an “arsenal anti-émeutes” (46-47, 77). Such a reading, rather than distorting Shakespeare, as critics claimed upon seeing Césaire’s play, liberates the latent conjunction between spectacle and power in what Shakespeare’s Prospero with apparent euphemism, but also surprising directness, refers to as “My potent Art” (5.1.50).
In this context, an alternative genesis of Césaire's adaptation of Shakespeare needs to be proposed. Césaire's *Une Tempête* harnessed, indeed was generated by the fact that it identifies the way the original play was grounded in the conflicts and contradictions of a highly politicized context. A reading of that context can help to appreciate to what extent Shakespeare's text was an unstable artifact rather than the satisfyingly dramatic resolution of disparate destinies and political strife which traditional criticism has seen in the play. Just as Césaire's earlier plays, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* and *Une Saison au Congo*, arose out of historical conflicts, and were themselves polemical interventions in an ongoing history, so *Une Tempête* is triggered by Césaire's identification of a conflict structuring Shakespeare's dramatic art in *The Tempest*. The the presence of this conflict and its concomitant, the possibility of change, generate the transformation which Césaire's play both embodies and thematises.

The multiple facets of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are condensed in the wedding masque presented by Prospero for the two young lovers. In this performance-within-the-performance, the audience is presented with an image of its own docile acceptance of the values advanced by the play. Prospero constantly reminds Miranda and Ferdinand of their duty to observe codes of chastity. Prospero's subsequent harping upon chastity during the masque performance, echoed by the masque's enactment of the successful struggle between turbulent desire (Venus and Cupid) and chaste wealth and harmony (Iris and Ceres), aims to curtail the distractions of desire between the young spectators, in favor of attention towards the performance, in which the audience sees itself reflected as cooperating in the production of social order rather than anarchy. Miranda and Ferdinand's docility as an audience is in itself a display of social docility in which potentially turbulent desire is channelled into the productivity of docile social relationships. The young couple's obedient attention thus confirms Prospero's power as master of ceremonies, as a producer of socially potent performances of ideological interpellation. Prospero's masque performance of "a contract of true love" (4.1.133) effectively embodies his powerful strategies to "enact my present fancies" as he himself says (4.1.121-22).

The real audience watching this play-within-the-play are in turn offered a dynamic portrayal of their own response to the play, which, it is implied, will be equally docile. *The Tempest* was performed at the court of James I of England in 1611 and in 1613 on the occasion of the strategic marriage of James' daughter, Elizabeth, to the most powerful Protestant prince of North Europe, the Prince Elector of the Palatinate. In this context, the play presented the audience with dramatized and performed attitudes of docility towards royal power, together with the performance of the acceptance of such attitudes. Prospero's god-like omnipotence as king of the island reflected James' own claims to divine authority from well before his accession to the English throne or onwards, in particular in his treatise *Basilikon Doron* (1599). In the figure of Prospero as peacemaker and reconciler of enemy factions, audiences would have detected allusions to James' achievement of peace with Spain shortly after his accession to the throne. The spectators would have also understood Prospero's strategies of diplomatic reconciliation as an allegory.
of James’ aspirations to unify Scotland and England in a single British nation. Yet if
the play harnessed the political potential upon James’ brief popularity as the engineer
of an alliance between England and the most important Protestant prince on the
continent, it also alluded to James’ loss of his recently deceased son, Henry, who
was popular with the English people for ostensibly displaying a militant Protestantism
in a way his father, the king, did not. The play alludes to Henry’s very recent death
by suggesting that just as Alonso regains, at the moment of the discovery of Ferdinand
and Miranda in the grotto, the son he initially thought to have lost in the shipwreck,
the marriage of Elizabeth and Frederick compensates for the much lamented loss
of Prince Henry. Thus the marriage permitted James to appear as the executor of
his deceased son’s plans for a grand Protestant alliance, but one based on diplomacy
rather than military undertakings. Equally, the felicitous tale of the happily resolved
shipwreck was replete with references to the Virginia plantations, a project supported
by Henry with the design of establishing a Protestant counterweight to Spanish
activities in the Americas.9 Once again, it was the father who was presented as
achieving aims acceptable to the Protestant party. He is rallying behind the son, by
means of diplomatic methods favoured by the father. The play thus offers various
positive images of James and at the same time presents a figure of audience
acceptance of an ideology of approbation of the sovereign.

However, Prospero’s production of the marriage masque comes to an abrupt
end as he is reminded of Caliban’s imminent uprising. More importantly, The Tempest
terminates with a curious epilogue in which Prospero, addressing the audience,
admits his powerlessness as controller of theatrical reality: “Gentle breath of yours,
my sails / Must fill, or else my project fails / Which was to please” (Epilogue, 11-13).
Just as the abrupt termination of the Prospero’s masque is accompanied by a
meditation upon the illusory character of theatrical representation, so Prospero’s
transgression of the “frame” of the theatrical universe, when he acknowledges the
presence of the audience, constitutes a reduction of performance to mere spectacle.
The ideological interpellation, which Prospero so masterfully wielded, appears, at
the moment when he addresses the real audience, to be a less than certain
achievement. The audience, it seems, possesses a greater degree of agency than
hitherto apparent from the play’s figuration of spectator coercibility. This is abundantly
clear in Prospero’s statement that the play’s action cannot be closed unless the
audience grants its approval; that is, the goal of Prospero’s machinations, his ultimate
reinstatement as Duke of Milan, which constitutes the narrative closure of the
drama, is entirely dependent upon audience ratification. If Prospero’s masque
portrayed the audience’s role as one of docile acceptance of an aesthetic of flattery
of royalty, the closing lines of The Tempest radically destabilize such functions and
transfer power back to the spectators. Shakespeare’s play thus simultaneously offers
the audience a spectacle of flattery of the sovereign before whom it was performed;
yet at the very moment of including a figural indication of audience response within
the ideological spectacle, so as to enact interpellation at work, it necessarily drew
attention to the merely spectacular, and thus illusory nature of the theatrical
representation. From the very moment of presenting the audience with a figure of
its own docile consumption of ideology, the play revealed its dependence upon audience cooperation in what transpired to be a contractual relationship.

This instability in *The Tempest* points to tensions around the person of James I, which had been increasingly evident since his accession to the throne in 1603 upon the death of Elizabeth. As a Scot, he was regarded with suspicion, and his policy of ostentatiously lavishing favors on a small group of Scottish courtiers did not help matters. James soured the general population by his grudging participation in or complete absence from public celebrations such as his royal entry to London upon his accession to the crown, or the funeral procession for his highly popular son Henry, withdrawing from the public eye not unlike the ill-advised Prospero prior to the loss of his dukedom (1.1.70ff). James’s diplomatic endeavors to make peace with Spain made him into a supporter of the Catholic cause in the eyes of many who desired a more militant association with the Protestant states on the continent. James had increasing difficulty persuading Parliament to grant him funding for his lavish spending, and after the failure of his efforts to gain monies for the celebrations around creation of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales in 1610, he effectively ruled without Parliament from 1611 to 1621—reigning alone not unlike Prospero on the island. These tensions would become particularly acute as James’s son Henry, especially since becoming Prince of Wales a year before the first performances of *The Tempest*, began increasingly to be associated with the radical Protestant party at court. When James married his daughter, Elizabeth, to the Protestant Elector of the Palatinate, Frederick, some of these conflicts were allayed. With the eruption of the Overbury affair in 1616 and the execution of Ralegh in 1618 James’s public image would be irretrievably damaged. *The Tempest* is thus a devious drama, simultaneously flattering the king and winking at factions of the court, and large sectors of the wider population, who did not favour what they perceived as temporizing and pro-Catholic policies. Shakespeare appears to have been writing for the multiple public Sartre declared to be the motive force behind political theatre, and which was certainly present in the court of James and the theatre-going public. Clearly, far from representing simply a figure of pardon and justice, Prospero is a ruler whose power is deeply ambiguous, his diplomatic talents hiding a will to power, which in turn hides his uncertain command of his subjects’ approval. Shakespeare’s play portrays the will to power at work in the process of colonization, the coercive role of theatre in the maintenance of power, and the inherent instability of such power.

Césaire, it seems, sensed the contradictions in Shakespeare’s play, and worked to foreground them, having Prospero describe, for instance, “le spectacle de ce monde de demain: de raison, de beauté, d’harmonie, dont, à force de volonte, j’ai jeté le fondement” (67): the harmony achieved by diplomacy, but belied by strategies of power, and in turn undermined by the illusory character of spectacle, are all present in this one statement by the master of the island. As Lilian Pestre de Almeida has commented, Césaire “explicite, ôtant l’ambivalence” (“Le jeu” 94) in Shakespeare’s play—but in such a way as to amplify conflict, rather than to resolve it. In other words, the half-hidden Shakespearean contradictions between spectacular power and the spectators’ power of veto are levered wide open by Césaire’s rewriting
of the earlier text, to display a fully developed crisis of power: “Puissance! Puissance! Hélas! Tout cela se passera un jour comme l’écume, comme la nuée, comme le monde. Et puis qu’est-ce que la puissance si je ne peux dompter mon inquiétude! allons! Ma puissance a froid” (71). Prospero’s famous meditation upon the illusions of theater, and indirectly, upon the illusions of the spectacles of power, is compressed by Césaire into a realization that power itself is an illusion, an impossible goal.

Subversion of the image of the powerful king of the island is operated in Shakespeare’s play by means of the interrogation of theatrical convention, by overstepping and thus dissolving the “frames” of theatrical illusion. This tactic is taken up by Césaire when he too foregrounds the artifices of theatrical performance by opening Une Tempête with a distribution of roles. The production of the play becomes part of the performance, as the Meneur du jeu nominates various actors to play the parts of the respective characters. This replies to Shakespeare’s Prospero, by usurping the power of the master of the island. For where Prospero “rais[ed] [a] sea-storm” (1.2.178), it is Césaire’s Meneur du jeu who proclaims “Mais il y en a un que je choisis: Cest toi! Tu comprends, c’est la Tempête. Il me faut une tempête à tout casser” (9). The Meneur du jeu, clearly outside of the fictional world of play and yet on the stage, orchestrates a tempest removed from the control of Prospero. Prospero’s power is “broken” from the very beginning of the performance, in an iconoclastic move, which seizes upon the relativization of theatrical illusion emergent only at the close of Shakespeare’s play. Furthermore, the distribution of roles demonstrates the arbitrary character of social power and status, undermining in advance Prospero’s racist generalizations about “les sauvages” (72). In this way, Césaire takes up Shakespeare’s signalling of the fragility of the theatrical undertaking, itself a function of political contradictions within the Jacobean audience, in order to turn these contradictions back upon the racial power relationships Shakespeare appears to have implicitly cast into question in an earlier context. The process of rewriting is a performative demonstration of a process of accelerating political change.

Prospero’s admission of dependence upon the audience dismantles the entire preceding performance of power. This collapse of illusory power, however, is prefigured shortly before the close of the play, when the beneficent white magician admits to his hearers the assembled nobility of Milan and Naples, “This thing of darkness / I acknowledge mine” (5.1.278-79). Caliban is thus objectified and demonized, yet simultaneously, Prospero, in assuming ownership, also reveals Caliban’s central role in the reconstruction of his ducal identity, just as he had earlier acknowledged that his island kingdom reposed upon Caliban’s labor: “We cannot miss him. He does make our fire, / Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us” (1.2.313-15). This fleeting admission of the master’s dependence upon the slave can perhaps also be read as an avowal of the constructed nature of the stereotypes of primitive exoticism and a recognition of the extent to which images of alterity were implicated in English identity in the Jacobean age. What appears to be a marginal slip in the dramatic narrative of Prospero’s power is seized upon, however, by Césaire, to become the central axis of Une Tempête. It is
this relationship, with its deep complexity, that becomes the focus for audience identification in a drama conceived, as Césaire explicitly states, “pour un théâtre nègre” (7). The instability here resides in the stalemated struggle between Prospero and Caliban, where the colonial master remains on the island, in contrast to his Shakespearean predecessor, to overcome the seed of doubt sowed in his own capacity to master the underling, a seed sowed by Caliban’s unbending will to resistance. Césaire has Prospero say: “Eh bien moi aussi je te hais! / Car tu es celui par qui pour / la première fois j’ai douté de / moi-même” (90). Césaire shows that “This thing of mine” is not just the slave as an object to be possessed, but also the colonial relationship which structures the very identity of the oppressor, making it impossible for the latter to abandon power without a loss of selfhood. It is this deadlock which contributes to the durability of the colonial relationship, such that the end of Césaire’s play offers no resolution or termination of colonial power, but, very much in a Brechtian mode, leaves the audience to identify with a situation which is their own, that of an unfinished process of decolonization and incipient neo-colonialism.13 Césaire performs Shakespeare’s Ariel’s verbal complaint: “Is there more toil? Since thou dost give me pains, / Let me remember thee what thou has promis’d, / Which is not yet perform’d me” (1.2.2243-45). It is curious that most critics claim that Ariel is granted his freedom at the end of The Tempest, whereas in fact, a close examination of the text reveals a rather different state of affairs. The last we hear of Ariel is in Prospero’s promise of freedom, on the proviso of another act of obedient service (5.1.243, 253-55): effectively, this constitutes yet another deferral of freedom. Once again, this ambivalence in Shakespeare’s portrayal of Prospero is amplified by Césaire into the durable continuation of the struggle between colonizer and colonized. Audience identification, in Césaire’s harnessing of the points of contradiction of Shakespeare’s text, is no longer directed towards the spectacle of power and harmonization of conflicts and the request for ideological ratification, but rather, towards critical identification with a political struggle which retains its relevance for the viewers.

It should be evident by now that Césaire’s appropriation of Shakespeare, far from being a case of assimilation that brakes the process of anti- and postcolonial transformation, takes its impetus from the moments of contradiction present in Shakespeare’s drama, themselves indices of social and political tensions structuring the original context of production. A more appropriate model of cultural transformation is called for than the model of simple “adaptation” which serves most of the criticism of the Shakespeare-Césaire relationship. This model of adaptation tends to leave intact the authority of the prior, originary term of the transformative relationship, as was evident in the acceptance of the ahistorical status of Shakespearian drama. Rather, we need a model of intertextual reworking which takes account of the corrosive effect of rewriting, as in Kristeva’s model of negativity (102)—, or more appropriately in this context, the theory of anthropophagic literary productivity, formulated by the Brazilian writer Oswaldo de Andrade.14 In this conception of literary production, the Third World writer devours the works of other writers in order to transform them completely, as the digestive process breaks
down and transforms nourishment; this literary cannibalism negates the objects it digests, precisely in order to avoid the trap of assimilation, recuperation, or reproduction of models of dependence: it recognizes the necessity of devouring in order not to be devoured. Such a model adequately accounts for Césaire’s radical rewriting of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*’s elusion to a relationship of cultural dependency upon its predecessor. Caliban’s injunction to Stephano and Trinculo, to “seize [Prospero’s] books” (3.2.90) has been well heeded by Césaire.

His adaptation of *The Tempest* constitutes in many ways a destruction of the original. Césaire reported that “Jean-Marie Serreau . . . m’a demandé si je voulais faire l’adaptation. J’ai dit d’accord, mais je veux la faire à ma manière. Le travail terminé, je me suis rendu compte qu’il ne restait plus grand-chose de Shakespeare” (qtd. in Hale, *Les Ecrits* 466). European critics, whose responses to contestable, Third World reappropriations of *The Tempest* include a history of identifying such rewriting of the originals with “error” or as “philistine,” were perhaps not entirely unperceptive in their sense that Césaire’s version of *The Tempest* “betrayed Shakespeare.” For they were confronted with a play which refused to be subordinated to the master text, which resisted assimilation to the authority of the prior model. *Une Tempête* does this, however, not by simply displacing the earlier text, as in Georges Ngal’s reading of the Shakespeare-Césaire relationship and thus ironically leaving the “master-text” unanalyzed and thus intact. Rather, Césaire’s reworking of Shakespeare is a productive form of destruction, liberating latent forces of contradiction in the earlier *The Tempest* which conservative criticism has often laboured to conceal. It is significant that in Césaire’s *Une Tempête*, there is no rendition of Caliban’s “You taught me language, and my profit on’t/ I know how to curse” (1.2.365-66). Contra-diction is not repeated, as a form of slavery to a master text, but rather released and reoriented in the performative production of novelty. Caliban’s linguistic counter-attack is no longer stated, it is simply enacted, from the very moment he comes on stage with his cry of freedom in Swahili: “Uhuru” (24). Literal quotation of Caliban’s curse would hardly be appropriate in a text where the process of cursing, the appropriation of colonial language in order to turn it against the slave master, is dispersed throughout the whole text. Indeed, it is the text.

It is this ostensive, performative character of oppositional transformation which makes Césaire’s theatre not just a celebration of liberation projects, but in its relationship with one of the iconic texts of European culture, an embodiment of the process of transformation. It is precisely in its engagement with that prior model, and foregrounding that engagement, that Césaire’s version of Shakespeare becomes a producer of cultural and political change. I have suggested that it was by identifying the points at which the Shakespearean text betrayed its own implication within a conflictual political situation, that Césaire was able to generate aesthetics of transformation. In other words, it was by an iconoclastic act of recognition of a particular, rather than a universal, Shakespeare, that Césaire triggered a process of subversive literary production. *Une Tempête* itself is based in particularity: it is replete with references to contemporary race struggles. Indeed, the title of the play,
Une Tempête, rather than being an act of “modesty,” an admission that Césaire’s Une Tempête no longer had much in common with that of Shakespeare, as he claimed (qtd. in Hale, Les Ecrits 466), brashly proclaims its singularity and makes the exercise a repeatable one. The indefinite article posits the potential existence of an infinite series of singularized The Tempests, each one based in a particular political context to which it would constitute a strategic response. This, indeed, encapsulated the theatrical aesthetic espoused by Césaire and Jean-Marie Serreau: each production involved substantial alterations to the plays performed, often in function of audience response, evolving political circumstances, or the suggestions of the actors. 17 It is this particularity that, while making Une Tempête age quickly, as some critics have suggested, 18 underlines the fact that the play resists any attempt to recuperate it for an “apolitical” politics of universal values of the sort Shakespeare once stood for.

1 See Lisa McNee, “Teaching in the Multicultural Tempest.”
2 All references are to Aimé Césaire, Une Tempête.
3 With regard to The Tempest, the most notable examples of this critical trend are: Francis Barker and Peter Hulme’s “Nymphs and Reapers heavily vanish: the discursive con-texts of The Tempest,” Jonathon Dollimore and Alan Sinfield’s Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism, Stephen J. Greenblatt’s Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture, and Stephen Orgel’s “Shakespeare and the Cannibals.”
4 Durozoi, in “De Shakespeare à Aimé Césaire: notes sur une adaptation,” does identify a conservative view of history in Shakespeare’s play (14-15), but it is a purely inert model, not one that is “productive” as Césaire’s is deemed to be.
5 See Cartelli’s “Prospero in Africa: The Tempest as Colonial Text and Pretext” and Marion F. O’Connor’s “Theatre of the Empire: ‘Shakespeare’s England’ at Earl’s Court, 1912” in Shakespeare Reproduced.
6 Trevor Griffiths’s “‘This Island’s mine’: Caliban and Colonialism” and Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan’s Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History.
7 See Ania Loomba, Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama.
9 See Graham Parry’s “The politics of the Jacobean masque.”
10 See page 68 of J. L. Kenyon’s Stuart England.
11 See J. P. Sartre’s Qu’est-ce que la littérature.
12 See Keir Elam’s text, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, particularly the discussion on pages 87-88.
15 Césaire’s full commentary can be found in François Beloux’s interview, “Un poète politique: Aimé Césaire,” published in Magazine littéraire, 34 (Novembre 1969).
Works Cited


Cesaire's Bard

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