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(Re)Appropriation: A Reading of *The Tempest*,
Kapalkundala, and *Disgrace*

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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(Re)Appropriations: A Re-reading of *The Tempest*,
Kapalkundala, and *Disgrace*

Sunayani Bhattacharya

ABSTRACT

The thesis looks at William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in conjunction with J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* and BankimChandra Chattopadhyay's *Kapalkundala*. In their own distinctive ways, each of these texts appropriate Shakespeare's play and are, in turn, appropriated by it while exploring the patterns of dominance and resistance inherent to the colonial/postcolonial context. *The Tempest*, as a play, is central to this argument owing to its experiments with power structures and their subsequent subversion. Shakespeare's text also provides an interesting point of departure because of the numerous postcolonial re-readings that it continues to provoke, creating theoretical room for discussing the status of these later works as rewritten "versions" of the colonially sanctioned master narrative of imperial control.

Coetzee's novel reworks the master-slave dialectic, although any easy parallelism with the characters of Prospero and Caliban is problematized with the introduction of Miranda-like figures. Chatterjee writes from within colonial Bengal while situating his reading of the play in a pre-colonial era—the temporal displacement providing the ideological distance needed to both critique and reaffirm the presence of an alien system

of governance.

I would like to divide the scope of the thesis under five chapter headings to consider the nature of each individual text, as well as their interconnectedness. While the introduction seeks to present some of the underlying theoretical and historical frameworks, the following three chapters analyze the way in which Chatterjee and Coetzee adopt the play to represent their peculiar socio-cultural situations. The significance of language in any text that “writes back” from the margins to a work that is firmly placed in the political centre warrants a separate treatment, with regard to both the rewritten texts as well as those that specifically consider the linguistic reshaping of history. In the concluding chapter, I hope to bring together the threads that these separate discussions create in an attempt to understand why a play like *The Tempest* continues to provoke multiple postcolonial versions, and whether or not one is justified in approaching the newer works as mere “versions” of the colonially sanctioned text.

Introduction: The Logic of Re-inscription

The empire writing back has consistently attracted the attention of self-consciously postcolonial authors and scholars, generating a specialized field within the broader examination of colonial structures of power. Writing back allows the postcolonial author to not merely re-narrativize the “original” work, but to incorporate in the newer text those concerns and themes that frame the modern writer and his/her subjects. While it would be simplistic to reduce the complexities of the colonial situation to the struggle between the ruler and the ruled, an investigation of the relationship shared by these two groups—the colonizer and the colonized—provides a clue to understanding the structures of power underlying the imperialist project.

The act of re-visioning a western text from the perspective of the (ex) colonized calls into question the colonizer’s patterns of dominance, revealing the points of subversion and of resistance to that system. The intricate—and interdependent—relationship between resistance and subjugation illuminates the complexities of the colonial situation, and effectively negates any attempts at simplistic polarization. While the centrality of the western text is undermined by the appropriation of authorial voice on the part of the colonized, the erstwhile “native,” too, must necessarily contend with his/her dependence on the ideological constructs inherited from the former masters. Thus,

neither the canonical text nor its re-visioning is left unmolested as both enter a gladiatorial contest interrogating their meaning. This agonistic relationship provides an additional stratum to the idea of writing back—the “original” and the reworked texts themselves must engage in establishing ethical/intellectual superiority as they critique or affirm the colonizing mission.

Given the ideological force of literature, not surprisingly the process of colonization¹ chose the written text as the ideal mode of cultural and intellectual domination. A case in point was the establishment of English studies in India even before it became a self-legitimizing institution in England, leading to an unprecedented growth in the consumption of English literature in the colonies.² A similar, though later, “civilizing” spurt occurred in Africa as well with English studies forming the core of school and college level curriculum. What began as a move to educate the culturally deficient native was initially embraced by the subjugated as a means to gain access to the private world of the whites. English literature in general and Shakespeare in particular, became the yardstick by which the oppressed race began to measure its intellectual capabilities, often denigrating indigenous literary traditions in order to better acquire the elements of the “superior” culture. Thus during the process of decolonization—a

¹ For the purposes of the thesis, I refer specifically to the historical development of British colonialism (discussed later in the chapter).

² English is introduced into the Indian curriculum following Thomas Babington Macaulay’s “Minutes” in 1835. In the next chapter I investigate the role English education plays in creating the “reformed native”—with reference to the character of Ariel in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*—and the problems inherent in the ideological force of literature.

historical event covering the first half of the twentieth century—the erstwhile “native” had to sort through the debris of a problematic loyalty to the body of knowledge that had to be necessarily rejected or revolutionized in order to formulate a nationalist, anti-colonial ideology. The incomplete separation of this sense of loyalty to the imposed intellectual tradition from the desire to reinstate the voice of the subjugated complicates—and to an extent latently undermines—postcolonial critique of colonization. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, European liberal humanism, and the ensuing elaborations that so deeply inform the Western canonical text, forms the backdrop for much contemporary criticism, undergirding a feeling of dependence that postcolonial authors often struggle to negate.

Self-conscious writing back to the western text—a work that once served as a primary tool for the colonialist enterprise—provides a mode of empowerment that reclaims the identity of a rational human being that had been denied the colonized. By thus appropriating the texts that were the former symbols of oppression, the postcolonial author is then able to engage in a dialogue with the west on his or her own ideological terms. The text loses its mythic status as embodying the “civilized” virtues, and is instead exposed as a negotiation of power structures propagating a rather one sided—and hypocritical—definition of the human. Thus Shakespeare’s plays—once a symbol of British colonial power—too question the very system of control that sought to position the plays as a part of the imperial enterprise. The points of rupture that now become

visible allow access once again to the white man's world; only this time the method of entry is intentionally disruptive, uncomfortably probing. With the emphasis shifting from imitation to authorial recreation, the colonized can effectively impose his/her perspective on the west and its symbols, rendering ineffectual any attempts at a monologic version of colonial narratives.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-11) has been repeatedly read by authors in an attempt to uncover the deeply problematic juxtaposition of domination and resistance. To understand the centrality of *The Tempest* in a postcolonial setting one needs initially to consider the construction of the characters of Caliban and Prospero, and the forces of attraction and repulsion that shape their interactions. The play revolves around Prospero, the former duke of Milan as he bides his time on an enchanted island with his daughter Miranda, his airy spirit Ariel, and Caliban, the "deformed" native. At one level, Prospero's desire to bring his usurping brother, Antonio, to justice drives the play's plot—Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand, the son of the King of Naples, forms a subplot—and to achieve those ends Prospero magically creates a tempest that leaves Antonio, the King of Naples and his men stranded on the island. Prospero's interaction with both Caliban and Ariel creates another interesting subplot as it comments explicitly on the complex historical reality of colonization. Prospero, as the colonizer, establishes his rule over the island and subjugates the previous inhabitants, in this case Ariel and Caliban. Postcolonial authors and critics interested in the structures of power undergirding colonialism have exploited this angle of *The Tempest*, and have adapted the play to suit

their particular socio-political realities.³ It is important to place the master-slave relationship—that emerges between Prospero (master) on the one hand, and Ariel and Caliban (slaves) on the other—within the socio-historical reality of the colonies to uncover the power struggles that lie beneath an apparently polarized set of voices. *The Tempest* thus becomes symbolic of the logic of colonization *and* also of resistance to subjugation. The dual pressures operating within the play enhances the instability of the colonial situation, and makes it possible for authors to appropriate *The Tempest* to suit their particular ideological agendas. The patterns of subjugation and subversion that form much of the play's fabric are interrogated in later works, with a particular view to understanding the way in which these two seemingly disparate motifs are often negotiated within an undifferentiated space of contest.

Two texts that highlight the problematics of power in *The Tempest* are the Bengali author Bankimchandra Chatterjee's *Kapalkundala* (1866) and the South African novelist J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999). In both of these works, the authors are engaged in challenging the established norms of social interaction as propagated by the colonial masters, while adopting very different approaches and ideologies. Situated in radically different epochs of the colonial process, Bankim and Coetzee re-vision Shakespeare's play as a reflection of their own literary and cultural spaces. While Bankim's work must indirectly negotiate the colonial master owing to his close proximity to the institutions of

³ The next chapter presents some of the major appropriations of *The Tempest*, and seeks to establish the play's investigation of patterns of subjugation and resistance.

control—he lived and worked in nineteenth century Bengal during the British imperial heyday—Coetzee has to incorporate his identity as a white man in post-apartheid South Africa into his text. However, their concern with expressions of power and its subversion justifies the juxtaposition of their works. The protagonists in both Bankim's and Coetzee's novels must situate themselves within their respective social norms in order to understand the constructedness of the structures that define them, and to fashion forms of resistance from within their socio-cultural milieu.

At this juncture, it is important to make certain distinctions in the seemingly homogeneous concept identified as colonial rule to understand the peculiarities of the examination of power structures in *Kapalkundala* and *Disgrace*. British imperialism—like the other European colonial ventures—manifested very specific characteristics in the different colonized parts of the world. These traits were both a result and the basis for unique modes of colonizer-colonized interaction; modes, however, that shared the common cause of imposing an alien power structure over indigenous forms of socio-cultural existence. The pattern of a settler colony⁴ marked the relationship between the British and the indigenous African tribes in South Africa, while a more rigid insider/outsider binary characterized British rule in India.

South Africa developed as an offshoot of the imperial trade route between Europe and Southeast Asia during the first half of the seventeenth century, serving as little more

⁴ A settler colony is defined as a colony inhabited by members of the erstwhile ruling class even after the period of decolonization. As a result, the distinction between indigenous people and alien rulers is blurred in the post colony.

than a base for ships to rendezvous. The British continued to follow the Dutch policy when they captured the colony in 1795, and the scenario remained much the same until South Africa's gold and diamond reserves were discovered in the late 1870s. The British government identified the Cape station and its surrounding area as a settler colony, particularly after it transported some five thousand odd men, women and children—primarily from the lower middle classes—and set them up as agricultural farmers. It should be noted, however, that the Afrikaners, descended from the original Dutch settlers, maintained a skeptical distance from the British and in some cases even established independent states within the colony. While the demographics of the Cape colony differed significantly from the other British settler colonies in North America and Australia—where colonial invasion had practically eradicated indigenous groups—Britain still provided the colonists considerable constitutional powers. A combination of administrative freedom and wealth consolidated the settlers' hold over the land, and they effectively relegated the Africans to the role of manual laborers. The social hierarchy dividing the whites and the blacks that had initially been the product of racial prejudices and slavery, found support in the colony's economic realities, and the abolitionist movement managed little other than effecting administrative policies that were color blind only in name. As Leonard Thompson notes in his *A History of South Africa*,

[w]herever Afrikaners had settled, they tolerated scarcely any social interaction with black people except as masters with servants. Indeed, they went a long way toward preserving the patriarchal relationships that had originated in the

seventeenth century, minus the overt practice of slavery. The British settlers in the Cape Colony and Natal, and in the towns and villages in the republics, had rapidly complied with the established mores. (108)

The creation of the modern postcolonial state of South Africa had to contend with these sharply marked racial divisions, as a sizeable white population still remained in the republic.

The colonial matrix in India assumed the form of a non-settler colony, as the majority of the British colonists left India following the latter's independence in 1947. The Indians were the colonized "natives" subject to the "outsider" British colonizers, and the insider/outsider binary made—and still to an extent makes—itsself apparent in the relationship between these two groups. The British East India Company ruled the Indian subcontinent from 1612 to 1857 when the British government took over the administration following the Indian Rebellion of 1857. During the early days of the colony a fluid line divided the British from the Indians, with frequent instances of interracial marriage and of the colonizer "going native."⁵ Stricter laws segregating the communities came into effect after 1857 and the racial divide was one of the dominant characteristics during the final century of colonial expansion in India. Unlike the South African settlers, the British administrators in India had limited constitutional powers because the Indian people vastly outnumbered the pockets of British colonialists.

⁵ William Dalrymple, a British historian, provides detailed examples of such interracial exchange in his quasi-novelistic work *White Mughals* (2003).

However, while postcolonial India did not have to negotiate the presence of its former colonizers, the educated Indian still had to deal with his/her problematic loyalty to British ideological constructs that had become too deeply ingrained to be dismissed following decolonization.

Bankim's *Kapalkundala* is a novella produced during the early days of British rule in India (1866), and the adaptation of an Elizabethan play within the context of colonial Bengal creates its own peculiar dynamics of structure. A further dimension is added by Bankim locating his plot in Mughal Bengal, thus establishing a separate paradigm of colonialism—as Bankim's critique of the Mughal empire masks his resistance to British rule—within which he then sets his commentary on the British Raj. The author's own position as a member of the British civil and legal systems introduces the perspective of the colonized during the nineteenth century—at a time when the challenge posed to British colonial rule had not yet acquired the nationalistic fervor that it did later. Bankim's primary concern in this novel is the exploration of liminal identities and the subversive potential of such in-between selves. Liminality itself becomes a mode of resistance that allows Bankim to critique not just the imposed structures of control, but the indigenous patriarchal system as well. *Kapalkundala*, the novel's eponymous heroine, is situated at the cusp of the civilized and the barbaric,⁶ a position that paradoxically allows her to perceive the interrelatedness of the two traditionally antagonistic spaces.

⁶ She is raised by a mysterious father figure on a remote island away from human society, and then she marries a relatively wealthy, upper middle class Bengali. Her upbringing exposes her to untamed nature while her marital life forces her to abandon her previous identity in favor of a socially conditioned one.

Bankim then goes on to inscribe an androgynous self that seeks to negate the myths of physical and intellectual effeminacy so rigorously propounded by the British, particularly in colonial Bengal. *Kapalkundala*'s significance consists in its ability to construct an alternative masculinity that is best expressed in the figure of the socially marginalized woman. The focus thus shifts from the struggle for control that takes place between Prospero and Caliban to a repositioning of Miranda as the empowered androgynous figure. A radical revisioning on Bankim's part succeeds in marginalizing the stories of the male figures by rendering them thematically and conceptually impotent, foregrounding instead the possibilities of the feminine. He subverts Shakespeare's text so that it provides him with the thematic means to counter the reality of imperial attitudes seemingly endorsed by the play. Bankim adapts *The Tempest* to reflect the reality of colonial rule in nineteenth century Bengal, and to explore the relationships of power binding the colonizer and the colonized.

While Bankim provides a point of view deeply rooted in the historical time period of England's imperialist expansion, J.M. Coetzee speaks literally from the post colony. He is doubly implicated in his historical context as he belongs to the race of the former oppressors. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee addresses the former colonizer's feeling of guilt that accompanies the process of decolonization. His novel reverses the master-slave dichotomy as it places power in the hands of the ex-colonized. It is Prospero who must now seek a voice, who must strive to have his story heard while Caliban threatens to demolish any semblance of equality. The novel is a retelling of the white man's disgrace

amidst the rapidly changing political climate of South Africa, and, in this context, *The Tempest* is peculiarly suited to Coetzee's project. The power equations are reversed, yet neither side attains anything but a pyrrhic victory. Petrus/Caliban cannot overcome the stigma of violence that Lurie/Prospero paradoxically imposes upon him; the latter cannot escape a sense of helplessness at being subjugated by the ex-slave's aggression. Like Prospero, David Lurie may claim divine inspiration, but Lurie has to accept the intrusion of history and his ultimate role not as the disseminator of knowledge, but as the student who learns by becoming the "dog-man." He has to re-learn the ethics of the past, this time not through the words of Byron and Wordsworth, but with the help of his daughter Lucy and her neighbor Petrus. His operatic recreation of the ambiguous romance between Byron and his Italian mistress Teresa marks the same movement of the margins towards the center, with the lush notes ultimately rejected in favor of the tinny, almost slapstick sounds of the toy banjo in the company of "too-menny" dogs. It is this insistent sense of history that refuses to be buried, that forces Prospero to look for ways in which he can come to terms not only with the figures of Caliban and Miranda—who now exist beyond his controlling/creative powers—but also with his newer, dispossessed self.

For these authors, the act of rewriting a canonical text plays out the internal tensions regarding the paradigms of subalternity and the patterns of resistance. Perhaps one can begin to understand the significance of the act of writing back by concentrating on the interplay of history and context in texts which seek to blur the lines dividing the center from its perceived margins.

Chapter One: *The Tempest* and Its Aftermath

In his essay entitled “On Originality,” Edward Said refers to Lukacs’ *The Theory of the Novel* to examine the connections between writing and the *intentions* that produce it. Such interrelatedness, Said argues, arises from “a desire to *tell* a story much more than it is one for telling a *story*” (“On Originality,” 132). Thus, following Said, one must concentrate not merely on the written text, but also draw attention to the subtext that compels authors to write what they write, at the time that they write. Said’s analysis of the art of writing further elaborates that,

to study literature as inertly *given* writing, canonized in texts, books, poems, works or dramas, is to treat as natural and concrete that which derives from a desire—to write—that is ceaseless, varied, and highly unnatural and abstract, since “to write” is a function never exhausted by the completion of a piece of writing [...] [S]ince one has neither the time nor the capacity to study all writing, it becomes necessary to analyze the intention or, where it can be decoded, the stated desire from which a specifically demarcated set of writing originally derives. (Said, 131-135)

If one assumes Shakespeare’s plays to form such a “demarcated set,” then the unit of study prompts the establishment of a connecting structure, whereby the group can be

said to have logical coherence. A closer inspection reveals Shakespeare's plays to have a recurring preoccupation with structures of power and their subsequent subversion. One such play, *The Tempest*, has frequently come under close scrutiny because of the colonial ideology it expressly presents and critiques. The play gained currency during the process of decolonization, as both the colonialist and the revolutionary "native" responded to its exploration of patterns of subjugation and resistance. As Frantz Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth*, decolonization was the period when the colonized aggressively rejected the colonizer's supremacy and sought to replace that culture with indigenous forms. That substitution often resulted in the colonized appropriating the symbols of domination—such as Shakespeare—to address contemporary cultural and political needs. However, the colonizer engaged with *The Tempest* as well and used it to rationalize both colonial domination and indigenous reactions. A brief survey of a few notable reworkings of *The Tempest* serves to underscore the complexity of the responses it has evoked, and also situates the play in a dialogue between power and its subversion.

In *Prospero and Caliban: Psychology of Colonization*,⁷ the French social scientist Octavio Mannoni proposed a theory behind colonialism that essentially triggered the re-evaluation of the play within the context of (post)colonial Africa and the Caribbean.⁸ An English colonial, Philip Mason furthers Mannoni's "Prospero complex" in his autobiography *Prospero's Magic: Some Thoughts on Class and Race* (1962) and

⁷ *Psychologie de la colonisation* (1948)

⁸ I discuss this in greater detail on pg. 8, specifically with reference to *The Tempest*.

formulates the broader “Pygmalion complex.” For him, what drives the colonial master to seek total domination on his secluded island is his desire to love only what he has created himself, and when his “creature” contests his authority, Prospero and his kind suffer from uncontrollable rage and irritation. Mason’s work, unlike Mannoni’s, reveals an implicit support of native self-government and the difference perhaps stems from the particular anti-colonial movements these writers and critics experienced.⁹ Each re-reading of *The Tempest* thus becomes a marker not only of mutually related historical events but also of very individual reactions to them. From the perspective of African, Caribbean, Asian and Latin American authors, *The Tempest* becomes a means of forging a nationalist identity; of challenging the Western canon in order to give voice to the many Calibans and Ariels. The works of George Lamming, Aimé Césaire and Roberto Retamar assume the form of an internal dialogue, no longer content with explaining the colonial situation but rather actively proposing a viable alternative.

In *The Pleasures of Exile* (1984), the Barbadian novelist George Lamming weaves into his study of the condition of the exiled author in mid-century London, his vision of Shakespeare’s Caliban, and of all the voices that have been suppressed in order to construct the colonially sanctioned image of Prospero’s solitary subject. Lamming draws upon C.L.R James’s discussion of the Haitian slave revolt and the overpowering figure of Toussaint L’ouverture, in order to resurrect Caliban from the historical position

⁹ Mannoni wrote *Prospero and Caliban* in the wake of the Madagascan Uprising of 1947-48 and Mason’s work appears in 1962 in an attempt to rationalize anti-colonial movements in Kenya, India and Southern Rhodesia using Mannoni’s theories.

of the questioning colonial subject. The work also brings into question Mannoni's identification of Prospero and Caliban as representative of the positions of the colonizer and the colonized respectively, and demonstrates how each individually informs the construction of the other. Lamming also identifies Caliban's need for a voice that is his unique creation/possession. The reader needs to uncover the codes of the linguistic system which Prospero introduces to Caliban to understand how the latter appropriates it to formulate his pattern of resistance. Like Lamming, Aimé Césaire, the poet and author from Martinique, is also interested in recovering Caliban's voice to narrate the version of colonial history suppressed by the ruling class, and he brings to bear his involvement in the negritude movement by adapting *The Tempest* for a specifically black audience. Césaire's *Une Tempête (A Tempest)*—first performed in Paris in 1969—employs language to critically re-evaluate western humanist ideals, and to reveal the violence undergirding colonialism. Césaire's Caliban returns to his African past to counter the violence of the “civilizing mission.” In her “Mastering the Masters: Aimé Césaire's Creolization of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*”, Judith Holland Sarnecki identifies Césaire's incorporation of African mythic and linguistic traditions into the imposed European language as an attempt

to beat Shakespeare at his own game. The Caliban Césaire creates speaks a language that, like Creole, is pieced together from fragments that reveal the violence done to Africans forced into slave ships and carried far from their

homeland. Caliban's "creolization" of the French language, furthermore, reveals a mastery that unsettles Prospero to the point of madness. (277)

Roberto Retamar, a prominent figure in the cultural restructuring of postrevolutionary Cuba, disrupts the façade of scholarly objectivity in his reworking of *The Tempest*.

Retamar writes his "Caliban: Notes Towards a Discussion of Culture in Our America" (1969) in a voice that reflects the history of Cuba and creates a collective autobiography of the Cuban people. The essay identifies the divide between Ariel and Caliban as one based on class and, for Retamar, the colonized person's loyalty lies with Caliban—the representative of the revolutionary proletariat.

Irrespective of their allegiance to either the colonizer or the colonized, these writers manifest the common desire to explore the relationships shared by the characters in *The Tempest*—relationships defined by patterns of domination and resistance. But can the abovementioned—and indeed any (post)colonial—interpretation of the play escape the charge of presentism¹⁰ that has been leveled against efforts to incorporate *The Tempest* into the postcolonial canon? Shakespeare writes his plays during the "age of discovery" when England has certainly begun establishing significant trading posts in future colonies but her efforts have still not acquired colonial dimensions. However, while any discussion involving a postcolonial reading of *The Tempest* must necessarily acknowledge the text's situatedness in pre-colonial history, to argue that the play's

¹⁰ "A bias towards the present or present-day attitudes, esp. in the interpretation of history." (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

historical conditions of production sever it from a study of the territories and peoples colonized by Europe would be to deny the proto-colonial strand that the play emphatically interrogates. At the risk of making a universalized claim, I would argue that *The Tempest* embodies so many of the founding principles underlying colonial structures because the motifs of subjugation and its subversion stem from the very circumstances that situate the play within an exploration of power relations. The popularity that *The Tempest* has enjoyed—along with, significantly, *Othello*—among authors re-telling colonial history, further testifies to the play’s investigation of structures of power. In the case of *The Tempest* the “stated desire”¹¹ is to study the modes of domination and resistance, and their interdependent relationship.

One way of approaching colonial relationships—as it constructs the colonial identity—is to analyze the interdependent ties that bound Britain and its colonies, both historically and in the realm of economics. From such a perspective, the concept of dominance and racial or cultural superiority is integral to the understanding—and establishment—of the colonial situation. However, subjugation becomes possible only when there is the colonial “other” who accepts or rebels against the imposed dominant authority. The presence of the “irredeemable native” allows the colonizer to define himself or herself as lawmaker, while the conquered individual remains a servant as long as he/she has a perceivable opposition. For this particular reading of colonialism, then, the colonizer *has* to exert omnipotent control in order to play his or her part; the

¹¹ Said, “On Originality,” 135.

colonized *must* acknowledge the other's presence to complete the picture. Without this pre-existing and complicit relationship (of master and slave) the colony has no social, moral or economic validity. In *Orientalism* Said explores the binary between the orient and the occident, and he insists that the colonial self can be defined only in terms of the opposition provided by the non-self or "other;"

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. (1-2)

In *The Tempest* the complicit and interdependent relationship shared by the master and the slave expresses itself in repeated instances of individuals seeking to assert their unquestionable power over those who must needs fashion their resistance from within the imposed authority. Prospero, Caliban, Ariel, Miranda and the shipwrecked king's men all strive to attain that position of dominance, and their constructions of legitimacy—or righteous victimhood—provide the play with its distinct exploration of (in)dependence. Even a cursory look at critical trends¹² reveals the significant attention that has been paid to the Prospero-Caliban binary in an attempt to reconstruct the latter's rebellious voice and to situate both in an interdependent relationship. Prospero shares a seemingly omnipotent relationship with all other characters of the play, and it is his

¹² As previously discussed with reference to Mannoni, Mason, Lamming, Césaire and Retamar.

desire to obtain sovereignty that drives the primary level of action. The complexity of the bond between the colonial ruler and his “thing of darkness,” however, exposes Prospero’s dependence on the very subject he claims to have subjugated. Carefully concealed within the framework of the play is the rather precarious position that Prospero himself occupies. His claim to righteous victimhood appears dubious when one considers the circumstances leading to the usurpation of his dukedom. As he recounts his story to Miranda he directs her attention to his consuming passion for knowledge—“Me, poor man, my library/Was dukedom large enough” (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 109-110). From Prospero’s own revelation, Antonio is justified in wishing to replace the former in order to effectively manage the affairs of the state which, as Prospero remarks, was already his duty by his brother’s unofficial mandate. To further cement Antonio’s position, one can draw on the testimony offered by Machiavelli in *The Prince*. The means, according to the early modern political thinker, must be subordinated to the end if by doing so the state’s good is served. Even if one takes into account Machiavelli’s rather questionable reputation in early modern England, Prospero still fails to serve in his appointed role as the duke when he ensconces himself in his pursuit of obscure knowledge and severs his ties with the state and its subjects.

I would argue that Prospero’s aversion to ruling becomes further problematized in light of his relationship with Caliban. Stranded on the desert island with ample opportunity to pursue his scholastic goals (Prospero tells us in Act 1, Sc. 2 that Gonzalo, one of his courtiers, provides the castaways with Prospero’s most treasured volumes),

Prospero turns his mind to attaining total domination over the few who inhabit the island. At this juncture one is led to wonder whether or not it is Caliban's existence that provokes Prospero's desire to rule Milan. Once again, Prospero's own words can be called upon to substantiate this reading. As the play comes to a close, Prospero informs Alonso that following Miranda's marriage he wishes to "retire me to my Milan, where/Every third thought shall be my grave" (*The Tempest*, 5.1, 314-15). The deposed duke gains a moral victory over all who had previously wronged him, yet he expresses no desire to rule his dukedom. It appears as though the lack of Caliban and the enchanted island deprives Prospero of the ability or the need to continue performing the role of the colonial ruler. What Caliban's presence does, in effect, is to provide the necessary opposition that Prospero needs in order to establish his sense of self as the colonizer.

If one acknowledges that it is indeed Caliban's presence that forces Prospero to assume the mantle of kingship, then it follows that the former is as instrumental in shaping the latter's being and sense of self as Prospero is responsible for creating a colonized identity for Caliban. In his work entitled *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, Octavio Mannoni draws attention to this double bind from which both the ruler and the ruled suffer. Each must constantly resist the other as a real and perceived threat but, paradoxically, their identities depend on this mutual antagonism. While Mannoni's dependency syndrome (and the subsequent fear of abandonment that the "native" supposedly experiences) has been justifiably challenged by many postcolonial authors and critics, it is worth reiterating his ideas, if only to

underscore the complexity of the relationship that exists between Caliban and Prospero. Mannoni postulates:

If we look at the external facts alone, we cannot help realizing that the dependence relationship is reciprocal in nature: if the master has a servant, the servant likewise has a master, and though he [the servant] does not compare himself with him [the master], he nevertheless takes pleasure in the value of the thing he possesses. (*Prospero and Caliban*, 80)

Although Mannoni consciously wishes to present the trope of dependence as something that is almost wholly a part of the colonized person's psyche, his argument cannot avoid the curious bind which the colonial situation places on both master and slave—the former requires the presence of the latter in order to validate his or her position of authority. His near total reliance on resistance undermines the discourse of domination to the point where one realizes that not only must the colonized carve out a language of resistance, but the colonizer too needs to resist such dependence.

The most crucial blow to Prospero's precarious balance of power is dealt, ironically, by the very language through which he hopes to subjugate the inhabitants of the enchanted isle. It is also the same language that provides him with his magical powers and ultimately allows him to cleanse the corrupt city/court. Prospero consciously draws attention to the force of words and indeed relies wholly on them to fashion his world view and foist it both on himself and others. The play's action—as scripted both by Shakespeare and Prospero—is carried out primarily through linguistic commands as

physical acts are often replaced by their verbal re/foretelling. The very physical punishments that Prospero inflicts upon Ariel and Caliban are presented as curses. Caliban's curses ("A southwest blow on ye/And blister you all o'er! (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 326-327)) remain ineffective because he is forced to function within the linguistic system devised by Prospero. The latter can control the language, and thereby the potency, of his spells, while Caliban can only verbalize his thoughts.

Like all else related to his regime, however, Prospero's power over words is never absolute. One gets a hint of his dependence on words as he frequently urges Miranda to pay closer attention to the words uttered by him;

Prospero: Dost thou attend me? [...]

Thou attend'st not.

Miranda: Oh, good sir, I do.

Prospero: I pray thee, mark me. (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 78-88)

Paradoxically, his repeated urgings serve to underscore the instability of his discourse and thus, as a consequence, the omnipotent position he wishes to appropriate. Because the whole structure of his regime depends on his control of words, Prospero becomes vulnerable if Caliban can expose the inherent duality in Prospero's language. Like the colonizer, Prospero requires a monologic language; one that the colonized can learn but never appropriate to articulate his or her own desires. Prospero teaches Caliban the European tongue for much the same reasons Robinson Crusoe teaches Friday—to civilize the "native" and facilitate communication. However, Caliban's charge—"You taught me

language and my profit on't/Is I know how to curse" (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 366-367)—discloses his ability to manipulate the colonizer's language to express his own emotions, thereby revealing Prospero's lack of total control over meaning and truth. The point is further reinforced when Caliban plots against his master using the same linguistic code that was employed to colonize the island. The colonized subject narrates his version of the island's colonial history to Stephano and Trinculo—the drunken shipwrecked men in Alonso's service—and enlists their help to overthrow Prospero:

Caliban: I say by sorcery he got this isle;
From me he got it. If thy Greatness will
Revenge it on him [...]

Remember

First to possess his books, for without them
He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not
One spirit to command. They all do hate him
As rootedly as I. (*The Tempest*, 3.2, 51-95)

Caliban is no longer the passive vessel vulnerable to Prospero's linguistic promises as he identifies language¹³ as the source of his master's power. He uses the language that Prospero teaches him to plan Prospero's downfall. The subjugated succeeds in trapping the possessor of the Word with his own language.

¹³ I suggest language forms the foundation for the knowledge that Prospero acquires from his books. In this context, then, when Caliban alludes to Prospero's books, he identifies also the linguistic power that his master derives from those "brave utensils" (*The Tempest*, 3.2, 96).

The Barbadian author George Lamming alludes to this prison-like nature of language in *The Pleasures of Exile*, and although he places Caliban within such a cell, it is Prospero who is ironically confined;

Prospero believes—his belief in his own powers demands it—that Caliban can learn so much and no more. Caliban can go so far and no further. Prospero lives in the absolute certainty that Language which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban’s achievements will be realised and restricted. Caliban can never reach perfection [...] [f]or Language itself, by Caliban’s whole relation to it, will not allow his expansion beyond a certain point. (*The Pleasures*, 109-110)

However this “absolute certainty” prevents Prospero from circumventing his own system of words, thereby depriving him of a language of resistance. From such a perspective, Caliban is empowered because he can—and does—subvert language initially when he curses both Prospero and Miranda for misleading him with false promises and usurping his island, and then later while plotting with Stephano and Trinculo. For Prospero to question his own linguistic system would amount to a fatal challenge to his already unstable identity. Hence the colonial master has to perpetually play out the ritual of linguistic control, knowing full well that his created sense of self has no existence beyond it. Prospero must teach Caliban his own tongue, but the commands and punishments are uttered only to reaffirm Prospero’s retention of the *image* of the rational European man. If Caliban fails to understand or respond to this alien language, then the white man has no means of recreating the charade of western civilization at the margins

of the known world. Prospero's desire to cling to his native tongue masks a double layer of fear—of becoming or, worse still, of being the irredeemable “other”—that lurks at the fringes of his quotidian interactions with the inhabitants of the outpost. For Prospero the alternative to the identity that his language provides is a fear of being contaminated by Caliban's system of signs, and consequently of becoming the dreaded “other.” Lying beneath even this paranoia is a deeper realization, one which must be dispelled if Prospero is to retain the moral and political high ground. In *Prospero and Caliban*, Mannoni touches upon the first level of fear as he discusses the European observer's response to Madagascan behavior:

The observer is repelled by the thoughts he encounters in his own mind, and it *seems* to him that they are the thoughts of the people he is observing. In any such act of projection the subject's purpose is to recover his own innocence by accusing someone else of what he considers to be a fault in himself. (20)

What Mannoni's words do not acknowledge is that Prospero can never resist his own language because he is eternally aware and frightened that by doing so he will be forced to acknowledge the Caliban within himself.

Caliban, on the other hand, has to craft his resistance from within the system of domination and to succeed he must necessarily reinvent the linguistic codes. Ironically, it is Prospero's mode of domination that allows Caliban access to the point of rupture in the colonial fabric. The island comes under Prospero's control the moment that he is able to render its past inaccessible and, even more importantly, irrelevant for its native

inhabitants. Sycorax, her prior claim to the island, Ariel and Caliban's individual existences become invisible, at best remembered through mythic narratives almost always as expounded by Prospero. The colonizer's dismissive attitude toward the island's history becomes apparent when he refutes Caliban's charge of usurpation—"Thou most lying slave,/Whom stripes may move, not kindness!" (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 347-348)—and provides his version of the colony's past:

Prospero: This blue-eyed hag [Sycorax] was hither brought with child
And here was left by th' sailors [...]
Then was this island—
Save for the son that she did litter here,
A freckled whelp, hag-born—not honored with
A human shape. (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 271-286)

Homi Bhabha, however, suggests by disavowing Caliban's history, the European colonizer allows for the existence of a "logic of reversal" (*The Location of Culture*, 15).

Bhabha argues that

[s]uch a forgetting—or disavowal—creates an uncertainty at the heart of the generalizing subject of civil society, compromising the 'individual' that is the support for its universalist aspiration [...] The unhomely moment relates to the traumatic ambivalences of a personal psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political history (*The Location of Culture*, 15).

Caliban in the context of European humanism that Prospero imposes upon the native of the enchanted island. He submits that Caliban

has no *sight* [...] Caliban may become Man; but he is entirely outside the orbit of Human. It is not Prospero who keeps him there; nor is it his own fault that he is there. It is some original Law [...] which has ordained the state of existence we call Caliban. If Caliban turns cannibal, it is not because human flesh may appear a necessary substitute for food which is absent. It is rather because he is incapable of differentiating between one kind of reality and another (110-111).

I would suggest that what Lamming's reading crucially points out, but fails to expand upon, becomes evident in Caliban's own response to the charge of rape. He categorically asserts his desire to people the "isle with Calibans" (*The Tempest*, 1.2, 354), thus bringing forth the image of an alternate reality. Caliban's statement contradicts Lamming's because it demonstrates not a failure on the part of the colonized person in differentiating between two kinds of reality, but rather manifests a conscious decision to reject the notion of the individual as depicted by Prospero. Shakespeare's deformed "monster" consciously identifies his progeny as *Calibans* and not as *men*.

While Caliban has been the primary symbol of resistance for the colonized peoples, Prospero's other subject/servant Ariel, the airy spirit, represents another crucial aspect of colonialism. Ironically, his proximity to Prospero creates his greatest potential for subversion while simultaneously undermining his sense of an independent self. Ariel contrasts Caliban's bestiality with his light airy being and thus seemingly occupies a

the spirit raises significant questions regarding Ariel's submissiveness. At this point the concept of mimicry becomes important in understanding the nature of his resistance. Homi Bhabha's essay, "Signs Taken for Wonders," succinctly defines mimicry as a strategy for exposing—and exploiting—the essential duality embedded in colonial governance. Mimicry, Bhabha posits, occurs through the "ruse of recognition" (165). Bhabha is careful to distinguish it from Fanon's idea of the black identity as becoming entirely passive and allowing the white man to "represent his self-esteem" (126). In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon asserts that colonial education—and here he speaks specifically of Martinique—forces the black child to inculcate a way of thinking that is essentially white in nature, so much so that the child comes to recognize itself as white. Only when this child comes in direct contact with the white man does he first feel the full weight of being black. The black person now has to negotiate the conflict between being black and possessing an attitude that associates the color with moral and sexual depravity. His moral standards urge him to eliminate the black man from his consciousness and the struggle leads to a paralysis of effective action. For Bhabha, the encounter between the black and the white person is a moment filled not with confusion, but possibility. He theorizes a third possibility in the form of an "ironic compromise" (122) that allows that colonized person to escape the black/white binary;

[I]t is difficult to agree entirely with Fanon that the psychic choice is to 'turn white or disappear.' There is the more ambivalent, third choice: camouflage, mimicry, black skins/white masks (172).

Within the notion of mimicry is embedded a kind of double vision, which complies with colonial authority, but simultaneously disrupts the same. Mimicking the colonizer camouflages those modes of knowledge and beliefs that are considered inappropriate by the dominant discourse. According to Bhabha, this form of colonial imitation occurs because the colonial power can only partially transmit its ideals of thought and manners to the natives of the colony, as total identification on the part of the colonized would cause the colonizer's power to become automatically invalid. Prospero only delegates the manual portion of magic to Ariel in order to ensure that he retains the upper hand in the relationship. Hence the educated colonized is forced to occupy the position of "not quite/not white" (131)—almost the same as the colonizer because he is imbibing the latter's ideas and ideologies, but also different because the colonizer and the colonized can never be identical. Mimicry embodies that gap between difference and desire that is a part of any colonial discourse. On the one hand the colonizer desires to create reformed, rational beings, while on the other hand he/she fears the difference between the white person and the colonized subject. The double vision prompted by mimicry highlights the hollowness of colonial power, and so what gets mimicked is only the symbol of authority, estranged from the meaning which it signifies. Bhabha suggests that this hollow doubling, because it occurs within the range of knowledge and belief systems that had been disavowed by the colonial structure, is capable of producing new and different sites of power, which can then question imposed institutions of control.

If read in the light of Bhabha's hypothesis, Ariel's mimicry then opens up the possibility of a serious challenge that can be posed from within the colonial system itself, using modes of authority as appropriated means of subversion. In this light, it is interesting to draw attention to the Shakespearean canon which served initially as a vehicle for "authorial" control. Shakespeare became one of the central texts of the civilizing mission by which the West sought to enlighten—and humanize—the East, and, not surprisingly, the prominent position was accorded to Shakespearean texts in colonial educational institutions. In general, English as a discipline was first established in the colonies at a time when the classical curriculum still had a firm hold in the mother country itself, and became one of the most effective means of governing the colonies. English was introduced in India following Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute" in 1835, in which he stressed the need to replace oriental learning with European education to create the "reformed" native. Gauri Viswanathan examines the growth of English studies in the colonies—in British India in particular—and theorizes that when one perceives the ideological force of literature it is but a short step towards uncovering the cultural hegemony implicit in any such means of imparting education. As she formulates her thesis in *Masks of Conquest*, Viswanathan asserts:

Indeed, once such [ideological] importance is conceded to the educational function, it is easier to see that value assigned to literature—such as the proper development of character or the shaping of critical thought or the formation of aesthetic judgment—are only problematically located there and are more

obviously serviceable to the dynamic of power relations between the educator and those who are to be educated. A vital if subtle connection exists between a discourse in which those who are to be educated are represented as morally and intellectually deficient and the attribution of moral and intellectual values to the literary works they are assigned to read. (4)

This “subtle connection” calls for the assigned works to represent the racial superiority which the colonizer wants to project. In this context English becomes doubly important given the almost unconscious connection posited between the canon and the “British” values that it supposedly embodies, thus serving as the ideal vehicle for cultural control. The Book—and by induction, Shakespeare—simultaneously represents the colonial power and the civilizing mission that it undertakes. It plays such a crucial role within the colonial context because it apparently symbolizes the West’s desire to illuminate the Eastern darkness, and thereby humanize the mentally deficient colonized. The high moral ground of this Enlightenment-inspired project is undercut by the colonizer’s desire to create a class of “reformed” natives, capable of filling in the clerical posts in the administration. Such an ideological inculcation finds an interesting ally in Shakespeare given the latter’s close relationship with the rise and growth of British nationalism. His playtexts are marketed as the commodity ideally suited to raise the intellectually and morally handicapped native to the level of the superior ruling class. To all appearances, the colonized strains to imbibe the novel knowledge while the colonizer experiments with the former’s powers of retention and repetition.

However, colonial authority, as projected through its humanizing missions, is far from being a stable discourse and ambivalence exists at multiple levels within the structure of power. Most damaging is the colonizer's perception of the colonized as a willing receptacle for occidental ideas, and as possessing a sense of moral/intellectual inferiority that must necessarily precede the desire to be instructed. This image, ironically, operates within the ruler's mind, significantly removed from socio-historical reality. The desire to create an impersonal system of management, relying solely on the constructed sense of superiority, distances the ruler from the ruled, making the latter "an object emptied of all personal identity to accommodate the knowledge already established and being circulated about [the] native" (*Masks of Conquest* 11).

Paradoxically, this inability to interact with the real subject allows the colonized to perceive the dual nature of the colonial government and find the means to subvert it. The image that the colonizer creates relies almost exclusively on the chasm between the historically extant colonized and his ruler's perception of him. The gap forms a liminal zone which brings into sharp focus the difference between reality and ideology, also allowing the colonized to mutate into a peculiar hybrid of submission and resistance. This entity has the peculiarly disturbing ability of acknowledging only the form of authority, denying any validity to its content. Even the printed book—the very source of colonial authority—loses its omnipotence for the hybrid because it becomes only a fragmented projection of authority. The structures of knowledge and history denied legitimacy by colonialism now enter the dominant discourse and question the rules of authority, as

hybridity reverses the process of disclaiming essential for the existence of colonialism. The judgmental stance assumed by the colonizer is exposed by the hybrid as being merely a position of power, and the culture of the colonized ceases to be that which is authoritatively determined by the mother country. Colonial narrative, which had thus far assumed the mask of monologism, now has to contend with other historical and cultural narratives. The intellectual guardians of colonial supremacy cease to function merely as instruments of instruction as they are appropriated to tell the story of those races that they were supposed to subjugate. Thus begins a complex process of rewriting, in which voices that had hitherto been silenced to sustain more Euro-centric points of view are given primacy. Such appropriations complicate any easy establishment of binaries between the ruler and the ruled, and gradually the fissures in authority are revealed through the very narratives that were once symbols of power.

Chapter Two: Refashioning Gender: *Kapalkundala* and *The Tempest*

Bankimchandra Chatterjee occupies the curiously doubled position of being a conservative Bengali Hindu within the larger framework of nineteenth century colonial Bengal. On the one hand he is deeply enmeshed in Western ideologies, conditioned in part by thinkers such as Comte, Darwin and Max Muller, while on the other he draws extensively from Hindu mythology and contemporary reformist thought, creating a peculiar combination that simultaneously reinforces and critiques the Bengal of his religio-cultural inheritance. His fictional and non-fictional works link empirical and imaginary histories in a conscious effort to write a “continuous” narrative of the past to counter the British colonial stereotype of the weak Bengali/Hindu/Indian. In doing so, Bankim¹⁴ attempts to create not only a community with a legitimate history that can serve as an inspiration for both the present and the future of the colonized people, but also contests the image of the effeminate Bengali—a representation that had become the justification for colonial administration. The British actively propagated the myth of the physically, morally and intellectually weak Bengali *babu*¹⁵—an individual in constant

¹⁴ I refer to Chatterjee as Bankim following the convention used by most contemporary scholars of the period.

¹⁵ Usually used to refer disparagingly to middle/upper class Bengali gentlemen as having only a veneer of western education, and as indulging in a debauched lifestyle.

need of Western supervision—and Bankim challenges this mythic identity, seeking to replace it with an alternate gender construction. As John Rosselli submits in “The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal”, countering the effete image imposed upon the Bengali/Indian formed the basis of the cultural revivalist movement of which Bankim was such a central part. Rosselli traces the reasons behind such a perception of the Bengali and also the importance given to imaginatively recreating history in order to oppose the myth of frailty that the British methodically propagated. So pervasive was this image of the Bengali that the colonized felt this to be—at least in terms of their contemporary culture—a reality that had to be rectified. Rosselli suggests that in colonial Bengal,

Bengalis, they [the Bengalis themselves] admitted, were “lilliputian in size and weak in constitution,” “physically about the weakest people in India,” “in mere physique and courage...inferior to Englishmen.” Educated Bengalis were “broken in health;” the term of life accorded to the Bengali constitution has been rapidly decreasing. To Bankim Chandra Chatterjee [...] the matter was simple: “Bengalis never had any physical valour.” This lack was freely admitted. (123)

The reformed, ideal Bengali finds complete expression in the novelist’s later works, but his search for a viable identity begins as early as in the exploration of gender in *Kapalkundala* (1866). The novel marks Bankim’s first major publication in Bengali

and also his fascination with reworking western texts.¹⁶ The plot of *Kapalkundala* is set in the Contai subdivision of Bengal, and it narrates the tale of a young woman brought up by a Prospero-like father figure on a desert island. Kapalkundala falls in love with Nabokumar—a man who, like Ferdinand, is stranded on the island—and she escapes her domineering father by marrying this man and fleeing with him. Bankim then introduces Luthfunnisha (alias Moti Bibi), Nabokumar’s previous wife, but no one, except the reader, knows her real identity till the very end of the novel. *Kapalkundala* closes with the heroine’s suicide—an act that symbolizes her rejection of her socially conditioned wifely identity in favor of the untamed, natural part of her self.

What makes the novel unique is that in it Bankim challenges the identity imposed by the colonizer through a reworking of a canonical Western text—Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Bankim’s decision to choose *The Tempest*, a work that the imperial masters had propagated as embodying the superior culture, is integral to the nationalist/culture revivalist project of the late nineteenth century. He employs the characters of the play to re-imagine the concept of the masculine and the feminine, and to reclaim the gender identities that had been systematically negated under colonial rule. Thus Bankim’s act of writing back to *The Tempest* involves both a retelling of the play’s basic plot from a colonial context, and a re-visioning of the gender identities assigned by the British.

¹⁶ Bankim later goes on to loosely refashion Thomas De Quincy’s *Confessions of an English Opium-eater* in his 1875 publication *Kamalakanter Daptar (From the Desk of Kamalakanta)*.

For Bankim, rewriting *The Tempest* serves two significantly productive functions. From the perspective of colonial Bengal, subverting the paradigm of British authority using such an identifiably British icon as Shakespeare exposes the contingent nature of colonial power and allows for the existence of multiple narratives instead of a single, occidentally-defined authorial voice. *Kapalkundala* becomes symbolic of the Bengali intellectual's ability to appropriate the colonizer's discourse and to create a text whose codes of communication exclude the ruling class. Thus access to a work like *The Tempest* no longer requires the exclusive sanction of the culturally "superior" British, and what is instead made available to the intellectually aware Bengali is the subaltern voice that the colonizer wishes to suppress. At the level of the text itself, Bankim reworks the characters of Miranda and Caliban to formulate his peculiar brand of gender identity. He exploits the play's insistent questioning of power as stemming from both the ruler and the ruled to implicate the colonizer in the creation of the myth of the effeminate Bengali—a myth that must necessarily appear as truth for the propagation of the imperialist project. The alternative that Bankim presents rejects the hypermasculinity of imperial Britain in favor of the empowered feminine principle, and he finds a surprising ally in Miranda who he transforms into a powerfully androgynous figure, balancing both the masculine and the feminine.

If there is anything more central to nineteenth century intellectual Bengali culture than the British presence, it is the overwhelming acceptance of Shakespeare as representative of that presence. Gauri Viswanathan, in her work *The Masks of Conquest*,

alludes to the dominant position occupied by English literature within the colonial framework and traces the growth of English studies as a means of cultural subjugation. Bankim presents himself as well aware of the ideological force of literature in his novel *Kapalkundala* when he reworks *The Tempest* to tell the tale of a Bengali woman and her inability to integrate within a patriarchal society. *Kapalkundala* shares many plot elements with the Shakespearean play—the magus-like father figure, the woman existing beyond the social structure, and a male figure closely resembling Ferdinand—but the reference to Shakespeare extends even to the structural aspect of the novel. Bankim uses key phrases from Shakespeare—among other English and classical Indian authors—as epigraphs to the chapters, thus consciously equating a Western ideological construct with its oriental counterpart.¹⁷ Significantly, however, he negotiates any direct critique of the system by situating his novels within a seemingly remote historical past, often invoking Mughal¹⁸ rule in order to displace the points of colonial rupture. The most apparent example of such temporal distancing can perhaps be best seen in his novel entitled *Anadamatha* (*Abbey of Bliss*), in which the ruling power is identified through progressive editions as *ingrez* (the English), *sepo*y (soldiers), and finally as *yaban* (a pejorative term

¹⁷ Bankim’s comparative approach is discussed in greater detail with reference to his essay “Shakuntala, Miranda Ebang Desdemona”, but it is also evident in his selection of epigraphs. Each epigraph summarizes the action that unfolds in the chapter, and while Shakespeare functions as Bankim’s primary English source, Kalidasa serves as his Indian equivalent. Thus while the two opening chapters are headed by brief quotes from *The Comedy of Errors* and *King Lear* respectively, the next few epigraphs are drawn from Kalidasa’s *Raghuvamsa* and *Shakuntala*. Bankim’s choice of texts and authors indicates a desire to obliterate the ideological hierarchy that the colonizer sought to impose through literary works.

¹⁸ The Mughal empire was the Muslim imperial power that ruled the Indian subcontinent from around the early 16th century to the middle of the nineteenth century.

used for Muslims). The objects of criticism are merely renamed, and not eradicated by the veiled threat of censorship.¹⁹ Although less prominent in *Kapalkundala*, here too Bankim places the burden of colonial rule on the Mughal system, thus ensuring that his interrogation of an identifiable Western text fails to register on the censorship radar.

At the same time, it would be inappropriate to judge Bankim by modern day postcolonial standards in his negation of British dominance, as his argument seeks to validate the politically effective Hindu within the context of the alien government. The West—and its ideological appendages—form a liberating backdrop against which to place the logic of an emergent colonial nationalism. The novel form is at once a product and a critique of colonial Bengal and one can trace in it the foundations of the transformed colonized subject and the language of his/her articulation. The meteoric rise in the readership of the novel and the various linguistic and structural modifications in its Bengali versions testify to the dual pressures of unquestioned approval and critical negation of Enlightenment rationality. To be able to satisfy both these trends, textual subversion must needs assume a subtler form, inclusive of the complex loyalty on the novelist's part toward the foreign ruler. The Bengali novel as it emerges simultaneously rejects the colonizer's essentialized definitions of the effeminate Bengali self, while accepting European humanist ideals.

¹⁹ Bankim's anti-colonial writing might have cost him a promotion while serving as the deputy magistrate in the town of Khulna, Bengal.

Significantly, Bankim's first novel, *Rajmohan's Wife*—his sole work in English—failed to make an impression on both European and Indian audiences. *Rajmohan's Wife* represents a conscious attempt to express himself in the language of the dominant discourse, an attempt demonstrated to be inadequate. What Bankim proceeds to do, subsequent to this literary “failure,” is to incorporate the West within the comparative mode of study, thereby appropriating the legitimacy of the colonizer's texts to validate vernacular literature. His essay, “Shakuntala, Miranda Ebang Desdemona”²⁰—published in the *Baisakh* edition of the Bengali literary magazine *Bangadarshan*—compares Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* to Shakespeare's *Miranda* and *Desdemona* in an apparent attempt to explicate *Shakuntala*'s coy behavior through the lens of Shakespearean heroines. The study, however, curiously undermines the centrality of Shakespeare when it emphasizes the difference of cultures that functions outside the ambit of the colonizer's claim to intellectual and social superiority. Bankim's approach is deceptively straightforward, yet strategically subversive when he discusses *Miranda*'s lack of social graces;

Shakuntala possesses all the social graces, *Miranda* none. She has not the least inhibition in praising *Ferdinand* to her father; the kind of praise one would lavish upon a picture [...] Yet the shyness that is intrinsic to womankind is not lacking in *Miranda*. That is why there is in her simplicity, in comparison to *Shakuntala*'s, a novelty and charm [...] [W]e understand that *Miranda* though unaware of social custom, was affectionate and was disturbed at seeing someone suffer [...] [M]ark

²⁰ “Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona”

the amazing technique of the two poets [Kalidasa and Shakespeare]; they did not set about portraying Shakuntala and Miranda after conferring with each other, but the characters seem as though sketched by the same pen. (“Shakuntala, Miranda Ebang Desdemona,” 223-224)

The subtle equating of the “two poets” negates any assertion of hierarchy, rendering invalid the very premise legitimizing the colonizing mission. Characteristically, Bankim’s probing analysis does not end there as he goes on to remark on the easy availability—and indeed almost the omnipresence—of Shakespeare in colonized households;

We wanted to reproduce this first love talk between Ferdinand and Miranda in its entirety but it is not necessary. Everyone has Shakespeare at home; everyone may open the original text and read it. (“Shakuntala, Miranda Ebang Desdemona,” 226)

Shakespeare’s presence is never denied; indeed Bankim calls on it to substantiate his argument. The implication of centrality is refuted, and, by consequence, the structure of power that imposes Western ideological positions.

The choice of texts—and the cultural understanding Bankim wishes to articulate through such a comparative study—underscores his proto-nationalist attitude and is itself a subject of much critical debate. For my present purposes however, I wish to focus on the comparative mode that the essay assumes, and its implications in evaluating the

characters of Kapalkundala and Luthfunnisha—the two female protagonists in *Kapalkundala*. In “Shakuntala, Miranda Ebang Desdemona”, Bankim pays particular attention to Miranda in order to undergird, and explain, the differences between her and Shakuntala; Miranda is once again at the core of the narrative as he constructs Kapalkundala. Bankim’s heroine shares many elements of her fate with Miranda, in a manner that can hardly be thought of as coincidental. She is brought up by the Kapalik²¹ who, though not her biological father, imparts the same care and education as Prospero does to his daughter. Despite having lived in the wilderness, away from human society for all her life, Kapalkundala, at least superficially, displays no asocial or anti-social behavior. Like Miranda, she is acutely aware of her love for Nabokumar, although the reader is not made aware of it till much later in the novel. There are, however, some significant differences between the two female protagonists that exhibit a more complex form of adaptation on Bankim’s part than has been conventionally acknowledged. Although Kapalkundala is Nabokumar’s “legitimate” wife in the course of the novel, she lacks the knowledge of social conventions that Miranda seems to possess. For Kapalkundala the transition from her island home to her marital home is prompted not by love but by a desire for self protection and the move is by no means an easy one. So, unlike Miranda, Kapalkundala can never be forthcoming about her love for Nabokumar. To an extent, the dissimilarities arise not as a result of a lack of social graces but rather because of Kapalkundala’s indifference towards them. The final example of this

²¹ Roughly translates as a sage worshipping the darker aspects of the Goddess Kali.

indifference occurs when she agrees to leave Nabokumar for Luthfunnisha to reclaim her position as his wife;

Kapalkundala again set about thinking. Her mind's eye swept all over the wide world but could not see any familiar face there. She looked into her heart but, strange! she could not find Nabokumar there. Then why on earth should she be a thorn in the path of Luthfunnisha's happiness? (*Kapalkundala*, 142)

This Kapalkundala is difficult to reconcile with the Miranda who pledges not just her love but even her life to Ferdinand. Yet Bankim provides enough textual clues not to sever the comparison entirely. Thus the question arises—how does the novelist utilize these differences between the characters in his reworking of *The Tempest*?

What is peculiarly interesting about Bankim's novel is that it portrays not a single, unified Miranda, but rather splits the character into two distinct individuals—Kapalkundala and Luthfunnisha. In a move that closely resembles Marilyn French's²² division of the feminine into its inlaw and outlaw aspects, Bankim juxtaposes the docile Miranda with her uncontrolled self. It is almost as though they mirror each other with Luthfunnisha representing the socially conditioned self of Prospero's daughter. Luthfunnisha may seem to be far more worldly wise than Miranda could ever hope to be, and her status as a courtesan in the Mughal court could not be further from that of the usurped Duke's only offspring. Yet through this division Bankim is able to project the

²² In her work entitled *Shakespeare's Division of Experience*

version of Miranda that emerges once the characters leave the enchanted island. Although Shakespeare considerably problematizes the genre of the festive comedy,²³ *The Tempest* retains the structural form of the genre with courtly disorder, retreat, reconciliation, renewal and a return. If this pattern is accepted, then Nabokumar's first wife—Luthfunnisha—symbolizes a return for Miranda from the green world into the urban space. While *Kapalkundala* represents Miranda's past and present, Luthfunnisha reflects her future self—one enmeshed in the world of the court. The transition between the two worlds is not easy, owing to the incomplete division between the city and the country with which both Shakespeare and Bankim experiment. Thus neither *Kapalkundala* nor Luthfunnisha can be perfectly reconciled with Miranda, but together they reveal the various facets of her character. In answer to the question posed earlier then, Bankim retells Shakespeare's play by imaginatively exploring the possible trajectories of individual characters.

A secondary project Bankim undertakes while writing back to *The Tempest* is an investigation of the liminality of his female characters. This is also a part of the anti-colonial drive that undergirds much of Bankim's work as it helps create the alternate gender identity to counter the imposed colonial stereotype of the weak "native." The liminal feminine identity that he envisions derives its potency from rejecting

²³ One of the most significant ways in which he does this is by dissolving any neat boundaries between the city and the country, thereby rendering the concept of a "retreat" into a "purer" world considerably more problematic. *Kapalkundala* reflects this same ambiguity regarding ordered and chaotic spaces when the island and the forest become not sites of refuge but of dark uncertainties. Also, see reference to C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* in the following chapter.

conventional gender stereotypes and finds its full expression in the figure of the Mother Goddess in *Anandamatha*. In *Kapalkundala*, Bankim recruits Miranda and Caliban to help him fashion the empowered feminine self. The split in Miranda's character—as shown through Kapalkundala and Luthfunnisha—reveals the social conditioning that these women are subjected to by the patriarchal system. Caliban provides the prototype of the untamed “thing of darkness”—a figure that Kapalkundala must strive to become in order to achieve complete self-expression. However, before identifying the Calibanic in Kapalkundala, it is necessary to consider the plural identities Bankim bestows upon both her and Luthfunnisha to understand his fascination with the gendered self.

The two female protagonists of *Kapalkundala* together work out what can only be described as an experiment on the part of the novelist, in which Bankim pushes the plurality of identity to its logical extreme. Kapalkundala is christened Mrinmoyee by her husband's family in order to reclaim her from the asocial past that her name is thought to represent.²⁴ Luthfunnisha introduces herself as Moti Bibi when she first meets Nabokumar but the novel then reveals her to be Padmabati, his first wife. Bankim is careful to stress that she assumes the name of Moti Bibi only when travelling under a disguise, thus undergirding also the need for pseudonyms in certain situations. The multiplicity of names projects the instability of these identities and the inability of

²⁴ Renaming of the newly married wife and thus symbolically severing her identitarian ties with her natal family and claiming her as their own was a traditional device in many Bengali households up until the early decades of the twentieth century. According to the novel “[t]he name Kapalkundala was a bit horrible so women-folk called her Mrinmoyee” (*Kapalkundala*, 68). Note in this context, the very patriarchal act of renaming Antoinette as Bertha, by her un-named husband in Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea* is also the first step towards erasure and control of her “untamed” self.

Bankim's female characters to inhabit any one, rigidly defined domain of selfhood. The image that the reader perceives is one in which the many personas continually threaten to collapse, and indeed mutate, into one another. To see Mrinmoyee and Padmabati as essentially a single self would be to acknowledge the mold that their husband's family places them in—that of the superficially domesticated Hindu wife, deriving contentment from the legitimacy of social relations. Yet, the constant pressure of their other, less tamed selves impinges upon any such easy identification, and ultimately the two women are defined by those very outlawed identities. The problematic division and juxtaposition of selves can be seen as an extension of Bankim's analysis of the liminal within the social.

Nabokumar's second meeting with Moti Bibi at the inn marks a moment when one individual self is made to bear the burden of multiple identities. To demonstrate the paradox, I quote from both their first and the second encounter, beginning with Nabokumar's response to Moti Bibi's taunting enquiry regarding his knowledge of beautiful women;

“I have seen many a woman [,]” answered he “but never such a beautiful one.”

The woman boastfully asked “Not a single one?” [...] “Not a single one! No—I can never say that.” “So far so good” rejoined the woman. “Is she your wife?”

“Why? What, above all things, sends you on the thought of a wife?” “The

Bengalee always regards his wife as an unsurpassed beauty.” [...] “My wife is

with me.” It gave another opportunity of showing Moti’s vein of humour. “Is she the non-pareil beauty?” asked Moti. (*Kapalkundala*, 54-57)

When Moti makes the final statement, she is already aware of Nabokumar’s identity, thus posing the narrational problem of identifying the subject of this sentence. The “non-pareil beauty” she mentions could simultaneously refer to her, to Padmabati (her earlier name as Nabokumar’s first wife), Kapalkundala, or Mrinmoyee (the name “given” to Kapalkundala by her husband’s family after her marriage with Nabokumar) as they all fulfill the prerequisite of the claim—Nabokumar’s divinely beautiful wife. Note however, that at this point only Luthfunnisha and the reader are aware of the multiplicity of selves and the multiplicity of wifely-identities, so far as Nabokumar is concerned. By the time Kapalkundala acquires this knowledge, she is already too committed to one identity to be able to effect a shift in character. This insight allows Luthfunnisha to move back and forth between her various selves, manipulating them in order to enable her return to Hindu social legitimacy. However, the final self she consciously adopts in order to “become” Padmabati again, is the disguise of a Brahmin boy and she is left stranded with this identity, as both Nabokumar and Kapalkundala (the only two people who know about her real identity) commit suicide at the end of the narrative. Thus Luthfunnisha’s constant role-shifts take her beyond not merely the notion of unified selfhood, but outside biologically designated gender frames as well.

Kapalkundala is herself a curiously androgynous figure, simultaneously straddling several zones of liminality. While the circumstances of her upbringing and her

relationship with the mysterious Kapalik place her in a situation similar to that of Miranda, Bankim introduces a number of textual clues that reveal the presence of an alternate “other” within Kapalkundala. Paradoxically, she is not just a reworking of Miranda but of Caliban as well. The dark, unpredictable dimension of her nature that makes her so peculiarly unsuitable to a Bengali, nineteenth century domesticated social context, ironically serves to make her represent the “unnatural” monster of Prospero’s island. Like Caliban, Kapalkundala chooses not to subdue her “outlawed” self as she feels it to be the closest to her sense of her own identity.²⁵ The transition from the Miranda-like malleable self to the more untamed Caliban-like side of Kapalkundala is established by the way she wears her hair. One of the things of which the reader is aware, when he/she first sees her through Nabokumar’s eyes, is of the mass of unruly hair that seems to give her an ethereal aura—much like the idols of the goddess Durga or Kali. The untied/unbraided hair remains symbolic of her wilder self. When that identity is forcefully reined in, as Mrinmoyee, the demure wife of Nabokumar, Kapalkundala has to submit to the normative, carefully coiffeured hairstyle of a nineteenth century Bengali housewife. As the novelist describes the “new,” domesticated Kapalkundala, he once again draws attention to the arrangement of her hair;

Now the mass of her raven-dark hair that once hung out in heavy serpent-like coils, sweeping down her waist-line, has been gathered up and twisted in a

²⁵ This can be seen as analogous to French’s division of the feminine into the “inlaw” and the “outlaw” aspects, although it is important to note that here Bankim’s model for the outlaw is the male Caliban.

massive knot that perched high in the back of her head. The braiding of locks even was worked up into an elaborate art-work and the fine skilled designs and figures displayed in the pleating spoke highly of Shyamasundari's [Kapalkundala's sister-in-law] finished style of hair-dressing. (*Kapalkundala*, 112)

Before she can revert back to her earlier self, she must unloosen her hair, thus symbolically rejecting the identity of "Mrinmoyee" to revert to the wild, untamed "Kapalkundala."

Perhaps the most telling passage, in which Kapalkundala appears most like her Calibanic self occurs at the close of the novel. As she ventures very willingly into the forest to gather certain herbs that must be collected at the dead of night, Kapalkundala throws off the caution and fear that is the mark of a socially conditioned Bengali housewife, and reveals her "untamed," transgressive, Calbanic-self;

She remembered the surf-touched cool sea-breeze that playfully shook her dishevelled hair on the sand-dunes of the Bahari [the island]. She gazed into the unrelenting blue of the sky and recollection brought back to her mind the cameo-cut impression of the boundless stretch of the sea resembling the vast deep azure of the sky overhead. With a heart heavy with such reflections did Kapalkundala walk onward. (*Kapalkundala*, 117)

Nabokumar notices this indefinable streak in his wife, but he is so enamored with her “domesticated” Mrinmoyee-self that he can no longer perceive the transgressive Caliban-like Kapalkundala, or the essential liminality of her desires. His rigidly defined code of ethics perceives her subversive behavior to be a sign of her unfaithfulness, her lack of marital fidelity. Nabokumar simply lacks the emotional or intellectual ability to understand the complexity of the multiple identities lurking within Kapalkundala. It would be profitable to compare Kapalkundala’s dilemma with that of Jean Rhys’ Antoinette (in *The Wide Sargasso Sea*) just as it would be worthwhile to compare Nabokumar’s imperviousness to his wife’s liminality with the harsh British husband’s refusal to “see” the Caribbean side of Antoinette/Bertha’s character. Seen through the eyes of Nabokumar, and the patriarchally attenuated society, the “wife” Kapalkundala is little more than an anomaly, and one that must be rectified, even if she has to be physically erased in the process. In aligning Kapalkundala with Caliban and Miranda, Bankim can be seen as reworking *The Tempest* with a view to contesting both colonial gender identities imposed by the British, and the patriarchal social structure of nineteenth century Bengal.

While Kapalkundala and Caliban are strikingly similar in that the difference that they wish to express so strongly is contained by the society in which they live, and that that very society situates them in preconceived molds, they are also similar because the construct of the domesticated “angel in the house” was a British construct of “taming” and “containment.” What is achieved at this point (for the colonized reader) is the

conflation of the patriarchal and imperial positions in the figure of the chastising/regulating Nabokumar, and the coalescing of the “untamed native” as well as the “transgressive woman” in the form of Kapalkundala. For Prospero and his ilk, Caliban is always the comfortably “othered,” familiar “thing of darkness;” a potential threat rendered impotent when framed by well-known conventions of othering. Similarly, Nabokumar—even at the moment of Kapalkundala’s death—can acknowledge only her fidelity and his love, and not the validity of her alternate identity.

Since she has little control over the way that her life moves through its different phases, Kapalkundala is perpetually at the mercy of male figures who in protecting her, are ultimately protecting their own self-interest—her rebellion can only be expressed through death. Kapalkundala transcends the human realm in perceiving the Goddess Kali as the only figure whom she can trust and from whom she can demand recognition for her individuality. Thus her decision to sacrifice herself can be seen as not an act of self-destruction, but as giving primacy to her desired sense of self at the cost of losing her physical identity. Similarly, another such liminal figure, Antoinette, nullifies the intersecting forces of imperial and patriarchal control conspiring to contain her and re-inscribes her identity, paradoxically through erasure and death. As this is the one act that Kapalkundala must perform on her own, she does not allow either the Kapalik or Nabokumar to enact their male vengeance on her body, simultaneously denying the norms of both the father and the husband. The fact that the Kapalik cannot sacrifice her, and Nabokumar cannot prevent her suicide provides Kapalkundala the self-justification

that she has been seeking throughout the novel. Significantly enough, her death also disrupts the patriarchal system that had so far imposed its will on her as it “emotionally compels” her husband to follow her example. The narrative had begun with Kapalkundala granting a fresh lease of life to Nabokumar (a man virtually condemned to death when his selfish associates on a passenger boat had left him stranded on a desert island to starve, or die of tiger-mauling, or both). Henceforth, throughout the narrative she consigns herself to a life in which she is merely satisfying his wishes. It is only at the very end of the narrative that she leads him—although this time to his death.

Reworking *The Tempest*, a canonical text produced from the imperial center and touted as normative of “civilized” European culture, paradoxically allows Bankim to explore these conflicting and contested registers of gender identity at a time when these very identity positions were under severe attack and when the very project of nationalist revival was integrally related to the recovering/reconstructing of a heroic and a culturally distinct identity position. *Kapalkundala* renders invalid the rigid hierarchy of both social and gendered modes of being that the colonial enterprise sought to implement by employing both Miranda and Caliban in the ironic reversal of power relationships within colonial Bengal. Shakespeare’s play provides Bankim not only with the necessary raw creative material but also with the means to rupture the colonial fabric assigning a mythic sense of self.

Chapter Three: Positions of Power: Reading *Disgrace* and *The Tempest*

The socio-historical context of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, its fascination with a powerful European man forcibly occupying a contra-European space and his apparent civilizing intent, its etching of a complex and intertwined master (Prospero)-slave (Caliban) relationship, and its engagement with the problematic female figure (Miranda) as a locus of desire has prompted generations of readers, especially those operating within a postcolonial context, to respond and react to the play. As Meredith Anne Skura remarks in "The Case for Colonialism in *The Tempest*,"

Europeans were at that time exploiting the real Calibans of the world, and *The Tempest* was part of the process [...] When the English talked about these New World inhabitants, they did not just innocently apply stereotype or project their own fears: they did so to a particular effect [...] *The Tempest* itself not only displays prejudice but fosters and even "enacts" colonialism by mystifying or justifying Prospero's power over Caliban [...] *The Tempest* is a political act (223).

Seen in this light, Prospero becomes the classic example of the colonizer, ruling over the curiously deceptive island and the "thing of darkness" (*The Tempest*, 1 275, 5.1).

Caliban's attempts to win back his island remain unsuccessful because, from the

imperialist perspective, his primitive challenge can never equal Prospero's Enlightenment rationality.

If *The Tempest* is concerned with themes of subjugation/resistance, and the interdependence of colonizer/colonized, then J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* reworks some of these primary motifs. The novel engages with the deeply problematic and unstable power locations in contemporary South Africa, and enunciates its complex and embittered racial reality. Coetzee's historical situatedness as a white man living in post-apartheid South Africa makes such negotiations with race and power relations—in both the public and the private sphere—inevitable. This appears to be an abiding theme in Coetzee's narratives as he explores the complex familial and colonial bonds that function along the axes of subjugation and resistance. In *Disgrace*, as in *Foe* and *In the Heart of the Country*, he demonstrates how each of these positions—that of the father or the daughter, the master or the slave, the colonizer or the colonized—is implicated in the other in an Hegelian “life-and-death struggle.”²⁶

Disgrace problematizes the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized by portraying positions of power in a state of flux. Coetzee's novel narrates the story of

²⁶ In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel traces the path that self-consciousness follows through desire, a life or death struggle, to finally the master-servant relationship. A very cursory—with the acknowledged risk of being simplistic—reading reveals self-consciousness's desire to impose itself too strongly on other self-consciousnesses that it perceives, in order to show itself as being more than a mere animal consciousness. Hegel posits this desire as one for recognition and theorizes a dramatic struggle to death that takes place between these two entities. He argues that the willingness to give up one's life is the most effective means of claiming a unique selfhood when confronted with an “other” which also possesses self-consciousness (114).

David Lurie as he is forced to leave his teaching post following a brief, but intense, affair with one of his students. The protagonist then takes refuge on his daughter's farm in rural South Africa, and has to come to terms with his sense of dislocation and disempowerment. Lurie is a strange and fractured Prospero figure, lacking any effective forms of power. Even before his disgraceful exit from the university, he is aware of not having any real authority in what he calls an "emasculated institute of learning" (*Disgrace*, 4). Coetzee describes Lurie as,

[o]nce a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications. Like all rationalized personnel, he is allowed to offer one special-field course a year, irrespective of enrolment, because that is good for morale [...] For the rest he teaches Communications 101, 'Communication Skills', and Communications 201, 'Advanced Communication Skills.' (3)

It is almost as though the author picks up the character of Prospero from where Shakespeare had left him—an old man without his magic—and builds him into David Lurie. However, unlike Prospero, his willingness to abjure his powers is really a sham. Lurie chooses to move away from the institute that had been his source of authority but his departure is nothing like the grand exit of Shakespeare's Prospero. In Coetzee's version he slinks away from the public eye to contemplate, and ultimately to humble himself before, his disgrace—caused both by his socially condemned relationship with his underage student Melanie, and by his inability to protect his daughter Lucy from the

physical assault on her isolated farm. One is reminded of Prospero's epilogue calling for the audience's approval and good wishes to complete the "magical" play; only this time Lurie's audience refuses to grant him an honorable release.

Disgrace, unlike most works of postcolonial re-visioning, recovers Prospero's voice and not Caliban's, as Coetzee begins his story after Caliban has insidiously, but effectively, taken over his island. The author charts Prospero/Lurie's journey from a complete loss of power to a partial reconstruction of his self not merely through his interactions with other characters, but also via his creative instincts. Lurie's academic ambitions urge him to compose a grand opus on Byron, one of the British poets writing during the Romantic era, but like his relationships with women, this too gradually devolves into a disjointed series of fruitless lamentations. As he goes through his period of disgrace, Lurie realizes that he must identify not with the voice of the Don Juan-like socially attractive poet, but with Byron's mistress, Teresa, who is well past her prime, and the poet's wraith-like daughter. Like Teresa, who evolves from being a muse to giving voice to Byron's faint whispers, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, too, has turned a full cycle and it is the white man who must now fight for his right to be heard.

In Coetzee's narrative the traditionally subjugated figure of Caliban finds expression not in the character of a single man but as the entire black community. The acts of violence committed by the various Calibans—the rape of Lucy in particular—are represented as a continuous and integrated deed that defines them as a people.

Lurie/Prospero and his kind suffer from a vulnerable individuality that hinders fruitful interaction with each other, thereby rendering them ineffective against the Calibans's communal aggression. Prospero's solitude—the source of his magus-like powers as it allows him to accumulate knowledge—becomes untenable in Lurie's South Africa. Coetzee's protagonist fails to communicate even with his daughter, thus alienating himself from the primal bonds of kinship. Tellingly, Coetzee portrays his protagonist as struggling to give voice to Byron and his long-forgotten mistress Teresa in a fictive world dominated by individuals who can only give the impression of communicating.

Petrus—one of the several Caliban-like figures in the novel—evolves from being Lucy's "dog-man" and general handyman to her neighbor and ultimately her protector on the farm. He plays out the act of reclaiming history as he slowly rises to the position from which he can dictate terms and offer to take in the white woman under his protection. He negates the apparent need displayed by Shakespeare's Caliban to destroy Prospero's books to be on par with the magician. Instead, Petrus confidently displays his wealth and family, and expresses no compulsion to compete with Lurie on intellectual/cultural terms. Lurie, however, interprets this expression of independence as symbolic of Petrus's savagery, and as further proof that he and his "brutish" kind cannot be trusted around European women. Lurie's own actions—his semi-consensual relationship with Melanie—undercut such a judgment and the reader is continually reminded of Lurie's own rather tenuous claim of succumbing to lust in the name of Eros. It is the "boy" Pollux who rapes Lucy, but Lurie conflates the identities of Petrus and Pollux, and his

convictions are strengthened when Petrus insists on protecting Pollux. For Petrus the question of seeing the boy as guilty does not even arise because as he tells Lurie,

‘You have no work here. You come to look after your child. I also look after my child [...] Yes. He is a child. He is my family, my people.’ So that is it. No more lies. *My people*. As naked an answer as he could wish (*Disgrace*, 201).

While Shakespeare’s Caliban can only make a futile attempt at colonizing the body of Miranda, the Caliban—an amalgamation of the entire black community—of *Disgrace* is able to not only “mark” Lucy, but also claim her through her unborn child.

Significantly, the relationship between Petrus and Lurie also marks a breakdown of the colonizer’s language. Petrus does not overtly reject Lurie’s tongue, but he adapts it to suit his communicational needs, while Lurie realizes that the English he is familiar with is no longer capable of telling the stories of either communities. Perhaps one way to look at the situation would be to use what Chantal Zabus, in her eponymous article, terms “relexification.” In her description of the word, she explains:

[t]he emphasis is here on the lexis in the original sense of speech, word or phrase and on *lexicon* in reference to the vocabulary and morphemes of a language and, by extension, to word formation [...] [T]his concept can be expanded to refer to semantics and syntax, as well. I shall thus here [define] relexification as the making of a new register of communication out of an alien lexicon. The adjectives ‘new’ and ‘alien’ are particularly relevant in a post-colonial context in which the

European language remains alien or irreducibly ‘other’ [...] and a new language is being forged as a result of the artist’s imaginative use of that situation (315).

The problem of language is inherently present in any postcolonial situation because its unique connection with socio-cultural reality makes it the ideal site for the subversion of authority. For the erstwhile colonized it is the language of the masters—hence defined by the very act of colonization—and for the white man, too, it is a tired language, burdened with heavy syllables that can no longer adequately represent changing times. Throughout the novel Coetzee repeatedly draws attention to the inadequacy of the English language and looks for an alternative means of articulation. He expresses his doubts about the suitability of English through Lurie, as the latter ponders how

[h]e would not mind hearing Petrus’s story one day. But preferably not reduced to English. More and more he is convinced that English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Stretches of English code whole sentences long have thickened, lost their articulations, their articulateness, their articulatedness. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened. (*Disgrace*, 117)

The only tentative solution that Lurie—a scholar of languages—can offer is to start from the basics again. However, his proposition, that one should start with the alphabets and the small words and then work one’s way back to the larger words in order to allow those words to regain some of their original “purity” seems problematic and a fracturing of Prospero’s confident assumptions regarding words.

Coetzee mimics the confusion over language in his refusal to draw easy parallels between *The Tempest* and the relationships between Lurie, Lucy and Petrus. In the context of the novel, Lucy is Miranda's counterpart, but she is significantly different from the Shakespearean character because Lucy openly rejects Lurie/Prospero's offers of guidance. However difficult it might be—and she acknowledges the dangers of her decision—she seeks to lead her life on her own terms, even though those very terms are compromised by virtue of her position as a single white woman living in rural South Africa. Lurie insists that as her father, it is up to him to steer her through her life, but remains aware of the possibility of his being led by her. From Lucy's perspective, her relationship with her father cannot be that of a teacher-student and she tells him,

You do not see this, and I do not know what more I can do to make you see [...] I think of you as one of the three chimpanzees, the one with his paws over his eyes [...] I cannot be a child for ever. You cannot be a father for ever. I know you mean well, but you are not the guide I need, not at this time. (*Disgrace*, 161)

Here Lucy sharply contrasts with the Miranda who—initially—obeys her father and hesitates to look for a source of knowledge beyond him. Even more interestingly, Lucy accepts Petrus/Caliban in a bid to undo the wrongs of the past. She understands that to survive on her land she needs the help of the community whose land it was originally. While Lurie almost mocks her decision to stay on even after the rape, she can only justify herself from a very different perspective—

But isn't there another way of looking at it David? What if...what if *that* [the raping] is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves. (*Disgrace*, 158)

She is still unable to transcend the us/them binary but nonetheless she is willing to accept "their" viewpoint as having some legitimacy. Her actions might be a move toward, quite literally, paying for the sins of her forefathers, but Coetzee offers no further elaboration in that direction. Lucy understands that her individual existence depends upon forming those very communal alliances that now empower the novel's many Calibans, and in this she rejects the alienating solitude that her father emphatically embraces. Her acceptance of Petrus's offer of protection clearly marks the shift in power—the white male figure must now give way to the erstwhile slave and accept his own marginalized minority status.

Like Lucy, the other female characters in the novel also aid in destabilizing any easy identification between Lurie and Prospero. With Soraya, the prostitute, Lurie strives to play the role of the dominating partner. At a very superficial level, he seeks to physically re-make her when he asks her to wipe off the make-up that offends him. On a far more fundamental level, he repeats his desire for supremacy by imagining her and her life outside the room in Windsor Mansions:

Soraya is not her real name, that he is sure of. There are signs that she has borne a child, or children. It may be that she is not a professional at all. She may work for the agency only one or two times a week, and for the rest live a respectable life in the suburbs, in Rylands or Althone. That would be unusual for a Muslim, but all things are possible these days. (*Disgrace*, 3)

When he tries to track her down she rejects him, leaving him with no option other than to look for other sexual partners. His student, Melanie, momentarily succumbs to his pressures, allowing him to imagine himself as an agent of the god of passion, Eros, but, paradoxically, it is the same Melanie who forces him to realize that he is no more than a repulsive “old man” (*Disgrace*, 169). Ultimately with Lucy’s friend Bev, Lurie is forced to admit that his Prospero-like powers can no longer exist even in the realm of his imagination. Unable to deny the loss of his youth and masculine charm, he turns to fictional Teresa—the girl Byron loved and then neglected—but she too is broken and the best she can offer Lurie are her songs of despair and the “silly plink-plonk of the toy banjo” (*Disgrace*, 184).

This act of authorial re-visioning extends to the genre that encompasses both *The Tempest* as well as *Disgrace*—the festive comedy as envisioned by Shakespeare.²⁷ Stated

²⁷ C.L. Barber’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* elaborates on structure of Shakespeare’s festive comedies and traces the form’s roots in early modern holiday customs. Barber asserts that most of these holiday rituals reversed the order of everyday life, and were “understood to be a temporary license, a ‘misrule’ which implied rule” (10). He then goes on to suggest that Shakespeare’s festive comedies follow this pattern of reversal and that the green world represents holiday humor. For Barber, translating the festive experience into drama allowed Shakespeare to

in rather simplistic terms, the festive comedy dramatizes a temporary retreat to the country—the green world—in order to escape the corrupt influences of the city. The country provides a site for moral regeneration, following which the characters return to their homes in the city, refreshed and ready to take on the problems of real life. The holiday humor of this mode automatically creates a city/country divide and Shakespeare’s play—at least superficially—seems to conform to the generic demands of the festive comedy. Interestingly, however, Shakespeare stretches the boundaries of the genre by questioning this city/country binary. Caliban/Prospero’s island is described as enchanted because, to different people, it takes on different forms. Hence while the old courtier Gonzalo sees it as lush green and as conducive to life, to Antonio, Prospero’s usurping brother, and Sebastian, the brother of the king of Naples, the island is seen as though

Sebastian:

it had lungs, and rotten ones.

Antonio:

Or as ‘twere perfumed by a fen [...]

Gonzalo:

Here is everything advantageous to life.

Antonio:

True, save means to live.

Sebastian:

present “holiday magic as imagination, games as expressive gestures [to bring in to focus] the saturnalian form itself as a paradoxical human need, problem and resource” (15).

Of that there's none or little. (*The Tempest*, 2.1, 48-52)

The action of the play—especially through Prospero's control over Caliban and Ariel—shows that the island itself is as corrupt as the city. The effects of moral regeneration are not extended to Caliban or even to the drunk Stephano and Trinculo. Prospero's triumph seems to be more of a political achievement and this fact only further complicates discourses of pure country versus corrupt city.

In Coetzee's case the problematization of genre is markedly more deliberate and he goes so far as to almost completely reverse the traditional positions occupied by the city and the country. There is no easily identifiable demarcation between the two zones as each seems to constantly intersect and implicate the other. The city is represented as a place that demands repentance for the "crime" that Lurie commits; it is no longer content to leave that task of reformation to the country. When Lurie first leaves the city and reaches his daughter's home in the country, he feels as though the latter is untouched by the problems of urban life. Lucy appears before him as having perfectly fitted into the role of the settler, living happily with her dogs, her flower and produce patches, and her handyman Petrus. He urges himself to get used to the simple life of the country, and the city begins to look remote and distinct—"Country ways. Already Cape Town is receding into the past" (*Disgrace*, 65).

This pastoral idyll however, is first disrupted when Lucy and her father are attacked and she is raped. All at once, the city's corruption seems to invade the country,

and the latter loses its “innocence” and “simplicity.” Lurie is slowly forced to realize that the differences are not as strong as his scholarly mind had initially assumed them to be. The brutality of the attack and its bewildering consequences suddenly transform the country into a space as treacherous and unstable as the city. Adding to its danger is the violence involved in the acts of aggression and the undisguised hatred of the rapists that Lucy feels is directed towards her. The country, particularly the farm, becomes the site for a postcolonial re-writing of history, and one in which the protagonists are conscious of a violent re-telling of the past. Coetzee uses the traditionally idyllic countryside to examine the process by which the violence that had been concealed by colonialism is let loose upon those perceived as belonging to the now-defeated ruling class.

There is, however, one place that occupies the liminal zone between the city and the country—the animal welfare clinic. In *Disgrace*, here, the fateful abundance of the country meets the cruel, but efficient methods of the city. Although the clinic claims to be a place of healing, Lurie soon realizes that it is no more than a last option for the animals as well as their owners. Significantly, it is in this in-between zone that he finds some form of meaning in an otherwise upside-down world. The dogs that come in have to be killed—“*because we are too menny*”—and then Lurie assumes the responsibility of disposing off their corpses. The plentitude of life—one of the defining features of the countryside, and traditionally the most celebrated—becomes the cause for inconvenience. As Bev puts it,

[t]he trouble is, there are just too many of them [...] They don't understand it, of course, and we have no way of telling them. Too many by our standards, not by theirs. They would just multiply and multiply if they had their way, until they filled the earth. (*Disgrace*, 85)

The us/them binary operates even here, although it only serves to stress this little clinic occupies neither. The apparent rigidity of the city/country binary breaks down in the space of the animal clinic which becomes, rather, a zone of in-betweenness.

To say that Lurie remains in the Eastern Cape to help the dogs have an easy journey into the afterlife would perhaps involve a considerable degree of simplification. However his act of remaining in the country does partially resolve the binary. With his curious little toy banjo and the doomed dogs, Lurie can no longer belong wholly to either the country or the city, and must remain in the one place that perhaps best unites the plentitude of the country with the harsh efficiency of the city.

The novel's context of production provides an interesting clue to reading its obsession with retribution and a *re*-distribution of guilt, and to critically examining the idea of reparation. *Disgrace* follows shortly after the much discussed report presented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and one can perceive a dialogue that Coetzee establishes with the ideas driving the project. The Commission itself was constituted in 1995 under the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, no. 34, to allow South Africa a smooth transition into democracy. Its purpose was to provide a platform where victims of apartheid could give voice to the crimes that had been

committed against them, and the perpetrators could claim general amnesty. The preamble to the Interim Constitution of South Africa created the foundation for such a commission;

This Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society problematized by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy [...] The pursuit of national unity, the well-being of all South African citizens and peace require reconciliation between the people of South Africa and the reconstruction of society. (as qtd in *Between Anger and Hope*, xiii)

The very scope of the TRC, however, raised certain difficult questions that revealed the problematic of basing democracy on the grounds of voluntary reconciliation. One of the central motifs that dominated the entire proceedings was the move to grant amnesty to those human rights violators who provided a complete confession of their crimes. Coetzee's novel focuses on the idea of a total confession, the motives that prompt such declarations, and the assumed spirit of repentance.

In a move that mimics the proceedings of the TRC, Lurie is called upon by the sexual harassment committee to confess and repent for his near-rape of Melanie Isaacs. In return, he is promised a compromise, one that will allow him to continue with his life in the university. Lurie agrees to plead guilty to the charges of harassment brought against him but he raises a significant point that undermines his confession—if it may indeed be called a confession insofar as the term still retains its religious connotations even within a secular establishment;

You want a confession, I give you a confession [...] And you trust yourself to divine that, from the words I use—to divine whether it comes from my heart? [...] I have said the words for you, no you want more, you want me to demonstrate their sincerity. That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of law. I have had enough. Let us go back to playing it by the book. I plead guilty. That is as far as I am prepared to go. (*Disgrace*, 52-55)

Later in the novel Lurie completes the cyclical call for penitence as he faces the second mock court in the shape of the Isaacs family. His presence in their house signals his desire to proffer the spirit of repentance that had been missing in his plea of guilt, but even here he cannot rid himself of the ambivalence that assails him at the moment when he presents the most vulnerable of selves. As he leaves, Lurie chooses to fall upon his knees in the traditional gesture of obeisance—and more significantly of surrender—hoping to atone for his mistakes. The observation that follows succeeds in undermining not only the honesty of *his* contrition, but the very practice of repentance—

Is that enough? He thinks. Will that do? If not, what more?

He raises his head [...] He meets the mother's eyes, then the daughter's, and again the current leaps, the current of desire. (*Disgrace*, 173)

Coetzee explores the avenues of contrition and its connections with disgrace, explicitly rejecting the simplistic notion that an honest confession necessarily entails the spirit of repentance. Through Lurie's rather skillful wordplay, he reveals any social structure's desire to extract remorse from the offender's declaration of guilt, thus

problematizing both the concept of forgiveness and the subsequent process of reconciliation. It is Lurie's refusal to repent—and not the crime of which he is accused—that finally places him outside established norms. Ultimately, even contrition is not enough for the “social” victim whose civilized mantle has taught him to mask his vengeance with the proffered repentance. He will be satisfied only when the guilty is humiliated and reduced to a state of utter dependency, thus reversing the balance of power. Coetzee presents the gang of rapists as disagreeing with the proclamations of the TRC particularly on the account of reconciliation. To correct the wrongs of history, Petrus and his people must subjugate their erstwhile masters, inflicting on them a physical humiliation and branding them with shame and a fear of that shame. Lurie surmises,

The men [the rapists] will watch the newspapers, listen to the gossip. They will read that they are being sought for robbery and assault and nothing else. It will dawn on them that over the body of the woman silence is being drawn like a blanket. *Too ashamed*, they will say to each other, *too ashamed to tell*, and they will chuckle luxuriously, recollecting their exploit. Is Lucy prepared to concede them that victory? (*Disgrace*, 110)

He is only too aware that the shame is not Lucy's alone, that he too is part of this disgrace. The TRC that fails to reconcile is not the dominant force in the South Africa that Coetzee perceives; it is the world in which victims are not satisfied with the

offender's confession. They wish to reverse the cycle of history and take possession of the very beings of their former masters.

Disgrace is in many ways a rewriting of *The Tempest* because it deals with some of the crucial themes present in the play. However, it is not limited to a reworking because the novel uses as its backdrop the historical reality of a post-colonial country where binaries are seldom to be found in their unadulterated state and where the protagonists have to constantly live through a re-visioning of history.

Conclusion

An examination of works from such vastly different historical time periods and ideological concerns can provide only a glimpse into the act of reconstituting western texts to critique hegemonic structures of power. In their own way, both Bankim and Coetzee challenge the notion that there can be a simple, definitive interpretation of any text, often calling into question the status of interpretation itself. The theoretical concerns that have so far shaped the notion of postcoloniality substantiate the appropriation that takes place on the part of the author, the reader and the critic, creating a space of interaction that can best be defined by a lack of rigidity or monologic comprehension. To even say that postcolonial texts allow the margin to speak for itself, merely overriding the imposition of the center, would be to fall into the same trap as saying its converse. Rather, the picture that emerges is a far more fluid, playful one, imbued with a sense of critical questioning and a refusal to accept absolute standards of evaluation.

Kapalkundala may seem to be superficially distanced from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* owing to the repeated displacement of the source of authoritative control, but it situates itself firmly within the tradition of rewriting when it insistently calls into question the patterns of subjugation and resistance. Bankim's preoccupation with the comparative mode of study enhances the connections that might otherwise be buried

under spatial, temporal and linguistic differences. The work emerges as re-telling the history of a group of people whose oppressed state extends far beyond social and political control. The author's close alliance with the alien system of governance problematizes any easy rejection, but nevertheless allows the reader to perceive the complex elements of loyalty that must be overcome in order to resist. In many ways, Bankim himself reenacts Caliban's role as he borrows Prospero's books only to later deconstruct their stability. His language of thought is one conditioned by Prospero's presence although he is never too far removed from those "barbaric" ideologies so detested by the colonizer. This uneasy binary is reflected in *Kapalkundala* as both the author and the protagonist strive to free themselves from the imposed systems of control which they have paradoxically embraced.

Coetzee's negotiation represents the disempowered story of a Prospero who has fallen from grace, and is deprived of the rough magic that has served him so well over the centuries. The process of readjustment calls into question the necessity of adjusting, simultaneously compelling the Prospero figure to acknowledge his own liminality. The reader is once again reminded of Lurie's Byronic opera—the grand plans that must be slowly whittled down to fit a less glorious state of existence. As Lurie consigns himself to being the dog-man—not so subtly remarking on Petrus's original occupation—so must Prospero face the prospect of living without his hyperbolic sense of control. *Disgrace* places before the reader a world in which the struggle for power must be left to the latecomers of history as older orders fail to accommodate the shifting nature of authorial

control. Ironically, Prospero's disempowerment does not necessarily translate into an empowered Caliban. Like Macbeth, Caliban has waded too far in blood to attempt a reconciliation or a rejection of the violence that has so steadily been drummed into him. Caliban and Prospero must share an uneasy truce, one that merely destabilizes the power structure without providing a viable alternative.

Whether the emphasis is on a re-visioning of the nature of Caliban and Miranda's resistances, or on a recovery of Prospero's disenfranchised voice, Coetzee and Bankim are united in their search for a common ground from which to challenge the imposed narratives of colonialism. Their exploration of the patterns of subjugation and resistance never seeks to disown the Shakespearean paradigm within which they operate. Indeed, Shakespeare is himself—a self that is significantly imagined by the colonial ruler—evoked and re-formulated, along with the characters penned by him, in the “newer” versions of the play. He provides the authorial legitimacy that the postcolonial text must appropriate in order to attract the attention of the erstwhile ruling class. The work that emerges out of this creative interplay of history, language and power thus embodies no single ideological position, but is rather a reflection of the inter-relatedness of modes of existence.

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