Shipwrecked
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This chapter explores works with a group of people stranded on an inhabited island (or planet), anticipating or alluding to the shipwreck in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. First, Paul’s shipwreck (recounted in the New Testament book of Acts) prefigures Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, recalls Homer’s *Odyssey*, and links shipwreck with spiritual salvation. Second, we turn to the Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1968), a rewriting of Shakespeare’s play that addresses the questions of power and freedom. Finally, the movie *Forbidden Planet* (1956) translates the shipwreck scenario to outer space.

**Paul’s Shipwreck at Malta (Acts 27–28)**

One antecedent to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* from the ancient world concerns a historical shipwreck. On the way to Rome (ca. 60 CE), the ship conveying Paul of Tarsus wrecks on the Mediterranean island of Malta. In the book of Acts, Luke presents Paul as a hero who—with the help of God—saves everyone on board. Indeed, the idea of “saving” or “salvation” (Greek *sozo*, *soteria*) pervades this episode both in the literal sense (everyone is saved from disaster at sea) and in terms of having their souls saved.¹ Thus, the new

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¹ For “safety” and salvation,” see *sozesthai, sothenai, soterias, diasothenai, diasothenta, soterion* (27.20, 31, 34, 44; 28.1, 28).
dimension in this shipwreck scenario is that Paul’s faith in God leads to both physical and spiritual salvation.

The book of Acts relates the story of a onetime Pharisee named Saul who persecuted Christians, is converted on the road to Damascus, takes the name Paul, and works to convert Jews and non-Jews to Christianity. A crisis occurs when Paul is arrested by the Roman authorities and finds himself in danger of both legal charges and assassination attempts (e.g., Acts 20.12–13). About to be flogged, Paul asserts his Roman citizenship and appeals to Caesar (25.10–12). This leads to his sea journey from Caesarea in Palestine to Rome.

They reach Cyprus in late fall, near the end of the sailing season. Paul warns them not to continue (27.10), but he is overruled. Almost immediately, a “typhonic” wind carries the ship to the southwest, toward Syrtis, an area of dangerous shallows off the North African coast (27.14–17). In many ways, Luke presents a typical description of a storm at sea, with tremendous winds and no visible sun or stars; the travelers give up hope. They jettison gear and baggage to lighten the ship, but they are unable to control their course (27.14–20).

During this part of the voyage, Paul predicts that they will suffer no loss, for an angel appeared to him in the night.

And I urge you now to keep up your courage, for not a single life of yours will be lost, only the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, saying, “Do not be afraid, Paul, it is ordained that you shall appear before Caesar the Emperor; and be assured, God has granted you the lives of all who are sailing with you.” So keep up your courage, men, for I trust in God that it will turn out as it has been told to me, though we have to be cast ashore on some island. (27.22–26)

After two desperate weeks at sea, they approach land at night, and the crew plans to abandon ship. Paul then insists, “Unless these men stay on the ship, you will not be able to be saved”; the soldiers keep everyone on board (27.31).

Just before daybreak, Paul encourages everyone to eat for “salvation” (27.34), promising that all will survive.

I beg you to take nourishment, for this is your salvation [soterias]. Not a hair on your heads will be lost. (27.34)

2. Translation is my own.
Paul thanks God and breaks the bread; everyone eats and is encouraged (27.35).

At morning light, they sight an unknown island, but the ship runs aground on a reef (27.39–41). As the ship is breaking up, the soldiers plan to kill the prisoners to prevent their escape, but Julius, the centurion in charge of Paul, intervenes. Everyone makes it ashore safely, some swimming, some riding on planks or other parts of the ship (27.44).

This, then, is a shipwreck in which everyone arrives safely. They come to recognize the island as Malta and receive hospitality from the native islanders (28.1–2). After Paul is bitten by a snake when gathering firewood, the people of Malta assume that he must have committed murder (28.4). They expect Paul to swell up and collapse, but when he remains unharmed, they next assert that he must be a god (28.6). As we have seen with other shipwreck narratives, island inhabitants often try to determine the status of those who are cast on their shore. In fact, islanders suspect that the new arrival is a god in the *Odyssey*, *The Tempest*, and *Robinson Crusoe*.

Paul soon journeys to Rome on a ship named the *Dioscuri*, honoring Castor and Polydeuces, the savior gods of sailors at sea. The juxtaposition of the traditional Greek gods with the recent rescue at sea by Paul’s god suggests that this new god—with a proven ability to rescue those shipwrecked at sea—has supplanted the older divinities. When Paul finally arrives in Rome, he turns to his commission from God to proclaim “salvation” (*soterion*, 28.28).

Several interesting features deserve our attention. First, in many shipwrecks, the gods are involved in sending the storm and rescuing survivors (e.g., Odysseus is assailed by Poseidon but saved by Leucothea, Athena, and the river god). God appears to Paul first in prison, telling him to keep up his courage, for he must go to Rome (23.11); then he sends an angel and otherwise issues commands (27.23–24; cf. 26.16–18). These divine words and visions are anticipatory in a narrative sense but also reveal a religious dimension to the journey and rescue.

Second, Luke tells this story in the first-person narrative (e.g., “we set sail”). Scholars have interpreted the significance of Luke’s use of the first-person plural in several ways. One idea is that it may convey a historical fact: that Luke actually did accompany Paul on his trip. A second theory argues

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3. Paul prays effectively for the sick on Malta, but he insists he is not a god (28.7–10).
6. “We set sail” occurs in Paul’s third journey (e.g., 20.16, 13; 21.1) and in the sea voyage to Rome (“When it was decided for us to sail to Italy . . .,” 27.1).
that the first-person plural adds immediacy to the narrative and conveys a kind of authenticity (it would also imply the narrator’s survival). A third interpretation maintains that first-person narration is a convention of shipwreck narratives in ancient literature. It is impossible to tell with certainty which theory is correct in this case, though it is intriguing to imagine Luke as a companion on this eventful journey. Still, we should remain cautious.

In his article “The Shipwrecks of Odysseus and Paul,” MacDonald takes the third interpretation a step further and argues not only that the first-person plural is a convention of shipwreck narratives but that Luke deliberately recalls Homer’s shipwrecks of Odysseus. Evidence for Luke’s allusions to Homer are associations with Troy (Paul’s travels in that region), poetic or particularly epic vocabulary, the pattern of an angel appearing (cf. Leucothea), the ship’s company floating on debris, and the survivor(s) being treated as divine upon arrival. MacDonald concludes,

Luke not only imitates the shipwrecks of Odysseus, he christianized them. In fact, Luke’s intention in relating Paul’s shipwreck to those of Odysseus was to exalt Paul and his God by comparison . . . Odysseus panics and gives up hope (5.299–312), while Paul remains unflappably confident throughout. Zeus drowns Odysseus’s crew for having slain the cattle of Helius, whereas Paul’s God prevents any of the 276 passengers from perishing at sea . . . Luke’s narrative falls far short of Homer’s in aesthetic value, but it excels it in portraying the virtues of its hero and his God.

MacDonald argues that Luke is intentionally recalling Odysseus’ shipwrecks from the Odyssey in order to set up a contrast between Paul, who rescues all his fellow sailors, and Odysseus, who loses his entire fleet and crew. The contrasting fate of the protagonists depicts Paul as a new sort of hero.

Though there are serious weaknesses in parts of MacDonald’s argument, this intriguing interpretation points to sufficient similarities to trigger possible

7. First-person narration also holds true for the Egyptian “Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor.” Thimmes (1992) 61 observes, “This technique allows the author to omnisciently detail the physical elements of the voyage/storm/shipwreck, while permitting a speaking character to personally testify to the danger of the situation”; cf. Robbins (1975) and MacDonald (1999) 88–89.
associations with Odysseus’ shipwreck for an ancient audience. Once there is trouble at sea, it is difficult not to think back to Homer. The narrative of Luke suggests a different sort of transformation—spiritual salvation—now associated with being saved from a shipwreck.

The central distinguishing feature in Paul’s wreck is the rescue of all the passengers: “Not a hair on your heads will be lost” (Acts 27:34). Shakespeare explicitly recalls this biblical episode with Ariel’s line “Not a hair perished” (1.2.218). It is by no means obvious that Shakespeare alludes to Paul’s wreck in any other way, but it is striking that everyone in both Acts and Shakespeare’s play is miraculously brought to shore (as was true in the 1609 Bermuda shipwreck).

Césaire’s *A Tempest*

Next we examine a twentieth-century rewriting of Shakespeare’s play, Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1968). Following many Shakespearean plot elements, Césaire uses the relationship of Prospero and Caliban to criticize the history of European colonialism. Elsewhere, he refers to African slaves as the “refugees from the greatest shipwreck of history.” Walcott (discussed in chapters 3, 8, and 10) speaks of the image of the

West Indian artist as someone who was in a shipwrecked position . . .

One of the more positive aspects of the Crusoe idea is that in a sense every race that has come to the Caribbean has been brought here under situations of servitude or rejection, and that is the metaphor of the shipwreck, I think.

As we have seen, shipwreck leads to the contemplation of multiple possible roles and outcomes. In the nineteenth century, slavery was abolished in

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11. Weak points in MacDonald’s argument include stock elements (found in many shipwreck stories) in Luke and Homer (98); he also makes mistakes (Leucothea is not a divine “messenger”; see 99); and MacDonald conflates Odysseus’ different shipwrecks (103)—he is not marooned on Nausicaa’s island without ships to convey him (that takes place on Calypso’s island).

12. As Dayan (1992) 130 reminds us, Césaire explicitly calls his play an “Adaptation, after the Tempest of Shakespeare.”


the North Atlantic and the Caribbean; in the past fifty years, many Carib-
bean islands have acquired political independence (e.g., Walcott’s homeland,
Saint Lucia, in 1979), while both Césaire’s homeland, Martinique, and Gua-
deloupe (once French colonies) gained “departmental” status in 1946. As the
descendants of slaves with a new sense of autonomy, Walcott’s and Césaire’s
shipwreck tales explore the question of identity and transformation, but
these challenges are now addressed in the contemporary world.

Before turning fully to Césaire’s work, I would like to say a few words
about the evolution of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* over the four-hundred-year
period from 1611 to the present. First, there has been a wide range of responses
to Shakespeare’s work by actors, writers, and critics. Each dramatic per-
formance of the original play constitutes an act of interpretation. Indeed, several
fine books have shown how *The Tempest*—especially the figure of Caliban—
has been presented on the stage since 1611, such as Zabus’ *Tempests after
Shakespeare* and Vaughan and Vaughan’s *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural
History*. In Shakespeare’s play, the text refers to Caliban as “deformed,” “ugly,”
a monster,” and so on. He appears to be part human and part animal. In per-
formances over the past four centuries, the bestial Caliban has been presented
as part turtle, part frog, at times with webbed feet or fish fins. He has even
been played as a buffoon, a drunk, or Vice itself. Directors’ choices may be
influenced by contemporary controversies as well. For example, in the nine-
teenth century, Caliban was viewed as a sort of “missing link” between man
and ape; in the early twentieth century, he became a proletarian hero; after
World War II, Caliban came to symbolize the slaves and oppressed natives
under European colonialism. As Caliban gained in heroism, Prospero was
transformed from sage and magician into a tyrannical European colonizer.15

The brief sketch here traces the options available for presenting the sin-
gle character of Caliban.16 In addition, poets, artists, filmmakers, novelists,
and political theorists have reinterpreted the play, often with a focus on the
conflict between Prospero and Caliban. Beyond productions of the original
play, we find adaptation and a freer use of the ideas, characters, and situa-
tions from the 1611 play.17 The focus here will be on Césaire’s adaptation of
Shakespeare’s play to evoke modern conflict.

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15. See Vaughan and Vaughan (1991) 278; on the etymology of Caliban’s name, see 26–42.
16. Another change concerns the increasing independence of Miranda (similar to transfor-
mations of Nausicaa in twentieth-century adaptations of the *Odyssey*); see Nunez’s novel
(1964) offers a psychoanalytical interpretation of both the colonizer and the colonized, criticized
Césaire’s 1968 play, A Tempest, develops the central theme of Shakespeare’s The Tempest: authority. Césaire refashions the central figures by pitting a patronizing Prospero against the rebellious Caliban. The struggle for political power is overt. Césaire’s Prospero is a colonialist who enslaves (10), threatens whipping (14), is a despot (20), and has concern for the noblemen on the storm-tossed ship only because “they are men of my race, and of high rank” (16). He insults Caliban’s “barbaric language”; calls him “ape,” “ugly,” and “enemy”; and fears that Caliban is “getting a little too emancipated” (10). Prospero is explicitly presented as an imperialist. Before his exile, he had been planning to deliberately take possession of the island; he accuses his brother Antonio of “stealing my as-yet-unborn empire from me” (7). When the helpless Europeans reach the island, Prospero seeks their submission, going so far as to assert, “I am Power” (28).

The fully human Caliban is a black slave and a freedom fighter who plots with “a guerrilla force.” According to Prospero, “By his insubordination, he’s calling into question the whole order of the world” (50). In Shakespeare, Caliban asserts that he had first claim to the island, before Prospero arrived and conquered it (1.2.334–77). In Césaire’s play, Prospero’s authority on the island is once again disputed. The goal of his Caliban is quite clear: “To get back my island and regain my freedom” (62). When Prospero asks, “What would you be without me?” Caliban retorts,

> Without you? I’d be the king, that’s what I’d be, the King of the Island. The king of the island given me by my mother, Sycorax. (12)

Language and names are defined in terms of this struggle. Shakespeare’s Prospero is said to have taught Caliban how to speak (1.2.335–68), yet Césaire rewrites this exchange. His Prospero says,

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18. Page references to Césaire’s A Tempest follow Miller’s translation of Césaire (1992)—in only a few passages have I modified his translation.

19. Prospero is also uneasy about Ariel’s plans once he has been liberated (59–60).

20. Davis (1997) 159 finds that Prospero’s exercise of magic reveals “the protagonist’s desire for absolute power”; cf. Arnold (1978) 242. Césaire (in Belhassen (1972) 176) comments, “To me Prospero is the complete totalitarian. I am always surprised when others consider him the wise man who ‘forgives.’ What is most obvious, even in Shakespeare’s version, is the man’s absolute will to power.”

21. See Dayan (1992) 128 on Prospero’s act of usurpation: “He takes the island away from Caliban, an ‘inhabitant’ who is so savage and inhuman that the island can be described in Shakespeare’s stage directions as ‘uninhabited.’” Césaire’s Caliban speaks of Sycorax, a terrestrial spirit, as still alive and speaking to him in dreams (11–12), whereas “the earth is dead” for Prospero. For Prospero as “anti-Nature,” see Arnold (1978) 247–48.
You could at least thank me for having taught you to speak at all. You, a savage . . . a dumb animal, a beast I educated, trained, dragged up from the bestiality that still clings to you. (11)

Caliban responds,

You didn’t teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand your orders: chop the wood, wash the dishes, fish for food, plant vegetables, all because you’re too lazy to do it yourself. And as for your learning, did you ever impart any of that to me? No, you took care not to. All your science you keep for yourself alone, shut up in those big books.

(11–12)

The “lessons” of Prospero are limited to whatever facilitates master-slave communication.

In the *Odyssey*, the protagonist is able to reclaim who he is by announcing his name, *Odysseus*. He is no longer a beggar or “No-man.” Césaire probes deeply into the identity of Caliban, who rejects the name *Caliban*. He tells Prospero, “It’s a name given me by your hatred, and every time it’s spoken it’s an insult” (15). Most disturbing is what has happened to Caliban’s sense of self.

I’ve decided I don’t want to be called Caliban any longer . . . because Caliban isn’t my name . . . Call me X. That would be best. Like a man without a name. Or, to be more precise, a man whose name has been stolen. You talk about history . . . well, that’s history, and everyone knows it! Every time you summon me it reminds me of a basic fact, that you’ve stolen everything from me, even my identity! Uhuru!

(14–15)

Césaire’s drama is very much a play of its time, the 1960s. Here Césaire uses Malcolm X as a model for Caliban, who prefers the name X to the name

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22. After Caliban rejects the name *Caliban*, Prospero suggests *Cannibal* and *Hannibal*, arguing, “they [slaves] all seem to like historical names” (15). Dayan (1992) 134 comments that Prospero (like the biblical Adam) “falls automatically into the role of renamer.”
given to him by his slaveholder. Caliban—not Prospero—will determine his own identity.

Caliban is juxtaposed with Ariel, a mulatto slave, who evokes the principles of Martin Luther King Jr. and follows the doctrine of nonviolent resistance. Ariel speaks of Prospero, Caliban, and himself as “brothers” (20, 22–23). Ariel even hopes to force Prospero to “acknowledge his own injustice” (22). Yet Prospero is defiant: “You’ll have your [freedom] when I’m good and ready” (10). The play presents Ariel seeking freedom yet still hopeful for reconciliation, while Caliban rejects his name and ponders who he has now become. In Césaire’s hands, the name Caliban has now come to symbolize resistance and independence, as well as a fluidity of self that seeks freedom and a new name.

The twentieth-century drama also differs regarding Caliban’s attempted sexual assault on Miranda. In Shakespeare, Caliban admits his intentions.

Would ’t had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

(1.2.352–54)

Césaire’s Caliban insists that Prospero is at fault.

Listen, you old goat, you’re the one that put those dirty thoughts in my head. Let me tell you something: I couldn’t care less about your daughter. (13)

23. Uhuru, a Swahili word meaning “freedom” or “independence,” became an anticolonialist slogan in Kenya in the 1950s and elsewhere in the 1960s; see Arnold (1978) 240. Nixon (1987) 537 speaks of “the burgeoning of both international black consciousness and more localized nationalist movements. Between 1957 and 1973 the vast majority of African and the larger Caribbean colonies won their independence.” Zabus (2002) 47 discusses Black Muslims in the United States rejecting their names, wishing to be called by the name X.

24. In his interview in Presson (1996) 192, Walcott addresses the problem of identity: “I think the condition of colonialism, or of any first migration of people who were given another language, means the erosion of identity and the desperation to preserve their identity, which can sometimes be punished or banned . . . You have to go through a whole process of becoming a name that you have been given. It’s the process and technique of removing identity and altering identity so you can rule or can dominate.”
While the struggle for power is based on Shakespeare’s play, the focus has narrowed from several confrontations (including that among the Italian nobles) to a contest between Prospero and Caliban. Certain passages and characters clearly build on Shakespeare. Gonzalo is still a good man, loyal to Prospero. Ferdinand once again thinks he has become king, believing his father drowned (17). Yet Césaire’s work often differs from Shakespeare’s play in diction, style, and characterization. In the opening scene of the storm at sea, the boatswain tells the Italian nobles to go below. Reminded that there is royalty aboard, the boatswain uses graphic language to clarify the situation.

Well, there’s someone who doesn’t give a fuck more about the King that he does about you or me, and he’s called the Gale. His Majesty the Gale! And right now, he’s in control and we’re all his subjects. (4)

Once more the storm at sea levels the playing field: as is colorfully expressed here, those with authority and their subordinates are equally subject to powers greater than themselves.

In addition, the same romance appears in both plays, yet Césaire explicitly recognizes the romantic parallels between The Tempest and the Odyssey. Glimpsing Miranda, Césaire’s Ferdinand says,

Seeing the young lady, more beautiful than any wood-nymph, I might have been Ulysses on Nausicaa’s isle. (18)

This brief allusion points to the potential for romance found in both Homer’s and Shakespeare’s works, as Césaire self-consciously links his Shakespearean model with Homeric epic. This comparison reminds the audience that—as far as Ferdinand knows—he, like Odysseus (Ulysses), is the sole survivor of

25. Also in both plays, Sebastian wonders whether the island is even inhabited (25); Alonso thinks his son, Ferdinand, is dead (28); and Trinculo believes that everyone else has perished (38, 41; cf. Stephano at 40).
26. Arnold (1978) 238 notes that another innovation is the theme of religious fanaticism: Césaire’s Prospero, placed on the island by the church, works under orders of the Inquisition.
27. Saint Elmo’s fire, merely described in flashback in Shakespeare, is presented in this opening scene. Césaire suggests that either hell or paradise await the crew and shipwrecked survivors: note “devils” (5) and “inaccessible Paradise” (8).
the wreck. Césaire also adds a twist to the anticipated “divine epiphany.” Ferdinand asks, “What is this that I see before me: A goddess? A mortal?” A less innocent Miranda responds, “I know what I’m seeing: a flatterer” (17).

A striking innovation in Césaire’s play is that before the opening storm scene, a master of ceremonies invites the actors to choose masks for their characters: “To each his character, to each character his mask” (3). The theme of transformation is signaled in this additional scene with an overt declaration that each actor must assume a role before action can begin. Like Shakespeare’s play, this twentieth-century Tempest explores personal transformation—both in romantic terms (for Miranda and Ferdinand) and in terms of changing one’s social status (Ariel’s and Caliban’s quests for freedom).

For all his hatred, Césaire’s Caliban refuses to be a murderer, whereas Shakespeare’s Caliban was ready to “batter his [Prospero’s] skull” (3.2.87–97). After Césaire’s Caliban sets his coup in motion with Stephano and Trinculo, Prospero bares his chest and taunts Caliban.

**PROSPERO:** Strike! Go on strike! Strike your Master, your benefactor!

Don’t tell me you’re going to spare him!

*Caliban raises his arm, but hesitates.*

Go on! You don’t dare! See, you’re nothing but an animal . . . you don’t know how to kill.

**CALIBAN:** Defend yourself! I’m not a murderer.

**PROSPERO:** The worse for you. You’ve lost your chance. Stupid as a slave!

And now, enough of this farce. Ariel! Ariel, take charge of the prisoners! (56–57)

By his decision not to murder Prospero, Caliban proves himself to be more humane—and less “savage”—than Prospero.30

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28. Arnold (1978) 243 finds Miranda to speak “in a decidedly vulgar manner”; thus Césaire invalidates “the doctrine of high birth predisposing toward virtue, a doctrine he has taken care to exclude both structurally and thematically.”

29. Arnold (1978) 237 suggests that the master of ceremonies asking actors to choose masks in the prologue corresponds to Prospero’s epilogue in Shakespeare where Prospero “identifies himself as the masque presenter.”

30. Arnold (1978) 248 remarks: “As Prospero points out, Caliban does not have the ability to commit murder, a characteristic of Prospero’s own humanity.” Dayan (1992) 135 notes that Caliban “somehow stops short of revolution.”
Of particular interest is Césaire’s ending of the play. Prospero puts an optimistic spin on his island life with Caliban.31

In spite of everything I’m fond of you, Caliban. Come, let’s make peace. We’ve lived together for ten years and worked side by side. Ten years count for something, after all! We’ve ended up by becoming compatriots! (63)

This is unacceptable, an affront to Caliban’s perspective on his life since Prospero’s arrival.

For years I bowed my head,
for years I took it, all of it—
your insults, your ingratitude...
and worst of all, more degrading than all the rest,
your condescension.
But now, it’s over!
Over, do you hear? (64)

Caliban disputes Prospero’s version of their past as harmonious and cooperative. He issues a new threat.

At the moment
you’re still stronger than I am.
But I don’t give a damn for your power
or for your dogs or your police or your inventions!
And do you know why?
It’s because I know I’ll get you.
I’ll impale you! And on a stake that you’ve sharpened yourself! (64)

Caliban articulates his determined resistance, as his self-image has been transformed. By now, he has rejected Prospero’s denigration and come to realize who he really is.

31. Concerned about their effect on the “natives,” Gonzalo warns, “If the island is inhabited, as I believe, and if we colonize it, as is my hope, then we have to take every precaution not to import our shortcomings, yes, what we call civilization. They must stay as they are: savages, noble and good savages, free, without any complexes or complications” (25). This language recalls Mannoni (1964) 13 on the presumed inferiority complex of those who are colonized; cf. Arnold (1978) 240.
Prospero, you’re a great magician:
you’re an old hand at deception.
And you lied to me so much,
about the world, about myself,
that you ended up by imposing on me
an image of myself:
“underdeveloped,” as you say, “inferior,”
that’s how you made me see myself!
And I hate that image . . . and it’s false!
And now I know you, you old cancer,
and I also know myself! (64)

Prospero’s magic—his art of “deception”—consists of tricking Africans and
their descendants into thinking of themselves as subhuman, uncivilized,
“inferior.” Denouncing this chauvinistic idea of European superiority, Caliban
is finally able to see himself afresh.32

Césaire’s Prospero changes his mind about sailing back to Europe. He
will not return to his former status as duke in Italy. Prospero comes to
believe that it is his “destiny” to stay on the island, which “is mute without
me” (66). We have gone beyond shipwreck as a means of bringing figures
into collision and beyond Shakespeare as a model. Prospero decides to stay
on the island after everyone except Caliban departs. Caliban explains Pros-
pero’s motivation in terms of a “colonial” mentality.

You have a chance to get it over with:
you can pick up and leave,
you can go back to Europe.
But the hell you will!
I’m sure you won’t leave.
You make me laugh with your “mission”!
Your “vocation”!
Your vocation is to hassle me.
And that’s why you’ll stay,
just like those guys who founded the colonies

32. Davis (1997) 162 finds this a bold move: “In Caliban’s strenuous repudiation of the
image of himself imposed by the colonizer we recognize the same urge to reconstruct the self, to
salvage the self from the ruses of the other, that constituted the thematic backbone of [Césaire’s]
‘Journal of a Homecoming.’” Prospero describes the effect Caliban has had on him: “Well, I hate
you too! Because you’re the one who first made me doubt myself” (66).
and who now can’t live anywhere else.
You’re just an old addict, that’s what you are! (65)

Césaire’s Prospero has become the colonizer who remains even after colonial independence.33 After exploring the transformation of Caliban (first enslaved, then asserting his independence), Césaire turns to the issue of Prospero’s new role. If they both stay on the island, can Prospero and Caliban coexist? Césaire offers no clear answer. After everyone else has gone, Prospero still claims to “protect civilization” (68).

It’s as though the jungle was laying siege to the cave . . . But I shall stand firm . . . I shall not let my work perish! I shall protect civilization! (He fires in all directions.) They’re done for! Now, this way I’ll be able to have some peace and quiet for a while. But it’s cold. Odd how the climate’s changed. Cold on this island . . . Have to think about making a fire . . . (68)

The play closes with a powerless Prospero who calls on Caliban in vain and with Caliban’s song of freedom.

PROSPERO: Well, Caliban, old fellow, it’s just us two now, here on the island . . . only you and me. You and me. You-me . . . me-you! What in the hell is he up to? Caliban!

CALIBAN’S SONG: Freedom hi-day, Freedom hi-day! (68)

The final scene of Césaire’s A Tempest offers no true resolution: we are truly left up in the air.

In Shakespeare’s The Tempest, Prospero reverted to his former role as Duke of Milan. In Césaire’s A Tempest, we find a twist. Caliban is now free, but Prospero will not leave, and their relationship is no longer defined—a reflection perhaps of the challenges in articulating an identity in the late twentieth-century Caribbean. The play reflects historical reality, as we are left to contemplate an uncharted future.34

33. Zabus (2002) 52 speaks of the “addictive need of the colonizer” and believes that the reference to Prospero’s “vocation” alludes to Mannoni (51). In his Discourse on Colonialism, Césaire (2000) 35, 41 states, “First we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word . . . Colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes even the most civilized man.”

34. Davis (1997) 161 comments, “The unresolved, ‘open’ ending points to a postcolonial
Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) led a varied career. He was born in Martinique and studied in Paris as a young man. He became involved with Marxism and surrealism and was one of the founders of the negritude movement. As a writer, he produced plays, poetry, and political works such as Discourse on Colonialism. Césaire was also a successful politician. He served as mayor in Fort-de-France on the island of Martinique (1946–93), cosponsored the law that gave “departmental” status in France to Martinique and Guadeloupe, and was elected a deputy to the French National Assembly (for the first time in 1947).

Opportunities for transformation are offered in Homer’s Odyssey and Shakespeare’s The Tempest, yet these possibilities are rejected. Odysseus reclaims his status as king of Ithaca; Prospero returns to Italy as Duke of Milan. By contrast, modern reworkings of these shipwreck tales emphasize the possibility of a new self. Using a work from the canon of “Western” literature, Césaire resists the European perspective, in part by pointing to the evils of slavery and imperialism, in part by refusing to revert to the status quo at the end. This sharp deviation reflects the fact that both expatriates and the descendants of African slaves now live on these islands.

Shipwreck in Outer Space: Forbidden Planet

The final “shipwreck” under discussion in this chapter appears in science fiction. At its best, science fiction is able to address profound issues regarding human nature, what the future may look like, and what life on other planets may be like. In such scenarios, rocketships might be wrecked on what are

limbo in which ex-master and ex-slave are living by mutually incompatible principles and aspirations”; cf. Nixon (1987) 576–77. Nevertheless, Césaire (in Belhassen (1972) 177) insists that “Prospero and Caliban are necessary to each other.”

35. In an interview with Depestre (1971), Césaire speaks of the early twentieth century as a period “in which the negro was ashamed of himself. The atmosphere of rejection in which we lived, conditioned to feelings of inferiority” (78); blacks were “the only race whose very humanity has been questioned” (80); negritude was thus “really a form of resistance, to the politics of assimilation” (76); from a different perspective, negritude was “a fight against alienation” from black heritage and the historical link to Africa (77). See Davis (1997) 12 as to whether Césaire himself coined the French term négritude, a 1930s version of what came to be called “black power” or “black consciousness” in the 1960s.

36. This brief overview is perhaps misleading. Césaire left the Communist Party in 1956; he advocated “departmental” status for Martinique in 1946, but by the late 1950s, he hoped for more autonomy.

literally—from the perspective of earth—new worlds (the term *astronaut* is derived from Greek words that translate as “star-sailor,” a metaphorical coinage from sea travel). *Forbidden Planet* (1956), set in the twenty-third century, tells how a spaceship, the United Planets cruiser *C-57D*, travels to Altair IV (the fourth planet orbiting the star Altair) to search for survivors from a landing twenty years earlier by another ship, the *Bellerophon*. Upon arrival, they discover only a father, Dr. Morbius; a daughter, Altaira (or “Alta”); and a robot named Robby. Morbius tells the search and rescue team that the other crew members died, that the *Bellerophon* was vaporized in the first year, and that they now face no hardships and need no assistance—in fact, the second ship is warned to stay away.

Although we are moving from drama to the movies, it soon becomes obvious that the literary model for this film is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: Morbius (played by Walter Pigeon), a widower philologist who engages in esoteric research, is the futuristic equivalent of Prospero the magician; Altaira (played by Anne Francis), the naive teenage daughter who has never met young men before, corresponds to Miranda. Though Altaira does not speak the lines “O brave new world / that has such people in ’t,” the same sentiment is evident. While swimming, she conveys her innocence by asking, “What’s a bathing suit?” Later, when Commander Adams (played by Leslie Nielsen) approaches her, she asks, “Why don’t you kiss me like everybody else?”

Robby the Robot fills in for Ariel, Prospero’s servant. A supersized predecessor of R2-D2 from *Star Wars*, Robby knows over 180 languages, has remarkable strength but no feelings, and is programmed not to harm rational beings with his “blaster.” At one point, Robby, who can replicate any molecule, supplies the second ship’s cook with sixty gallons of bourbon—it has been a long journey with “no beer, no women, no pool parlors.”

As in Shakespeare’s model, neither ship in the *Forbidden Planet* has actually crashed. The situation is familiar: a small group finds itself isolated, with mysteries to unravel. In common with much of science fiction, the planet Altair IV presents familiar earthlike features combined with exotic alien aspects. The gravity of Altair (.897) is close to that of Earth; there is a high level of oxygen in the atmosphere (no helmets or breathing equipment is needed); however, the sky is green, the trees are purple, the landscape is barren, and there are two moons. The planet’s otherworldly sense is enhanced by the film’s music: *Forbidden Planet* is the first film to have an entirely electronic score, employing a theremin (the instrument familiar from the Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations”). This was also the first film in
which humans employ a flying saucer for space travel. Long distances are traversed by employing “hyperdrive” (a perennial standby in science fiction).

The new ship’s crew attempts to investigate what happened over the past twenty years, but Morbius is evasive. There are two related mysteries. Morbius has discovered that an earlier race, the Krell, had previously inhabited Altair IV and advanced “a million years” beyond human civilization. They created a society without sickness, insanity, or crime. They discovered how to free themselves from a physical existence, allowing their intelligence to reach “a new scale of scientific values.” So who were the Krell, what did they discover, and what happened to them?

The other mystery is what killed the crew of the Bellerophon (Morbius’ ship) and soon kills three of Commander Adams’ crew. At first, a giant footprint is the only evidence of an invisible monster that is invulnerable even to atomic fission (see chapter 6 in this book for discussion of the footprint as a recurring motif since Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe). It turns out that though the Krell could create by thought alone, they failed to account for “the mindless beasts of the unconscious,” in this case, the demons of Morbius’ subconscious mind. The monster is produced by the doctor’s mind (this “monster from the id” could be visualized in the original 1950s screenings with red-tinted glasses). Morbius had used a brain-boosting machine made by the Krell to increase his IQ; this allowed him to tap into the machine’s unlimited powers. When he fears leaving the planet, seeks to protect his daughter, or resents new arrivals, the machine produces a monster of his subconscious urges.

In the end, Morbius throws himself between his daughter and this monster of his own making, fatally wounding himself. Only too late does he realize the dangers to any race incapable of taming its irrational desires. The crew rescues Altaira and escapes from the planet before it explodes from the Krells’ destructive thermonuclear reactors. This film made in the mid-1950s reflects both the contemporary fear of nuclear annihilation and an American fascination with Freud.38

Forbidden Planet’s parallels with Shakespeare’s play are not exact. While the “id monster” may be thought of as playing the role of Caliban in respect to his irrational desires, Robby the Robot is the tireless servant who gets drunk as does Shakespeare’s Caliban. Also, the invisible monster is a shape-

38. As Zabus (2002) 187 puts it, the “journey to an outer planet is also a journey into the interior” of the human mind and its destructive potential; see her discussion of Forbidden Planet at 181–94.
shifter, “renewing its molecular structure from one microsecond to the next”: this recalls the protean Ariel. Perhaps more straightforward is the identification of Commander Adams with Ferdinand, as Adams awakens the love interest of Alta (Adams—like Adam in the biblical garden—may be said to teach this “Eve” about the forbidden fruit of sexuality). We even find an echo of Gonzalo’s hope for a perfect society in the seemingly utopian civilization of the Krell.  

The works discussed in this chapter indicate the range of variation on the Shakespearean model, including spiritual transformation, political independence, and the potential, even in outer space, for utopia and tragedy. Luke’s narrative of Paul’s shipwreck is an early example of the Tempest scenario: a group shipwreck in which everyone makes it safely to shore. It also puts a different type of hero front and center: Paul saves the lives—and souls—of his fellow travelers. Césaire’s reworking of The Tempest sets Shakespeare’s play in the postcolonial world of the twentieth century, with Caliban as a freedom fighter, while Prospero represents the last vestiges of European colonialism. Forbidden Planet relocates the Tempest scenario to the world of science fiction, yet conflicts from Shakespeare’s play resonate clearly in the film.  

Césaire’s A Tempest deviates from the classical model’s resolution, suggesting that closure is not in sight. At the time of its production (and still today), the resolution to the Caribbean drama of black and white, of Prospero and Caliban—that quest for articulating a postcolonial identity and asserting one’s own power—has yet to reach its final act. The Shakespearean model has been reworked to portray how independent islanders now seek to define themselves.

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39. Forbidden Planet exerted considerable influence on Gene Roddenberry’s Star Trek, the Star Wars movies, and the television series Lost in Space, including appearances by Robby the Robot (who also appears in episodes of The Twilight Zone and as junk in Star Wars: The Phantom Menace).