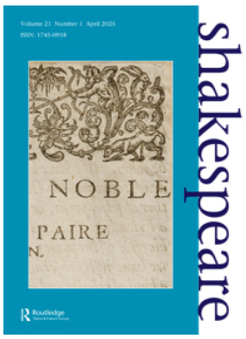

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The End(s) of *The Tempest* in Post-apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Following the sea change that led South Africa into the democratic era in 1994, theatre-makers have explored the resonances and limitations of *The Tempest* as an expression of local realities. In this article, I provide a partial performance history of the play in this period, tracing the ends (and endings) towards which it has been staged in five productions: two in 1994 at Maynardville Open Air Theatre and Rhodes University respectively, and three more at Durban University of Technology (2003), the University of the Witwatersrand (2004), and the Baxter Theatre (2009). These showed varying creative responses to the text, suggesting a double bind in performance: the network of associations attached to the play are both inescapable and frequently inadequate for articulating complex and variable post-apartheid experiences. Theatre-makers have thus, at times, moved beyond usual boundaries of the text, suggesting a need for something other than *The Tempest* to give voice to contemporary concerns. This was most fully evidenced by two further productions from the 2010s: *Miranda's Tale* (2016), and *Kunene and the King* (2019). In relation to the preceding productions of *The Tempest*, these two plays demonstrate significant departures from the text and the politics it has come to represent.

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Introduction

In the theatre programme for *The Tempest* staged in Johannesburg at the Wits School of Dramatic Arts in 2004, director Malcolm Purkey recalled how, in rehearsals, he and his student actors explored the themes of the text to discover various ends towards which it could be played. It was, by turns, about power and governance, justice and revenge, fathers and children. However, as they progressed, a key and irresolvable point of tension became apparent:

> We cannot avoid it, though, something else is fighting for centre stage. And so we slowly let it emerge in the rehearsal room: the theme of colonialism and colonial

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> power – Prospero and Caliban, master and slave, master magician and island dweller … And we are forced to ponder deeply on Caliban.
>
> … can we subvert the meaning of this play or is it enough to simply play it out in all its themes as clearly as we can. [*sic*] Should we play the play at all? … Should we invent a play called Caliban's Truth and Reconciliation?[1]

Purkey's reflection indicates the predicament of local theatre-makers who have, in *The Tempest*, been confronted with characters that are as resonant as they are intractable. At the time of Purkey's writing, the dramatisation of the relationship between coloniser and colonised, of a white ruler's oppression of a black subject, had clear parallels in the then-recently ended apartheid era, couched within the longer history of European settlement and racial segregation in the country. It is also telling that Purkey and his actors felt that the power dynamics between Prospero and Caliban *could not be avoided*. This description reads as a meta-drama: the Caliban-Prospero relationship becomes a 'something else' which 'fights for centre stage'. In 2004, only ten years into democratic rule, the comparative freedom to recognise and express the resonances of this aspect of the text could not be taken for granted.

While post-colonial interpretations of the play may have gained critical traction elsewhere in the world throughout the twentieth century, such readings were limited among literary scholars as well as theatre-makers during apartheid. As Martin Orkin pointed out in the early nineties,[2] South African literary research during the second half of the twentieth century failed to acknowledge the development of socially responsive scholarship on *The Tempest* and its relevance to the treatment of the text in the South African context, instead privileging readings that centre on transcendental insights gained by Prospero. On stage, post-colonial interpretations of the text had been similarly scarce, with productions generally avoiding overt colonial allegory or connections between Caliban and the oppressed classes.[3] One notable exception was an Afrikaans production by German director Dieter Reible (*Die Storm*, translated by Tjaart Potgieter). *Die Storm* was characteristic of Reible's penchant for controversy and satire. Starring a black actor (Peter SePuma) in the role of Caliban alongside a white Prospero (Louis van Niekerk), the production foresaw the end of the contemporary political dispensation. Reible's *Tempest* poked fun at the ageing Prospero, depicting him as a puritanical fool losing his grip on power while having the more sympathetic Caliban take out a tape-measure at the end of the play to assess the size of stage, which was implied would soon belong to him.[4]

[1]The programme does not include official page numbers, but this quotation can be found on the third physical page. Thanks to Amazwi South African Museum of Literature for programme materials for the 1994 and 2004 productions of *The Tempest*.
[2]Orkin, 'Re-presenting *The Tempest*', 47.
[3]For an account of productions of the play from 1946 to 1989, see the chapter in Quince ('Shakespeare in South Africa'), titled 'Masters and Slaves, Rapists and Virgins: *The Tempest* as Colonial Paradigm' (133–149).
[4]Ibid.

It might be expected that Reible's production represented an evolution of the text on stage: that towards the end of apartheid, it pointed to a future of post-colonial readings of *The Tempest* after the end of authoritarian, nationalist white power and the advent of a democratic government. However, as Purkey's note suggests, it is unclear whether such readings were suited to a present that was supposed to look different from the past. In 1989, for Reible, *The Tempest* could reflect the growing sense that the country was in the dying years of an old order and in the run-up to a renunciation of power. That moment came and passed in 1994: the government was no longer in the hands of the National Party as representatives of a white Afrikaans minority, but in those of the African National Congress (ANC), elected by the newly enfranchised black majority. Shortly afterwards, between 1996 and 1998, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established under Nelson Mandela's new presidency to facilitate hearings in which victims of apartheid-era violence could testify to their experiences, and where perpetrators could offer their testimony in turn and apply for amnesty. As part of the development of a new national narrative post-1994, the work of the TRC, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was to make space for the oppressed to share their stories, and for a subsequent process of forgiveness and reconciliation between groups who had violently opposed one another during the apartheid era.

Following basic allegorical lines, then, the plot of *The Tempest* could not be simply mapped onto South Africa's new political landscape. The play's ending does not reflect a completed transition of power. The text leaves Caliban where it found him: enslaved on the island and obedient to Prospero, the coloniser. If theatre-makers wanted to use the text to engage the past *and* the present – if the Shakespearean ending was supposed to reflect the national ending and new beginning – this could not be achieved without creative intervention.

In fact, Purkey's quip about a need to invent 'Caliban's Truth and Reconciliation' was prescient, anticipating the 2009 production of the play by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) and Cape Town's Baxter theatre, directed by Janice Honeyman and starring Antony Sher as Prospero and John Kani as Caliban. This *Tempest* evoked colonial allegory in its concept and design, post-colonial reflection on past dynamics in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, and post-apartheid politics in its ending. Prospero's request for absolution is, in the play text, addressed to the audience. For this production, Sher's Prospero spoke the lines, instead, to Kani's Caliban:

> as you from crimes would pardoned be,
> Let your indulgence set me free. (5.1.374–375)

This was a clear evocation of the exchange of contrition and forgiveness formalised by the TRC. Yet fifteen years after the beginning of democracy, more had happened within the political landscape than could be reflected in this

reframing of Shakespeare's words. The idealistic project of nation-building in the 1990s, into which the work of the TRC had been co-opted, had already proven its shortcomings. The Commission had left a lasting and complex legacy, having been criticised for granting perpetrators amnesty too easily and for focussing only on those who suffered direct political violence. It had failed, in other words, to give voice to victims of structural violence experienced during apartheid, the effects of which persisted in the deep inequalities that continued to characterise the social and economic landscape of the country.[5] Under the presidency of Thabo Mbeki (1999–2008), the national agenda had shifted from reconciliation to transformation:, to pursuing not only peace but also a redress of the material and ideological legacies of apartheid and colonialism. This phase of the democratic era was troubled in its own ways, with Mbeki's policies and approach to governance entrenching hierarchies within the ANC. This opened the party to internal dissent and the rise of Jacob Zuma as populist opponent to Mbeki.[6] In 2009, then, the most pressing drama of the state was not the end of the apartheid government and the pursuit of reconciliation, but the deposition of Mbeki and the ascension of Jacob Zuma to the leadership of the ANC and the presidency. As Bosman noted in his review, '(T)he narrow and outdated allegory into which the Baxter and RSC have shoehorned *The Tempest* has no room for the pressing questions of South African politics today: greed, corruption, anarchic violence, and the threat of autocracy'.[7] The TRC-*Tempest* belonged more to the 1990s than to the late 2000s: theatrical interpretation of the play lagged behind local realities.

While scholars and critics have commented on the 2009 *Tempest*'s attempts to make Shakespeare serve political discourses of forgiveness, or vice versa,[8] they typically consider it in isolation from other local productions of the text. As Purkey's reflections suggest, other productions have wrestled with the network of associations attached to *The Tempest*, finding its resonances both inescapable and inadequate for reflecting contemporary concerns. In 1994, 2003, and 2004, these productions displayed varying responses to the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, while also suggesting a need for something beyond or in addition to the text to make meaning of it. As the last example of a large-scale production of the play in recent history, the 2009 production seems to be a final example of the irresolvable tensions between the text and context. Nevertheless, those tensions have been revisited in different forms. I end my discussion with two original plays with close relationships to the text: *Miranda's Tale* (2016), devised by Ayanda Khala-Phiri during the Fallist movements, and

[5]These points, among others, were articulated in a seminal critique by Mahmood Mamdani, 'Amnesty or Impunity?' See also Fullard and Rousseau's 'Uncertain borders', which provides a summary of and critical engagement with various assessments of the TRC.
[6]Gevisser, 'Why is Thabo Mbeki a "Nitemare"?', 54–55.
[7]Bosman, 'Cape of Storms', 116.
[8]Bosman, 'Cape of Storms'; Young, 'Let Your Indulgence'.

Kunene and the King (2019), which, while referencing *King Lear* most explicitly, recalled the 2009 *Tempest* in that it, too, was directed by Honeyman, starred Antony Sher and John Kani, and evoked dynamics similar to those of Prospero and Caliban between its main characters. These works, in different ways, constructed new responses to *The Tempest* that unmade Prospero and Caliban in favour of the lived experiences that lay beyond their scope to represent.

The Tempest in 1994

Two productions of *The Tempest* were staged in 1994: one at Maynardville Open-Air Theatre in Cape Town, directed by Roy Sargeant, and another at Rhodes University in Makhanda (then known as Grahamstown), directed by Andrew Buckland (See Figure 1). These *Tempests* demonstrate differing responses on the part of largely white, English-speaking institutions to the end of a political era, and their differing approaches to Shakespeare as a source of cultural meaning and interpretation. The annual Maynardville Shakespeare, modelled on Regent's Park tradition of open-air performances in London, had been running since 1956, while it was customary at the time for the Rhodes drama department to stage a play during graduation season. Neither pursued an explicitly post-colonial reading, avoiding a focus on Caliban in favour of Ariel. However, the differences in their treatment of Prospero, as a symbol of white authority, reveal contrasting understandings of the nature of the magician's power, his environment, and his culpability towards his subjects.

The Maynardville *Tempest* was produced to meet the expectations of the theatre's loyal, predominantly white middle-class audiences. The directorial approach reflected Maynardville productions' attachment to tradition, and their tendency to adhere to reverently detached notions of the universal wisdom of Shakespeare's texts. *The Tempest*'s presentation was conventional, its magic at once elemental and elementary. The programme contents ('Shakespeare and the Bermudas', 'Shakespeare and the Sea', 'Maynardville – a Short History', 'About the *Tempest*') are an exercise in generality and do not provide any interpretive framing.[9] The cast list, however, suggests that some level of racial character coding was involved: white actors took the majority of roles, with Ralph Lawson in the role of Prospero, while Nkosinathi Gqotso, the only black actor in a starring role, played Caliban.

The Rhodes *Tempest* was more provocative. Designed to celebrate the class of 1994 and (more importantly, in director Andrew Buckland's view)[10] to train student actors, this production confronted audiences with the incorporation of translated text (isiXhosa and Afrikaans), contemporary music, and an extensive

[9]Sargeant, '*The Tempest*'.
[10]Buckland, video call interview with the author, 21 February 2021.

Figure 1. Programme covers for *The Tempest* at Maynardville (left), and *The Tempest* at Rhodes University (right) in 1994.[11]

reframing of the text as psychomachia: Prospero, a terminally ill physicist, was 'trapped on the 'island' of his hospital bed, attended by Ariel, his nurse, and dependent on his hi-tech life support system'.[12] Technological innovations of the late twentieth century represented Prospero's 'magic' as scientific knowledge with the power to keep him alive but also unable to save him from his ultimate fate. This interpretive approach precluded any colonial allegory in its casting, with Ter Hollman, a white actor, in the role of Caliban, while the only actor of colour in the production, Yolisa Ndima, played Gonzalo. Instead, the action of the play became an almost entirely interior process – and a kind of moral reckoning – for the dying Prospero.

The Prospero envisioned by the Maynardville *Tempest* did not suffer the same physical or ethical encumberment. Writing in 2005, eleven years after the 1994 production, local historian Helen Robinson associated Prospero's freeing of Ariel at the end of the play with the beginning of a new national dispensation:

> This great play with its renunciation of past difficulties and disappointments moves towards forgiveness and hope for the future in the hands of a new generation. It

[11]Sargeant, '*The Tempest*'; Buckland, '*The Tempest*'.
[12]Buckland, '*The Tempest*: Rhodes University'.

> seemed a fitting symbol of the time as Prospero lifted his staff at the end of the play, freeing Ariel from bondage.[13]

Retrospective association might have had a greater influence than historical record on Robinson's framing. In an interview, I asked Steven Stead, who played Ariel, to comment on these associations with his character: to him, it was 'a bit of a long shot … [because] why cast a white boy as Ariel?'[14] This is an apt question. The form of the text and the production's casting would have negated any connections between the end of the play and the end of apartheid: Stead's Ariel was the only one of Prospero's subjects who was granted his freedom, while Gqotso's Caliban remained beholden to the elderly white patriarch.

It is perhaps telling that Stead remembers the directorial approach as being 'academic',[15] as Orkin's critique of the largely 'non-interrogative' stance of local scholars, leaving the ambiguities of the text untapped at a time when they were most resonant and most politically urgent, helps to articulate the implications of the Maynardville production's lack of engagement with its own context. Whether there was an actual correlation between local scholarship and the director's disengaged approach is doubtful, but a pseudo-scholarly adherence to the text and conservative interpretation in this case failed to recognise the discordance, in 1994, of casting a black Caliban as a monstrous creature without recourse to the perspective of his subjugation by a white Prospero. The production design reflected the contrast between Caliban and Ariel's characterisations (see Figure 2) as well as the actors' experiences. Stead remembers that he was able to create a self-determined performance,[16] but the director became impatient and domineering towards Gqotso, taking issue with the actor's pronunciation of Shakespearean verse in what Stead remembers as an unpleasant rehearsal process. Ariel might have been granted emancipation, but the direction did not address or resolve the racially coded master-slave dialectic evoked in Prospero and Caliban's relationship.

The Rhodes *Tempest* sidestepped this kind of coding while also presenting a significantly less powerful and more troubled Prospero. Notions of reconciliation seem to have informed this interpretation, but in terms that contrast with Robinson's re-telling of Prospero's emancipation of Ariel. While the programme does not extensively reference the politics of transition, the impending new democracy certainly seems to have shaped the approach and language behind the production:

> The universal theme of Nature set in opposition to Art carries a specific relevance in this decade as the effects of man's 'art' on nature becomes [*sic*] all too obvious. These effects being not only environmental but social, *The Tempest* lends itself to creative

[13]Robinson, *Shakespeare at Maynardville*, 103.
[14]Stead, video call interview with the author, 3 September 2021.
[15]Ibid.
[16]He recalled that he had a lot of freedom in exploring the metamorphic abilities of his character, enabled by several changes of evocative and richly designed costumes.

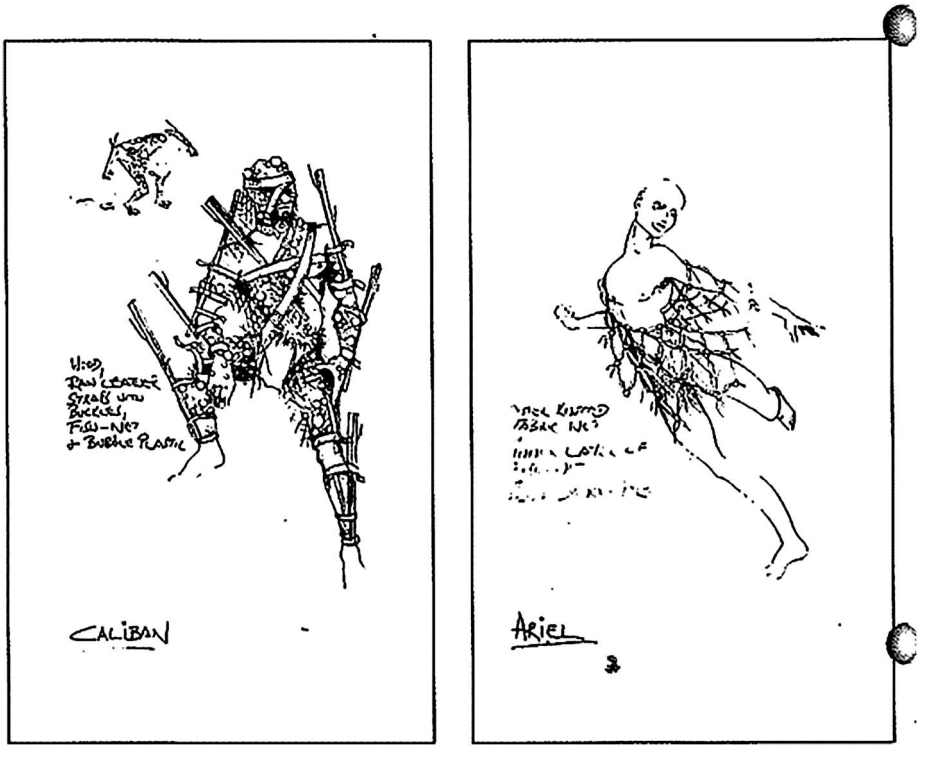

Figure 2. Sketches of the costumes designed by Keith Anderson for Caliban and Ariel. Caliban, the sketch indicates, was to be covered in a profusion of materials reminiscent of beach debris: wood, raw leather, straps with buckles, fishnets, and bubble plastic. Dressed in these materials, the illustrated Caliban is carbuncled and sharp-edged, his face obscured by a strap and piece of netting. Ariel, by contrast, is unencumbered, though his mantle of knotted, loose netting still suggests his captivity.[17]

> interpretation in a *country divided by many languages*, since it is concerned with the central themes of *repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation*.[18]

The Rhodes *Tempest* put Prospero in the centre of this process, drawing close connections between reconciliation and extreme vulnerability. In this configuration, Prospero was not the powerful and benevolent white magician who, after a period of self-development, set his subjects free. Instead, he was a sick and troubled (white) man at the mercy of others. He was the one who had to be set free, bound by the vagaries of his own psyche, before his death.

The productions' characterisations of Prospero were matched by their divergent approaches to staging Shakespeare. As Maynardville's *raison d'être*, Shakespeare was a site for maintaining tradition and, with it, a status quo of performance that left the fates of familiar characters cast in familiar roles of rule and servitude unquestioned (at a time in which societal change appeared otherwise imminent). At Rhodes, Shakespeare presented a ready point of

[17]Sargeant, '*The Tempest*'.
[18]Buckland, '*The Tempest*', my emphases.

reference to conduct a kind of formal and thematic self-examination. The enslaved characters of the text, Ariel and Caliban, took up respective positions as physical caretaker and psychological archetype: both were intrinsically tied to and orientated towards Prospero, while also reflecting his essential powerlessness and need for redemption. The production's interrogation of Prospero and of *The Tempest* stopped short of examining the racial categorisation of Caliban which was evoked but left unexamined at Maynardville. While this may have been another deliberate and possibly prudent subversion of tradition, Buckland's avoidance of casting characters according to race was not a promise of things to come. Racial categorisations went on to shape all other productions of the play discussed here, though in increasingly conscious and critical ways.

Interim Experimentation: 2003–2004 University Productions

In the early 2000s, about ten years into democracy and five years after the final TRC hearings, university drama departments continued to approach *The Tempest* in the more experimental and critical vein of the Rhodes production, showing a growingawareness of the ways in which standard casting and interpretation centre on Prospero as a representative of white experience. Accompanying this was a stronger consciousness of and willingness to deal with Caliban's critical and canonical position, while also resisting its expression in the most basic terms. The two productions in question – at DUT[19] (2003), directed by Brian Pearce, and Purkey's version at the University of the Witwatersrand (2004) – demonstrated the comparative space afforded by their institutional contexts for experimentation and critical reflection. That is, the scholarly environment, at this stage, opened up vocabulary and categories for interpretation where they could be pursued, for educational purposes, with university resources and full casts of actors in training. The productions demonstrate the varying material circumstances and demographics of the Wits and DUT drama departments. The DUT *Tempest* employed radically different casting than other productions of the play discussed in this article: a young black actor (Andile Mngadi) played Prospero, and besides Caliban (played by white actor Wesley Woolf), the rest of the cast was also black. The most significant interventions in Purkey's production, by contrast, were not in upending traditional casting patterns but in reframing Prospero and Caliban's characterisation through careful textual editing and interpretive choices.

In the DUT *Tempest*, Prospero was characterised as an *inyanga* (a traditional healer and herbalist) in an interpretation informed by the actor, Mngadi's, inputs (see Figure 3).[20] The character's magic was conceived of not as Renaissance alchemy or technological innovation, but as indigenous knowledge. This

[19]When it was established in 2002, the Durban University of Technology, abbreviated as DUT, was known as the Durban Institute of Technology.
[20]Pearce, 'Prospero's African Magic', 40.

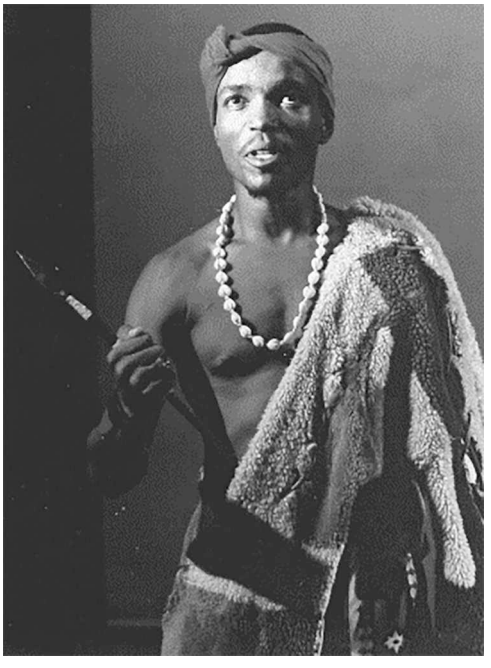

Figure 3. Andile Mngadi as Prospero in *The Tempest* (2003) at DUT.[21]

free use of 'African magic' by an African Prospero contrasts with the conventional Western magic wielded by a white Prospero against a black Caliban in the Maynardville *Tempest*. It also demonstrates an alternative power configuration to that of the 2009 *Tempest* (six years later), in which the magic of an African island was appropriated by a European Prospero and wielded against African characters. The effect of the DUT production's casting and characterisation was to create a post-colonial production, per Pearce's own description, but not in portraying a historical relationship between coloniser and colonised. Rather, the DUT production challenged the assumptions of European cultural hegemony by proposing a history in which the dominant system of power and knowledge is rooted in different traditions and exercised by different people groups. This presented the opportunity for critique and the satirisation of colonial systems. For example, the scene in which Stephano, Trinculo and Antonio speculate on how they might capture and display Caliban to Neapolitans back home for profit and show 'took on an ironic quality'.[22]

However, the director's reflections demonstrated how the subversive potential of this could be circumscribed. Apart from wanting to avoid colonial clichés, Pearce's reasoning did not always move beyond the opposing categories it attempted to undermine. The description of Mngadi's and Woolf's acting styles, for example, entered a beleaguered rhetorical space:

[21]Adamson, 'Andile Mngadi as Prospero', 44.
[22]Pearce, 'Prospero's African Magic', 40.

> Woolf is very much an intellectual actor and I thought that it would be a good learning experience for him to play the role of Caliban, which demanded an intuitive response and a very physical kind of characterisation. Mngadi is a much more physical and emotional actor and I thought that it would be exciting to find a Prospero who was passionate and volatile, as indeed turned out to be the case. On the other hand, Woolf brought a sense of cunning to his interpretation of Caliban, suggesting the character's desire to become ruler of the island.[23]

This reflection benefits from the qualifications of work by scholars such as Ayanna Thompson.[24] With reference to *Othello* in particular, Thompson notes the tendency for white actors in the role of Iago to be characterised as cunning, intellectual, and 'virtuosic' performers, while black actors playing Othello are characterised as physical, emotional, and 'natural'. This is often at the expense of the black actor, who in the case of Othello bears the burden of playing a main character who is an outsider by virtue of his race and is fooled into a tragic end by his white antagonist. While Pearce's description of Mngadi and Woolf's performances was not accompanied by the intratextual racial othering and dispossession of the black character and actor (which so easily occurs if a black actor plays Caliban alongside a white cast), the racial terms of the coloniser–colonised relationship still led to a gridlock of essentialist categories: 'Black men', he explained, 'may also be dictators', and 'white men can be savages and deformed slaves too'.[25]

At first sight, the Wits *Tempest*, staged a year later in 2004, contrasted directly with the DUT version and closely resembled the 1994 Maynardville production: Martin le Maitre, a professional guest actor, played Prospero, and Thami Mnqolo, who played Caliban, was the only black cast member. Yet as the earlier discussion of the programme note suggests, the director and actors were more aware of and engaged with postcolonial readings of the text. Their approach can also be framed in terms of a larger project of which the 2004 *Tempest* formed a part. It was the last in a series of annual Shakespeare productions, all directed by Purkey, that had been staged by the Wits Drama School for learners in Gauteng province: *Romeo and Juliet* (2000), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2001), *Twelfth Night* (2002), *The Taming of the Shrew* (2003). In the director's notes for the first two productions (*Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Purkey frames the staging of Shakespeare for schools as a kind of research project guided by a research question: 'is it possible to study and stage Shakespeare in South Africa in the new millennium?';[26] or, put slightly differently, 'is it possible to stage Shakespeare in a meaningful way, in South Africa in the twenty-first century?'.[27] Purkey's reflections became more troubled over the course of the project. On the one hand,

[23]Ibid.
[24]Thompson, 'Shakespeare and Blackface'.
[25]Pearce, 'Prospero's African Magic', 40.
[26]Purkey, '*Romeo and Juliet*'.
[27]Purkey, '*A Midsummer Night's Dream*'.

Romeo and Juliet and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appear to have provided accessible terrain for interpretive development and enriching cycles of audience feedback and performance during school visits. *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tempest* were more challenging and precarious. In a similar vein to his later reservations about *The Tempest*, Purkey noted about *The Taming of the Shrew*: 'I sometimes wonder whether plays like these should rather not be played at all. But that position just doesn't seem to wash'.[28]

Understood against this backdrop, details of the production recorded in a review by Tony Voss[29] suggest that, while the concept and presentation of the text did not show the same degree of intervention as in the 1994 Rhodes or 2003 DUT versions, the relationship between Prospero and Caliban was addressed with intention. The opening scene, in which Prospero was revealed in centre stage by flashes of lightning while sailors and passengers faced off against the storm, signalled the character's essential culpability. At this point, with reference to the tempest itself, Prospero proclaimed: 'this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine'.[30] This was moved from the last scene, where Prospero speaks the words to refer to Caliban.[31] In its original position, the line might be interpreted on a literal level to reflect Prospero's ownership of Caliban as a slave. Alternatively, or additionally, it may be a nuanced self-reflection on Prospero's responsibility for Caliban's worst qualities. That is, Caliban is what Prospero has made him. If 'darkness' is understood to mean moral or psychological corruption, then the repositioning of the line to refer to the tempest directly associates that corruption with Prospero, who conjures the storm with his magic. It also removes the direct association of the line with Caliban, circumventing the text's connection of his physical appearance with moral and psychological corruption, whether he is imagined as an inhuman creature, a non-European character, or as both non-white and non-human.

Caliban's performance and characterisation also appear to have benefitted from a combination of directorial attention and the creative freedom of the actor. Voss remarked on the strength of the performance, which 'belonged as much to the actor as it did to the director'.[32] This statement could not have been applied to the Maynardville *Tempest*, for example, in which Caliban's performance, subjected to quarrels about pronunciation and burdened by detritus and simplistic monstrosity, became a contested space that belonged to neither director nor actor. The complex rendering of Caliban's character also gave his departure at the end a particular affective quality:

> To this performance [of Caliban] Thami Mngqolo gave a wiliness, sweetness and intelligence, in many ways belying the judgments of Prospero and Miranda,

[28]Purkey, '*The Taming of the Shrew*'.
[29]Voss, 'Storm Warning', 76.
[30]Ibid., 75.
[31](5.1.309–310).
[32]Voss, 'Storm Warning', 76.

> and offering genuine resistance … I was disappointed that with the gormless sailor and drunken butler he disappears into his 'cave' beneath Prospero's cell at the end.[33]

If this was the effect of Caliban's presence and parting, then it may have added a layer to the forgiveness required by Prospero from the audience at the end of the play. In this description, the complex rendering of Caliban's character, paired with his retreat at the end, has a particular effect on the spectator's experience. When a compelling Caliban leaves before the final moments of the play, then it is the audience who is left with a feeling of disappointment and pathos, forced to contemplate the loss of a character who was both fascinating and perplexing. If this was the affective quality of Caliban's presence and his parting, then perhaps it provided a fitting layer to the forgiveness required by Prospero from the audience at the end of the play. In the final scene, it is the audience who must decide whether they will grant their indulgence and absolution to the magician under whose cell Caliban has disappeared.

Several Endings: *The Tempest* (2009), *Kunene and the King* (2019), and *Miranda's Tale* (2016)

For all the reconfiguration, reframing, and shifts in emphasis represented by the productions at Maynardville, Rhodes, DUT and Wits, *The Tempest* remains a play that is, essentially, about Prospero. The ending of the 2009 production demonstrated the limits of the text and what it affords to Caliban, even when Prospero, cast as the white oppressor, requests absolution directly from Caliban, cast as the black oppressed. After delivering his speech asking for Caliban's 'indulgence' to 'set him free', Prospero left the stage. Caliban straightened up, leaving behind the crutches he had been using up to that point, and ascended a set of rocky steps. The production ended with this image: Caliban, halfway up the staircase, left in troubled silence to gaze out to the audience. At the end of a process designed to achieve reconciliation and closure, this reconfiguration of the last scene suggested a lack of resolution and inequality of outcome. While Caliban's recovery of the use of his legs after Prospero's request and departure was reminiscent of a biblical miracle, he was simultaneously rendered speechless. Or, rather, the text did not afford him a response. Prospero may have redirected his words to a certain effect, but they are nevertheless the final ones. Caliban's emancipation was therefore partial at best: his new physical freedom was not matched by a freedom of expression or rebuttal (Figure 4).

Whatever truth Caliban had to share after his emancipation remained unheard and beyond the bounds of the original text to provide. The production's lack of resolution and inequality of outcome (at the end of a process designed to achieve reconciliation and closure) could thus be said to

[33] Ibid.

(a) (b)

Figure 4. John Kani and Antony Sher in *The Tempest*.[34]

have reflected the failures of the TRC. However, it is questionable whether it was necessary to produce a Shakespearean restatement of these failures, and of the network of roles that surrounded the TRC's historical moment: coloniser and colonised, white and black, perpetrator and victim. The 2009 *Tempest* presented a final variation on a theme that felt, to critics at least, as if it had run its course. Bosman commented:

> The decision to cast Sher as a white Prospero in linen and Kani as a black Caliban on a tether, thus reiterating a by-now-familiar allegory of colonialism, did not merely prevent this good production from becoming great. More instructively, it signalled the exhaustion of *The Tempest* as a vehicle for that allegory and the urgent need for South African theater, now fifteen years into democracy, to appropriate Shakespeare in freshly imaginative ways.[35]

Considering the configurations of all of the productions discussed so far, Bosman's comment bears some revision. On stage, the allegory that the 2009 *Tempest* presented had not been exhausted through overuse, but through its imaginative predominance and the practical attempts to ignore, avoid, or undermine it. None of the other productions discussed here fully stepped into the master-slave, white-black allegory which the 2009 *Tempest* embraced. However, their presentation was still essentially determined by the possibility of that allegory, whether it was consciously ignored, as at Maynardville; carefully avoided, as at Rhodes; inverted, as at DUT; or simultaneously sidestepped and subtly challenged, as at Wits. When the allegory that had hovered in the background for so long during the democratic period finally took on an explicit form, the timing of the thematic note was out of joint. The fact that *The Tempest* has not been done on a large scale since 2009 might appear to

[34]Kurttz, 'John Kani as Caliban'; Kurttz, 'Prospero and the Spirits'.
[35]Bosman, 'Cape of Storms', 109.

confirm that, allegory or no, the play had (for the time being) run its course on local stages. However, the picture changes if one considers the 2009 *Tempest* not on a timeline of productions of the same play text but on a timeline of productions that follow a particular pattern.

Ten years after the 2009 *Tempest*, *Kunene and the King* (2019) brought Sher and Kani together once more under the direction of Honeyman and with the assistance of the RSC (Figure 5). The play, written by Kani, follows the development of an antagonistic friendship between Jack Morris (Sher), a terminally ill Shakespearean actor working on the role of Lear, and Lunga Kunene (Kani), his new male nurse. As in *The Tempest*, Sher and Kani were representatives of the racial divide of apartheid and post-apartheid history. Morris's disappointment that his new carer is a black male nurse initiates a relationship that demonstrates the contemporary South African condition through a range of conflicts and exchanges centreing on Jack's racism, South African history, and Shakespeare. Jack and Lunga's conversations about Shakespeare in South Africa – such as Lunga's experience of an isiXhosa translation of *Julius Caesar* as a schoolboy (an autobiographical insert from Kani) – are didactic in tone, recognised by both Schalkwyk[36] and Thurman[37] as being designed for international, not local, audiences. The cumulative effect of tailoring history and employing stereotypes to suit the narrative in *Kunene* is to win over audiences who are 'disconnected from and ignorant of the country's past and present'.[38]

In many ways, *Kunene and the King* does not move beyond the pitfalls of stereotype and politically outdated frameworks. Nevertheless, it is an original play, not bound to negotiating a desired meaning from Shakespeare through extra-textual set pieces or intra-textual adaptation. As David Schalkwyk points out, the exchanges between Jack and Lunga force Jack, a representative of white South Africa, to bear witness to Lunga's life and experiences and, finally, to accept the 'weight of responsibility – political, economic, moral – as a condition for a final release'.[39] In the play's concluding scene, Jack visits Lunga at Lunga's house in Soweto. Lunga's patience runs out and he confronts Jack in a heated argument. The shock of this confrontation tips Morris's precarious condition over the edge, and in his dying moments he expresses recognition: 'Now, I see you'. At the end of the 2009 production, Prospero was released, free to move off the stage while Caliban was left in a state of bewilderment. In *Kunene and the King*, however, the redemption of Sher's character occurs only at the moment of his death.

This seems to present a redemption of sorts for Sher's character, in the same way that Prospero's indirect admission of guilt does in his application for

[36]Schalkwyk, 'Kunene and the King'.
[37]Thurman, 'Kunene and the Swan'.
[38]Ibid., 86.
[39]Schalkwyk, '*Kunene and the King*', 68.

Figure 5. John Kani and Antony Sher in *Kunene and the King*.[40]

Caliban's forgiveness in *The Tempest*. Yet while the 2009 *Tempest* concluded with the assumption of white exoneration, *Kunene and the King*, by loosening itself from the Shakespeare text, shifted in focus away from the performance of white narrative by insisting on the reality of black experience. As in *The Tempest*, the post-redemption moment in *Kunene* leaves Kani's character with a new burden, which is the expectation of forgiveness. *The Tempest* provides no words for Caliban at this moment: he is struck dumb by Prospero's exit. Lunga Kunene's burden after Jack Morris's departure is given a much clearer shape. Morris has died in Kunene's house, and Kunene must deal with the responsibility of explaining why there is a dead white man in his township kitchen. This drives home the presence of still-existing divisions along economic, racial, and geographic lines instituted by apartheid. The past is not the past just because Jack is dead. In *Kunene*, Kani voices his position: 'Why did you have to die in *my* house, and not in your own? You bastard!'[41] The post-redemption (post-reconciliation) moment is given an intensely local habitation, and a name, and a voice.

In 2019, *Kunene and the King* was a mainstream and comparatively conservative expression of the need for different stories to express post-1994 lived experiences. It also focussed on the experiences of an older generation of black South Africans, represented by Kunene. By contrast, Ayanda Khala-Phiri's 2016 reconfiguration of *The Tempest*, titled *Miranda's Tale*, was squarely

[40]Kurttz, 'Antony Sher and John Kani'.
[41]Schalkwyk, '*Kunene and the King*', 68.

rooted in the #FeesMustFall student protest movements and their calls for decolonisation of curricula and cultural institutions. More than twenty years after the advent of democratic government, these movements underscored persistent socio-economic inequalities, buttressed by colonial systems of knowledge and administration. The protests, as Sisonke Msimang noted at the time, expressed the widespread disillusionment of a younger generation with the idea of a democratic and unified 'Rainbow Nation'.[42] According to Msimang, it had become more and more necessary to pursue points of tension, dissent, and conflict, as opposed to promoting a grand narrative of unification and national pride that cannot account for the poverty and inequality still experienced by so many citizens. This was reflected in Khala-Phiri's adaptation of *The Tempest*, which insisted that the most urgent concern of the moment was the experiences of the vulnerable and oppressed that continued to be deprioritised in real terms, not the ideas of unification and progress that only seemed to benefit the privileged recipients of forgiveness.

As a lecturer and researcher in performance studies at UKZN at the time, Khala-Phiri had been asked by her department to use *The Tempest* to interrogate the relevance of Shakespeare to the decolonial project. In an article documenting her engagement with the text, Khala-Phiri[43] explains that the 2nd-year student cohort would have performed various adaptations of the play at the *Decolonising Shakespeare?* conference held in August 2016 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). For the students, this would have constituted the practical component of a module on theatre and post-colonial theory. However, due to ongoing protest actions and consequent interruptions of the academic programme, the envisioned performances could not be prepared and staged. Khala-Phiri then undertook a personal critical reflection on *The Tempest* and an adaptation of its narrative to present at the conference. This reflection was informed by Khala-Phiri's recent experiences of teaching during the protests. At the time, before the proposed project based on *The Tempest*, she and her students had been rehearsing *Sarafina!* by Mbongeni Ngema. Ngema's play, originally staged in 1987 and the subject of several post-1990 revivals, is set during the 1976 Soweto Uprising and follows its eponymous fictional heroine: a young black female school student in Soweto, who with her classmates becomes involved in the 1976 student protests against Afrikaans as the sole medium of instruction. It was in *Sarafina!*, not *The Tempest*, that Khala-Phiri and her students experienced the most striking resonances with their own context:

> … the parallel existence of the world of the play *Sarafina* and the unrest at the university meant the two were seldom seen as separate. In fact, the issues raised by students – teargas at residences, violent confrontations with police officers as well as infighting

[42]Msimang, 'End of the Rainbow Nation'.
[43]Khala-Phiri, 'Transformation's *Tempest*', 87.

> amongst student leadership – were becoming more complexly interwoven with themes of the *Sarafina* text wherever students recognised similarities between their own personal experiences and the experiences of the characters they portrayed.[44]

Khala-Phiri's reflection suggests that *Sarafina!* presented a continuity of experience between past and present, the struggle of the older generation that morphed into the struggle of the younger one. The story of anti-apartheid protests became disconcertingly like the story of post-apartheid protests.

Having recently rehearsed *Sarafina!* and felt its resonances with the protests she and her students were living through, Khala-Phiri decided to rework *The Tempest* into the context of the FeesMustFall movement, centreing on Miranda, who was reimagined as a first-year university student in South Africa at the time of the protests. To reflect the experiences of her students, Khala-Phiri chose to tell a story that bore little resemblance to the Shakespeare text. Most of the characters were dispensed with, leaving Miranda, the storm, and the island as the sole remaining elements. Khala-Phiri's Miranda was a South African university student who leaves politically and financially troubled circumstances at home to build a different future at university. However, she finds herself isolated on this new and strange institutional 'island', experiencing a storm of political instability and protest. Upon arrival, Miranda experienced a series of disillusionments and traumatic events: gatekeeping and exclusion by white male authority; sexual violence; the chaos of police teargassing student protesters; the looting of her boarding room; being driven to transactional sex to survive a lack of means; and, amidst all these challenges, the pressure to succeed academically. Miranda's story ended when she made news headlines as the youngest female student arrested during the protests.

In the extensive adaptation of the original to suit the context of the FeesMustFall protests, Khala-Phiri's play refused the limitations of framing her experiences in terms of *The Tempest* or of typical post-colonial readings of it. Prospero and Caliban had no place in her narrative, and while she conceded that 'In a time outside of the eye of the storm of FeesMustFall, my imagined Miranda and I may have found Shakespeare more useful',[45] it is important that *in* the eye of the storm, Shakespeare *was not* useful. To express what she needed most to say, the story she was given had to be changed.

Conclusion

We may now venture some answers to Purkey's questions raised at the beginning of this article. Firstly, is it possible to subvert the meanings of the play? Yes, though the productions in which this was most apparent – the ones at Rhodes and DUT – also showed that subversion remained dependent, primarily, on reframing Prospero's experiences. Since Prospero's whiteness is so readily

[44]Ibid.
[45]Ibid., 94.

assumed in standard interpretations, reconfiguring Prospero either prioritises white experience, as in the Rhodes production, or, when casting is inverted as in the DUT production, black experience is defined by relying on whiteness as an opposing binary. Alternatively, a lack of concept-driven interpretation might translate to a lack of awareness with unintended consequences. The Maynardville *Tempest* is a case in point, having inadvertently expressed the colonial dynamics with which it refused to engage. Then again, the Wits production seems to have successfully played the text 'simply in all its themes' (to use Purkey's phrase) *with* awareness. Yet, in all these examples, whether the productions evaded or actively attempted to assign moral culpability to Prospero, Caliban remained the subordinate character. Should theatre-makers invent 'Caliban's Truth and Reconciliation'?[46] Whether this should have been done or not, the 2009 *Tempest* attempted it and gave full reign to the colonial allegory to express both post-colonial and post-apartheid politics. While this production was commercially successful both locally and internationally, some critical responses highlighted the limitations of *The Tempest* as a vehicle for discourses on reconciliation. This, in turn, also highlighted the limitations of reconciliatory politics fifteen years after the transition to democracy in South Africa. Even when interventions in the text attempt to position Caliban as a central character, he is still defined primarily in relationship to Prospero. This being the case, the worth of staging the play, towards some ends at least, may well be called into question. As *Kunene and the King* and *Miranda's Tale* suggested, *The Tempest* might not be the play, and (in the case of *Miranda's Tale*), Shakespeare not the playwright, to say what needs to be said. Alongside the general absence of *The Tempest* on local stages in ensuing years, what these original plays point towards is that some stories – even those as expansive and recognisable as Shakespeare's – cannot contain and express others, and that readers and theatre-makers need not feel the imperative that they should.

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[46]Purkey, '*The Tempest*'.

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