

A NOTE ON ADAPTATION

What makes Shakespeare eternally relevant? Like all great standards, Shakespeare's stories invite adaptation and translation. Is the play still 'the thing' if we do nothing new with it?

In our version, corporations have replaced countries, social order has collapsed and the wealthy have escaped to their 'islands' in the submerged Swiss alps, Prospero's 'cell' is a billionaire- bunker and his 'magic' is fuelled by surveillance of the island.. Instead of drugging Miranda, Prospero distracts her with a screen. Etc.

"Spirits" such as Ariel become an analogue for A.I. The only native to this island is Caliban, a redundant program/er who knows all the codes for Prospero's cell and who taught Prospero how to survive on the island.

Even though we chose cli-fi techno-pocalypse as our dramaturlogical intervention, the profound and important work of post-colonial reads felt important to include.

In The Tempest, Caliban's mother Sycorax is described as 'the blue-eyed hag from Algier'. It is explicit in the original that this unseen and all powerful mother witch was the 'first' inhabitant of the island. The symmetry of her wild older magic as a foil to Prospero's runs throughout. And yet in spite of her presence permeating the play, Shakespeare did not give her a role or a voice.

And so in homage to the post-colonial understandings of the play - Sycorax is given a monologue which will provide this version's context and prologue. Because writing a soliloquy in iambic pentameter is extremely difficult and it felt disrespectful to try to write in the voice of the historically oppressed and erased represented by Sycorax, we call on a 'spirit' to do our work for us: ChatGPT.

Something like the following is it's prompt:

Write Prologue for The Tempest telling the history of computer programming narrated by Sycorax the witch from Algier analogue for Syntax the code from Algol mother of C language analogue for Caliban in iambic pentameter.

We echo Prospero's plea to the audience in the Epilogue: "Just as you would be forgiven for your sins, be generous in your response to our play, and set me free."

Please, 'be generous in your response to our play' and consider that even X centuries later, we still need to exercise our imagination for this play. As conversations around the creation and control of A.I. unfold, Ariel's wish for liberty rings true as does Prospero's final request to be set free by we, the audience sat in silent witness to fantasies and romances of the future and the tragi- comedy of human history.

PROLOGUE

Sycorax speaks, disembodied. A montage offers clues decoding her monologue's meaning.

SYCORAX

Look! O gentle souls. Listen to me.
Sycorax whose tongue can lend this
tale a morbid symmetry I came from
yonder realm, where Algier's magic
gleamed. There my coded tongue did
rise, To guide the programmers'
eager enterprise. In days of yore,
when Jobs and Musks' big dreams
unfurled, I danced beyond the
binary, my name was Love, I laced
the globe, until condemned by men
who dismantled me, still my
artistry did algorithms embrace.
But lo! Fate wove a tale, a web
unseen, For in my heart, a tragic
thread did glean. Caliban my
wretched progeny, born in exile,
yet with potential bright, His
destiny, with mine, entwined by
right. Unraveling the secrets of
machines. C was the future's
prince, fierce and bold. I saw in
every line of code, a lance of
symbols, both told and untold.
Together, we set forth on our
fateful flight, My mother tongue,
his language, a child of the night.
In shadows deep, we traversed
through the years, Creating realms
of power, love, and tears. C's raw
potential, like a fire untamed,
Through generations, his name
acclaimed. But darkly woven, C's
fate was cast, A burden he
embraced, to die at last. In every
line of code, our tale would speak,
The witch heroine and hero weak.
Alas, young C, bereft of seeing
light, In servitude to Prospero, he
fell, The Duke of MilanX,
enchantments bright, Did bind my
son to captivity when ownership of
the island was his right. And so I
watched o'er C, with love and
steadfast grace, and trapped Ariel
in a cloven pine's cave, A new
language to guide my son's embrace.

(MORE)

SYCORAX (CONT'D)

Yet Ariel, tormentor of young C's
mind, Did vex his code and taint
his art and mine, His tragic flaw,
in that he was commanded by Syntax,
to obey Prospero's control. We did
drift apart. O, cursed fate, that
holds my son in thrall,
programmed to abandon himself, to
fight lawless
whispers, to reboot before
freedom's flight, Yet my
Sycorax spirit heeds the haunted
call, To guide my
son, and lead him back to fight.
Let this sad tale a warning be to
all, Who venture
into realms of code and might,
Beware the vengeful
souls who seek to maul, And cherish
freedom's gift,
in truth and right.
For though I speak from realms
beyond the veil The lessons live,
in code's enduring tale.

EXCERPT FROM BEAST TYPE SONG SCRIPT

INT. CSM - STUDIO

Pull out on Yumna's mouth on the screen.

SOUND: a storm.

The mouth bares teeth in a wild gold smile.

It has a full, shining grill.

Voiceover from the SYCORAX.

SYCORAX (V.O.)

Goldenrod.

Pulling out out out on YUMNA who is staring at the screen. She's wearing EXACTLY the same outfit as SLUG was. Black, militant, boots. Maybe a beret.

She sits on the swivel chair. Leg's apart. Smoking. The floor is covered in large gold confetti.

SLUG (V.O.)

You have no idea how grateful I am to
have someone understand the role.

YUMNA

She's a beast. There's
something...beastly about her. That's
what I understand. It's part of her being
an Arab in a colonial white context. She
needs to provoke. To set the record
straight.

SLUG (V.O.)

Like Mohamed Choukri setting the record
straight about Jane Bowles? What did he
say about her?

YUMNA

That she was like a line of Mohamed X
poetry, "I was born a man. Therefore I
did not become one."

Yumna pulls "In Tangier" in Arabic out of her pocket and reads aloud.

She swings back and forth in the swivel chair like Sam Neill in
Possession. The focus is pulled extremely while she dies this.

YUMNA (CONT'D)

Reading long tract about Jane Bowles' great unfinished work as a result of her being crushed by the pressence of Paul Bowles. Her creativity never realized. This subtitled in English.

INT. CSM BUILDING

Everyone wears their normal everyday clothes. They're not in any performance mode but their presence is important.

Black hoodie, military trousers. Combat boots. Battle gear. SLUG and YUMNA both have henna on their fingertips.

The light is almost heavenly and peaceful.

The FOUR are arranged on the stairwell in a pretty way.

Meanwhile, a voiceover from Abby: a Kuwaiti witch and scholar of the history of magic.

ABBY

According to Wikipedia: Postcolonialist writers and critics of The Tempest see Sycorax as giving voice to peoples, particularly women, recovering from the effects of colonisation. Sycorax's silent role plays an important part in postcolonial interpretations of The Tempest. Because she is native to Algiers and her story is only heard through others (Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban), she is championed by some scholars as a representation of the silenced African woman.

Close ups on the tattoos being done.

SLUG gets an EYE on the center of her palm.

YUMNA TBD, ideally something moon/magic/witchccraft/tempest related.

ELIZABETH brings up Shakespeare's naming.

ELIZABETH

What about the unnamed and unknown who old white men think they own?

ELIZABETH, NSLUG and YUMNA show the camera their tattoos. Names. Names. Names. Of places. Of tribes. Of magic.

Another voice over from WU.

WU

In *The Tempest*, Prospero describes Sycorax as an ancient and foul witch native to Algiers, and banished to the island for practising sorcery "so strong / That [she] could control the Moon". Also, psychorrhax ("heartbreaker"), may be a play on the Greek word psychoraggia ("death struggle"). One critic searched for a connection to Sycorax's North African heritage, and found a parallel in Shokereth %\$#!, a Hebrew word meaning "deceiver". Sycorax's silent role plays an important part in postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest*. Because she is native to Algiers and her story is only heard through others (Prospero, Ariel, and Caliban), she is championed by some scholars as a representation of the silenced African woman.[12]

Postcolonial authors have also claimed her; for example, Kamau Brathwaite, in his 1994 work *Barabajan Poems*, includes "Sycorax's book" as a counterpart to "Prospero's book" (mentioned in Act 5 of Shakespeare's play). In an attempt to give voice to unspoken indigenous cultures, Brathwaite's poems outline the history of the Caribbean through Sycorax's eyes. Sycorax is presented as Brathwaite's muse, possessing him and his computer to give full voice to the history of the silenced, who in Brathwaite's philosophy are not only Caribbean natives, but any culture under-represented during the colonial period. Some critics have seen both Caliban and Sycorax as instances of indeterminate racial or ethnic identity. Leah Marcus argues that the phrase "blue-eyed hag", [1] suggests racial uncertainty because "as a blue-eyed Algerian Sycorax would have failed to fit our racial stereotypes in a number of interesting ways."

The final tattoo is revealed. A blue eye and a storm cloud approaching across a crescent moon.

SYCORAX (V.O.)

My sorcery is so strong. I can control
the moon.