

Spring 2015

Without Prospero: A Staged Reading and Continuation on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'

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Recommended Citation

Robotham, Samuel T., "Without Prospero: A Staged Reading and Continuation on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'" (2015). *Senior Projects Spring 2015*. 163.
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Without Prospero:

A Staged Reading and Continuation on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

A Senior Project submitted to

The Division of the Arts

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2015

Acknowledgements

To my advisor Jorge Cortiñas, for sticking with me through the whole process and always keeping me at the top of my abilities.

To all the professors who have inspired me along the way: Gideon Lester, Jonathan Rosenberg, Miriam Felton-Dansky, Jack Ferver, So Kim, Robert Woodruff, and Richard Aldous.

To Neil Gaiman and Geoff Sobelle, for taking the time to read and hear my script, as well as offering your brilliant feedback.

To Antonio Irizarry, for being such a incredible part of this project and a great friend.

To Matt Waldron and everyone in the Fisher Center who worked so tirelessly to make this show happen.

To Marissa Shadburn, for doing more than was ever necessary and being the best support system a person could ask for.

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Artist Statement

Without Prospero is a play I wrote over the course of my senior year. It culminated in a stylized staged reading in the Luma Theater at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts from March 27th to March 29th 2015. It featured Antonio Irizarry '16, Max Green '17, and Charlie Mai '18. The play is a continuation on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, focusing on the character of Ariel just after the events of the play have concluded. *Without Prospero* explores power, loss, abandonment, and how we look at a servant/master relationship through the lens of traditional Shakespearean characters. The play became an amalgam of historical fiction, adaptation, traditional playwriting, and devised work, ultimately teaching me that no work, no matter how iconic, can never truly be finished.

With the progression of time and changing of ideals, I believe that my writing must transform as well. Every new project I start begins with me thinking about it 4-dimensionally. I start by considering how I might create a universality so the piece has the potential to still feel relevant and engaging years from now. Before I can even begin this process, the piece must hold a long lasting importance to me as well as an audience. I aim for my stories to reveal this truth and live in a captivating honesty. I work a great deal by taking inspiration, and adapting literature and plays that have this essence of being unfinished. I hope for my audience to approach my work as skeptically as possible; to ask questions about anything and everything of me that they aren't sure of. As I write, I don't look to innovate or be the first to tell a certain story. I write to tell the stories that I want to see. I adapt. I blend. I recycle. I do what I must in order to tell my version of the story.

Part 1: Before

My first exposure to any of Shakespeare's works came when I was only 6 years old. It had been decided that I was to see a production of *The Tempest* on an outing with my family. I had no sense of expectation or particular thrill about going to see a theater production, but I attended nonetheless. In the moment, I can say for certain that I was unaware of what was unfolding before me. The complexities and elegance of the production were being lost on my young mind. Despite all this, it is not an experience I have never forgotten about, for this was the night I fell in love with theater. In a time that found me more concerned with watching Star Wars as many times as possible, I found a huge appreciation for what was happening before me. This play, that had begun with rushing excitement found a way to draw me in and stay with me throughout the next hour and a half. It was closest I will ever get to being transported back 400 years to this show's premiere, simply because I was going into it with fresh eyes. In the moment I was unaware to the extent of it, but I knew I wanted to make something like this. I wanted to create something exciting.

The first inklings of my play first appeared over a year ago, during the Fall semester of my junior year. I sat in Jonathan Rosenberg's Shakespeare: Director and the Text course, avidly discussing the final scene in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Though this play had always been arguably my favorite of Shakespeare's text, something was noticeably different for me in this discussion. As we reached the pivotal moment at the end where the spritely servant, Ariel, is finally freed by Prospero, the play's protagonist, a thought popped into my head: "Where is Ariel going"? He is given one last duty, then told he can continue to live his free from servitude. And this tiny, seemingly insignificant moment in a play filled with delight and magic, broke my heart.

I imagined Ariel, a boy who has known no other life than living with Prospero on this island, left to his own devices and his own life. There was an intense need to make something of this. Somewhere inside of me, I felt a story crying out to be told. So, I went home and I began to write.

The initial monologue I created for the play came to me surprisingly easy. I had no particular goals when I set out in my writing; I only wished to capture the sadness and loneliness I felt for Ariel. In its final form, it was a long, poetic soliloquy that continued exactly where *The Tempest* left off. I discovered a newfound meaning in Prospero and Ariel's relationship. Ironically, the immense help that this one monologue provided in shaping the entirety of the story did not make it into the final script, but its importance lasted with me throughout the whole process of writing. At this point, I knew I had discovered something special. Not just a story that spoke to me, but something I could see becoming a new way for me to develop work. The idea of adaptation had always been fascinating to me. I had tried my hand at it many times before, working from direct adaptation to twisted historical fiction, but none of it every really amounted to anything. As was with the initial inception of the piece, something about this story felt innately comforting and right. I wasn't sure why (and I wouldn't for many months), but I had to keep going.

Part 2: During

The next few months of development were spent the same way most of the project was: alone. I tried many different things, throwing in various characters and scenarios, only to find it felt forced and made for clunky story progression. Though I had already discovered my character

and chief conflict of the piece, I was still missing some kind of driving plot. As much as I wanted to push myself for more, I made the decision to take a step back from the piece for a moment and approach the whole thing more academically. I looked at multiple productions of the show, read dozens of pages of Shakespeare criticism, only to discover that one of my initial beliefs about Ariel was correct. For as many years that *The Tempest* has been told, then retold, then adapted, Ariel has more or less been portrayed in the same way. He is a spritely young being, who addresses Prospero with a mild temper and enjoys spending the time he has playing as many tricks as he can. But can anyone, especially someone with such a tortured past and present life, be portrayed so evenly? There is an anger in Ariel that is seldom seen. There is a need to love and express that is never given the chance to be fulfilled.

Somewhere along the way, I decided I would approach this play with a simple artistic question in mind. What is it exactly that makes us want to seek out what happens after the events of a story have concluded? This is certainly present in all spectrums of story telling. Time and time again we have seen stories that continue, or the same stories retold from a different point of view. At one time, I thought this was a lazy manner of storytelling, already having a pre-produced story and set of characters to work from. But what I soon realized was that no good story should ever truly be “finished”. This is the essence of a story that is truly long-lasting; its malleability that sticks with an audience member or reader. I have always equated the most satisfying theater to the kind of work that leaves me with so many questions. The longer I am thinking about something in a work of theater or film, the more I become enamored with it. As much as I would have fought against it, this goal for my work became lodged into my

subconscious that many times I forgot about it. However, I always made sure that some part of it was still present somewhere within me. And in that way, I was successful.

In early January, I walked into the Strand Bookstore with all of these questions and ideas furiously swirling around in my mind. Strand has always been a sanctuary to me. It is a place for my mind to empty and just be surrounded by the joy I've taken in purchasing a stack of used books. I was just entering into my second hour of browsing when I made my way down to the basement of the store. With sections consisting of everything from Philosophy to Self-Help manuals, it was a part of the store I rarely ventured into. Just as I was thinking it should be time for me to leave, something caught my eye in the Travel section. Glancing over the shelves, I stopped on a book with a bright orange spine. Upon picking it up, it seemed that fate was willing to give me a kind surprise on that day. I read over the title many times to assure I was not misunderstanding something. But the words could not have been more clear: "A Brave Vessel: The True Tale of the Castaways Who Rescued Jamestown and Inspired Shakespeare's *The Tempest*". I spent a few moments thumbing through it, feeling that if nothing else, it was a story of great appeal to me. I decided that it would be worth purchasing, as it might generate a little bit of source material for my research on the play. In retrospect, this is one of the greatest understatements of my life.

The next day was spent moving through the book, discovering gem after gem of creative fodder. None of these though were as igniting as some of the very first words of the book's prologue. It detailed a London writer by the name of William Strachey and his first viewing of *The Tempest* at The Blackfriars Theater. Strachey began to recognize particular images and sections of the play as similarities to those in a letter he wrote home on his long journey to the

new world. I was struck by his description of a “little round light like a faint star, trembling and streaming along with a sparkling blaze half the height upon the main mast” (xi).¹ In this quote, I discovered the beginning of my plot. The simple idea that Ariel’s powers, the thing that makes him unlike any other, is no longer special. His mysticism has become something that can be narrowed down to a scientific anomaly. I began to question that perhaps if Ariel had his powers no longer, and was not under the service of anyone, what is he living for? What happens to a spirit when he is stripped of what makes him so spirited? This answer came to me in waves over the next few months. As I experimented more and more with this first monologue, editing and rewording the tiniest of details, I discovered that Ariel was incredibly human. Despite his supernatural form, Ariel lives and emotes in the same way as any of Shakespeare’s other characters.

The more I read into this book, the more I was engrossed by the story unfolding before me; a Homeric epic detailing a journey across Atlantic ocean. A group of settlers facing storms, shipwreck, starvation, murder, mutiny, war, and eventually infamy, pushing onward all the while. It was an inspiring tale of the human spirit and the lengths that we will go to merely to survive. All of this surrounded the story of Strachey, and his goal to be a successful contemporary of Shakespeare’s. Though trying his hand at playwriting, poetry, prose, and academic writing, he found no success. After some time spent in obscurity, he traveled to the new world in hopes of becoming a new world observationist. He recorded every moment of his travels with incredible dedication and detail. I became fascinated with his aspirations and the information his writing provided. As the group he was a part of became shipwrecked and subsequently stranded in

¹ Woodward, Hobson. *A Brave Vessel: The True Tale of the Castaways Who Rescued Jamestown*. New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 2010. Print.

Bermuda, Strachey kept writing. Over a year went by before his tumultuous journey was brought to a close as he returned to England, safely along with his writings. It would not be long after this that Shakespeare himself would get hold of these journals and be inspired to write his final play.

To make a two-year long story short, Shakespeare used Strachey's letters as a basis to write *The Tempest*. I had discovered that I was writing this new play due to what Strachey had accomplished. In a way, this was my opportunity to give him credit, while simultaneously creating a secondary narrative that would hopefully encapsulate the fantastical elements that are presented within Shakespeare's work. The idea of a cyclical storytelling that I had accidentally fallen into became an incredibly important aspect of my writing. I sought to present both a beginning and end of this ever-developing story, creating a chain of authors that began with Strachey and ended with myself, while only briefly passing through Shakespeare. Because of this, Strachey would need to become part of Ariel's narrative and fit in as a way to illuminate the balance of power. Another key element of Strachey's tale that drew me in was the intended destination of his arduous trek. Having lived in Virginia for all of my life, I identified with so much of the history being thrown at me in the text. I had grown up taking annual school trips to Jamestown, and yet there was a new story unfolding before. There were a dozen different ideas I brainstormed regarding Ariel's involvement in this history, one including his responsibility in the fall of the lost colony Roanoke. Looking back, these were ridiculous attempts to find a compelling story, but I followed them nonetheless. Most importantly, they kept me writing.

On top of all of this, I began to think there was a sort of levity missing from my piece. I had written a character for Ariel to play, but neglected to have much fun with it all. In a traditional Shakespearean fashion, the characters imitating those of a higher status would benefit

greatly from an essence of farce. To achieve this, I began to look into the work of playwright Ben Jonson, another contemporary of Shakespeare's. Jonson's play *Eastward Ho!* is discussed frequently in Woodward's book as one of the most infamous plays of its time, and one that also echoed Strachey's journey. I found the play to be of interest, but no great help to my own writing. However, this led me to become fascinated with the whole spectrum of Jonson's work. Strangely enough, I began to find more of an appreciation of Jonson's eccentric texts than that of Shakespeare's. As I filed through a book his selected works, I read a short poem entitled "To the Memory of Master William Shakespeare". In an attempt to honor Shakespeare after his passing, Jonson writes, "Thou art a monument without a tomb, and art still alive while thy book doth live, and we have wits to read and praise to give" (929).² In this poem, I would find solidification in my cyclical author idea. There became an urgency to both immortalize the characters in my play, so that they might carry an everlasting relevancy, while at the same time striving to keep an open dialogue with *The Tempest*.

Much of the next few months were spent in this realm. I would read a chapter or two of Woodward's book, become inspired by some passing detail, and write out the scene as thoughtlessly as I could. My goal at this point became to merely create content, and so that's what I did. Several different iterations of Ariel's pleading loneliness were created, then edited, then cut. But I was continuing with my writing, and so I was pleased. In this time, I began to speak openly with others about my project. Strangely enough, I found myself explaining it differently every time I did so. To my friends and peers in the Theater Department, it was described as my attempt at a *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*-type play for *The Tempest*.

² Jonson, Ben. *Selected Works*. Ed. Harry Levin. New York: Random House, 1938. Print.

To my therapist, it was my own personal attempt at expressing loneliness and abandonment through characters I was familiar with. I told myself it was sure to lie somewhere in between those two identifiers, though I found myself stuck in place trying to emulate other works more than create something that was my own. This content was not bad necessarily, but something about it did not speak to my original idea on the play.

Just before the school year ended, I made several meetings with various faculty members in order to gather information and source texts to work from. My first stop was to meet with Jorge Cortiñas, my advisor for the project. We talked about many different things, from story, to character development, to research, all trying to assess what the next steps would be in moving forward with my writing process. Eventually, Jorge directed me to a play called *One Flea Spare* written by Naomi Wallace. The suggestion here was that it might help me in discovering the way to write a sort of period piece without sacrificing the story I wanted to tell. Upon seeing my past advisor, Gideon Lester, I was suggested a book called *The Sea and the Mirror* by famed poet W.H. Auden. The work is a collection of various epic poems, analyzing the world of *The Tempest* that Shakespeare created. With the approaching free time I was about to have, I wanted to create as much of an information database as possible. I dove into both of these texts, absorbing every detail I could, and prepared to diligently tackle my project for the next few months.

Much to my chagrin, I managed to hit a wall in my writing around the middle of the summer. My cure for writer's block has always been to develop multiple projects at once, stemming across different genres, in order to always have something to work on. However the pressure to make this work have self-worth held me back. I found myself constantly attempting to pull the story out from some defect or narrative hole. One evening, after returning home late

from work at the Spiegel tent, I took the time to wind down. I fell into the deep well that is the internet in a meager attempt to procrastinate from thinking about my play. It must not have worked because I eventually found myself watching short clips from Shakespeare performances. The final one I would watch that night was a section from a 1979 master class produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company and taught by Ian McKellen. Certainly one of the most well-recognized contemporary Shakespeare performers, McKellen walks the audience, line by line, through Macbeth's "Tomorrow, and tomorrow..." soliloquy, analyzing the words with great detail. But before he even goes in to the text, he speaks a great deal of profundity in regards to performance. With such confidence, McKellen says "that the actor must be the playwright and the character simultaneously".³

Now while this concept is largely focused on the writing of Shakespeare specifically, it was a moment of great clarity for me. My work on the piece had been done in solitude for so long, I had forgotten to take into consideration the reason for a script to exist. It was not my intention to create a literary work, but a piece of theater, and one that would eventually be performed. I know this seems like a hard mistake to make, but I learned from this short video that the performers connection to the piece must be as present, if not more so than mine. I had to allow myself to stop thinking so much on my work and let it be what it wanted to.

This unintended "hiatus" also gave the language of my piece a better understanding. Almost unintentionally, I started writing the piece in what I now refer to as a colloquial Elizabethan speech. From the beginning, it was vitally important to me that the piece be spoken

³ Tomorrow, and Tomorrow -- Ian McKellen Analyzes Macbeth Speech (1979). Perf. Ian McKellen. Youtube. N.p., 24 May 2012. Web. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGbZCgHQ9m8>>.

in this language. So much of what I find interesting in Ariel's character through the course of *The Tempest* comes from his beautiful poetic speak. This is a commonality throughout all of Shakespeare's texts, but some of my most favorite and vivid speeches come in the pages of *The Tempest*. A handful of these lines emanate from the soliloquies of Prospero. I felt no better way for Ariel to honor his lost master than to attempt speeches and language in a similar way. This kind of speak also stemmed from a want to provide some kind of extra historical element to the piece. Strachey's journals live in just as much of a poeticism as the text in Shakespeare's work. I believed that the language would be a way for me to conflate the two worlds in a manner that felt organic, while at the same time feeling like it was not a mimicking of Shakespeare's writing.

The source that heavily aided in the creation of this language came in the form of Prospero's final lines in the play. I made a conscious effort not to read *The Tempest* too many times in preparation of writing this play, though could not help but take obvious inspiration from the work of that created my play's world. Just as he has won his long game of tricks against the royalty of Milan, Prospero proclaims he shall promise calm seas for his journey home. He then turns his attention to Ariel: "My Ariel, chick,/ That is thy charge. Then to the elements/ Be free, and fare thou well" (5.1 320-322).⁴ Ariel's soliloquy at the start of my play began with these same lines, echoing in his mind as he attempted to make sense of what they might mean. This scene alone provided an opening to the entire world of the play. However, it simultaneously posed a fairly wide reaching question. As I had, at this point, detailed the circumstances of my play to many people, one of the first questions I received (and one that bothered me to no end) regarded the relationship between Prospero and Ariel. "Do you really think Prospero cares about

⁴ Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare Based on the Oxford Edition*. 1st ed. London: W. W. Norton, 1997.

Ariel? He is a little more than a slave to Prospero”. The definitive answer to this question for me has always been a complicated, but solid, “no”. It is clear to me that Prospero’s main concern in the course of *The Tempest* is getting retribution for the wrongdoing that has come upon him. He will use what he can to make sure his goal is achieved. What bothered me about this question was the vast oversimplification of Ariel.

As upset as this made me, it allowed me to really explore this new interpretation of Ariel to its fullest extent. I began to examine the relationship between Prospero and Ariel as a father/son relationship as opposed to one of more cruel servitude. It just made a great deal of sense given the circumstances. What we know of Ariel’s life is passed over so quickly in the narrative of *The Tempest*, but could not speak more thoroughly to Ariel’s tortured character. As far as the audience knows, and Shakespeare for that matter, Ariel has lived his entirely life under service of someone. First, he struggled under Sycorax, the mother of Caliban, which we are told was a cruel time and inevitably led to his imprisonment within the trunk of a tree. He is subsequently placed in Prospero’s service as he is rescued from that imprisonment. And like any paternal figure, Ariel was given life and subsequently cared for under Prospero. I was incredibly pleased to find myself not alone in this belief. The entire first chapter of Auden’s *The Sea and the Mirror* is concerned with this exact relationship. Only in this scenario, the perspective we are given is that of Prospero’s. As the poem begins to reach its conclusion, Auden’s Prospero speaks gently to Ariel, preparing him for the departure that will soon come. After reciting one of many short poems to the spirit, Prospero says “Now our partnership is dissolved, I feel so peculiar: As if I had been on a drunk since I was born and suddenly now, and for the first time, am cold sober” (10).⁵ Despite

⁵ Auden, W. H., and Arthur C. Kirsch. *The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare’s The Tempest*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2005. Print.

Prospero's lack of affection to Ariel, there is an obvious bond that has been built between the two of them and one that can hardly be broken with the simple departure of a master.

Auden's work also helped me to realize that there was something vitally missing from my piece. I was so focused on creating a world where Ariel was struggling in his loneliness, that I had completely forgotten to include any semblance of his past. In order for the pain and hunger that I wanted him to feel to properly come across, I had to build some factor, a constant reminder, that he did once have something to live for. There was no better presence I could think of to provide this prodding than that of Caliban. Acting as the foil to Ariel in *The Tempest*, Caliban is the character that Ariel has known the longest. As they are always portrayed in disagreement with each other, I made it a challenge for myself to give them a meaningful, civil relationship that would either grow or disintegrate in the course of my play. I credit Auden in this creation due to the fact that the last section of *The Sea and the Mirror* is entirely devoted to Caliban addressing an audience.

In what manages to be longest section of the poem, Caliban is given a platform to talk about himself and the ideas that he holds. He is a character who is constantly cut down as a savage monster, with nothing but cruelties to offer to the world. However, in Auden's work, he is presented as a wise, all seeing observer. He delivers a hefty, well-spoken lecture to the audience, offering his own unique, largely critical take on the events that have just unfolded in the course of the play. After some time analyzing the characters that Shakespeare created, he offers up perhaps one of the greatest profundities about *The Tempest*: "The journey of life - the down at the heels disillusioned figure can still put its characterization across - is infinitely long and its possible destinations infinitely distant from one another, but the time spent in actual travel is

infinitesimally small” (42). In this moment, I knew Caliban must be presented in my work as being a great deal more knowledgeable than Ariel. For Ariel to become a being, stuck waiting for something that may never come, Caliban would have to become a mature figure of great poignancy, much like that of a big brother. The ability to play with the expansiveness of time became a sort of game for me. While at certain moments it was possible that the events of the play were occurring just moments after *The Tempest* had concluded, other times it could be years after the fact. This kind of mysticism would allow for Caliban to progress mentally in what felt such a short period of time. I had all of my key players more or less in place and felt ready to show them off in a first pass.

Part 3: Finale

When I returned for the Fall semester, I had created a considerable amount of text for my play. One of the first things I did upon my return was to send my 20-something pages to Jorge. I finally felt like my project was beginning. I had moved from the brainstorming stage into a full fledged point of creation. When we had our first meeting, Jorge had a long list of comments on my piece. At this point in time, the play had grown to a size much larger than I expected when I began writing. There were a handful of characters now in the mix, trying very hard to fit into the narrative I wanted to tell. Ariel was struggling to be important in the text, as were the nine other characters that made appearances at various points. To put it briefly, the main question that was posed to me was, “Whose story is it really”? This play was Ariel’s story, I had always known that. But in the process of trying to fit all of these new ideas into the work, I had muddied the story and became more concerned with the narrative than anything else.

The next problem area to arise in this meeting was the language that the piece had developed. Despite having worked so diligently to craft the language of the piece, or perhaps because I had so worked so hard, the language made things more confusing than clear. For the most part, I was incredibly happy with what I had created up to this point. Jorge told me to look once again at *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. It dawned on me that one of the main reasons this play was suggested for me as research was its seamless use of language. Though set at the height of London's plague during the 17th century, the language of the piece is a fairly colloquial one. There are very little, if any, uses of antiquated words or phrases. The piece relies on the timelessness of its story to present its themes, something my piece was desperately missing at this point. It was not until this meeting that I had one of those moments of complete clarity. Being able to have a second pair of eyes on my writing helped to shine a light on all of the glaring errors within it. Obviously, this would leave any one at least a little bit defeated. Fortunately, without this slight knock down, I'm not sure my play would have reached the level that it finally did.

After talking over some options, I concluded it would be fruitful to essentially start fresh. I did away with every scene that involved Ariel interacting with another character, and took the time to simply build the stages of loss he may go through. Soon after this, I slowly began to add in Caliban and William Strachey again. Their importances to the story were simply too vital to let go of. I also chose to stick with the language I had written in after all this. Granted, I went through a painstaking process of simplifying it, but I found it hard to tell the story within the confines of a modern language. It became one more unifier for the play to share with Shakespeare's work, and for Ariel to share with Prospero. I returned to Jorge a few weeks later

with an entirely different play. The loss Ariel felt had been greatly abstracted, as had the rest of the world I had originally created. By simplifying the work down to a simple three character play, I was able to delve into themes like power struggle and colonization that I had previously had some trouble fitting into the story. But despite the great progress I had made in such a short amount of time, there was still something missing from Ariel.

I couldn't exactly pin down what it was that I was missing, so Jorge suggested I try to work out some physicality for the piece. I had been locked down to writing for so long, the notion to make some other tangible thing was incredibly exciting. This corresponded well with a class called Performance Composition I was taking that semester with Jack Ferver. The goal of the class was to develop movement and text based performances over the course of the semester. It seemed that this would be the perfect place to workshop not only the text I had written, but also discover the ways that Ariel could move, or rather the way his movement was hindered. I made the choice to work largely with one Ariel's soliloquies to Prospero detailing Ariel's loss of his powers. I had written so much about how Ariel could no longer fly or use magic, but had not thought about what this might physically do to him. While the traditional casting for Ariel would certainly never fit me at all, I found a heaviness that would come with this loss of abilities. It meant a lot, knowing that yet another part of me could be connected to Ariel in such a positive way. Even if I would never or will never make use of the movements I created for this short performance, finding the presence of Ariel's body also allowed me to find the pain in it.

Once all this was said and done, it was finally time for me to begin working on the presentation of the piece. I knew from very early on that I only wanted to show a staged reading of my play. In fact, it is the only thing that remained steady throughout the whole process and

kept me reasonably grounded in my project. No matter how far I strayed away from the story, I always had it in my mind that the final presentation would be a staged reading. Somewhere in my mind, I must have known that my story would be so transformative and that a staged reading would best fit this constant transformative nature. I wanted the ability to be changing the piece up until the very day of the show without giving my performers an anxiety attack. Most importantly, my senior project was not and never will have been an exercise in how quickly I could write, design, and direct a show. It would not be about creating a fractured glimpse of what I think the show could be. I chose to write a play and so that is what I wanted to put forward. I wanted the audience to see my characters, my language, and my story, with as little distraction as possible.

Now, of course, this doesn't mean I wanted my presentation to be very one note. I still wanted to give off a clear and effective aesthetic that fit into the shows themes and ideas. At some point in my writing when I was struggling to create content, I began to see images that were poking out of the text. These images were not fully developed, but rather black and white pencil sketching; a rough draft of something that could eventually be something of incredible beauty. From there on, this is how I would see my play, as I hoped others would upon sitting in on the staged reading. And in traditional regal style, I saw these images on flowing banners, roughly cut from a larger cloth. So this became another permanent staple of the project. For this job, I recruited a Studio Arts major and friend of mine named Moriah Mudd-Kelly. I had seen Moriah's work on several occasions and felt her use of more rustic styles would help to announce the tone I wanted. The work she produced for me not only created the best semblance of a set possible, but also worked as a great device that held the presentation together.

I had, in all honesty, not thought about casting until very late in my process. There were people I imagined working with, but this was all before my play went through several different changes. I went to Max Green first, asking him if he would be interested in reading for the show. In the moment, I didn't have a specific role in mind for him. But when he told me he would be interested in playing Ariel, it made sense. I had known him to be an earnest performer, and someone I could trust to put his whole self into the character. When thinking on who might play Caliban, there was a short list of people I had in mind. Antonio Irizarry was at the top of this list. In the past year, the work I have seen Antonio do has truly impressed me. He has an innate dedication to any and every role he takes on, no matter how small. This gravitas on stage was the sort of thing that I saw fitting for Caliban. The staged reading went no differently for him. Every day he brought something to Caliban that had gone over my head in the writing process. There was a beautiful elegance that I suspect no one else could have brought to the character. He also served as an effective semi-dramaturge for the piece. I had many concerns that not having some kind of outside dramaturge would cause an oversight on the work as a whole. But Antonio's commitment to asking questions, push for me to think deeply about the work, and engagement in dozens of out-of-rehearsal conversation truly helped to make the piece what it was.

Finding who might play William Strachey posed a little bit more of a challenge for me. As much as I thought about it, there was simply no one fitting my vision of the character. Fighting against my impulse not to do so, I decided to hold auditions for this role. After a few actors coming in to read, Charlie Mai entered the audition room. I had only seen Charlie perform on once before, but was suitably impressed with what he brought to the character. Much like Max, Charlie has a real sense of what it means to bring "real" to a character. In his read for

Strachey, there was a great deal of honesty and nuance brought to the surface. I had effectively assembled a cast of performers that I was sure would bring the truth of my words to life.

My own involvement with the project always felt somewhat complicated. As I mentioned before, I did not want to fully direct this piece. I wanted the entirety of my focus to be on writing the most honest version of this story as possible. Yet, I have never been the kind of writer who can simply hand off their project to a director and be done with it. I was stuck in somewhat of a gray area. However, in the course of our first cast read through, we had to collectively decide what it was we would be reading. Given our 25 minute time limit, it was obvious that cuts would have to be made in the hour long show. We all came to the conclusion that we would rather create a foreshortened version of the play, than to only show selected, unfocused scenes from the whole work. The goal would be to present what the key elements were to understanding the themes and narrative of the show. Because of this, I knew I would have to involve myself fairly heavily in the presentation. While I had certainly considered involving someone else to read the stage directions for the play, I chose to do it myself in the end. My presence would be a way for me to guide the audience through the world of the play. As I knew much of the play would be edited in its final presentation, having someone who fully understood the world as part of the read seemed like the proper way to create the experience of my staged reading.

The final weeks of my project were easily the most stressful and most complex time of this process. I had dug myself into somewhat of a hole writing a play that was seemingly too concise to cut anything out. Every time I walked into the theater, I was being told that my play was still running over time. No matter how much I would trim and edit or tell my actors to pick up the pace, it was consistently too long. I had reached the final stretch of my work, but felt

completely knocked down. So much had already been removed from the full script I felt to cut anymore would mean to sacrifice the integrity of my show. It simply did not feel like my play anymore. Then I remembered an e-mail I received a few weeks before from Neil Gaiman. In the previous semester, I took an Adapting Shakespeare course with Neil. Towards the end of the class, I asked on a whim if he wouldn't mind reading over the script. Though his response was mostly positive, he told me the play was too talky and advised me to rely on the actions of my characters. If the audience didn't know everything, that was okay because this was not a final draft of this process. It was simply about letting go of the finality of this piece, and to let the show happen.

Part 4: Epilogue

Having an audience made me understand so much more about this play. I had no intention for any of these moments to be comedic, and yet humor managed to find its way in there. The deeper meanings that had been cut from the show had translated through the performances of my talented actors. I suspected at the end of our final show that I would feel some sense of closure or experience a weight lifted off of my shoulders. Perhaps this will come in the submission of this long-winded reflection, but I suspect it is something much deeper. There is no closure because the play is not finished. In all honesty, a part of me hopes it never will be. I've spent a year and a half with this project, and in this time I have fallen so deeply in love with it. When I took on writing this play, I had no idea it would become the best thing I have written to date. I don't take satisfaction in one-upping myself, but rather in the fact that I accomplished something. I achieved my goal in challenging myself to write something deeply

personal that told an honest story. Just before we walked on stage for our first showing, Antonio turned to me and said “I’m incredibly proud to be a part of this”. Friendship aside, this comment about my show meant more than anything else I received because I knew, in that moment, I was able to give Antonio this opportunity as a performer in the same way he gave me the opportunity to show my work. The true spirit of my play was alive.

I’m not sure what my next steps may be with this show. Perhaps the traditional route of submissions to various festivals and theater companies will teach me infinitely more about the script. It’s possible it will remain untouched for years until I find the proper group of artists to produce it with. I’ve found myself feeling very similar to Ariel lately. I do not know what is waiting for me on the horizon. Though I fear it, I will not sit idly by and wait for it to approach me. Whatever mysteries may come, I’m ready.

Without Prospero

By

Sam Robotham

SCENE 1

In the darkness of the stage, we hear the sound of waves washing up onto the shore. The lights slowly rise to reveal Ariel contorted in a deep bow in the sand below him. The only other thing occupying the space is large treasure chest, with a folded fabric on top. A distant roar of thunder is heard. After a moment, he rises.

ARIEL

You will be welcomed back with open arms, my lord. Your spirited tales of travel will prove your greatness to all those in your kingdom.

Ariel responds to the empty space. This continues throughout the conversation.

ARIEL

Indeed, my lord. Your books shall be greatly cherished for the rest of your time on this earth. [Pause] I have done my duty. The seas will be cleared for your journey. Your eyes will never gaze upon a storm cloud again. [Pause] You are certain there is nothing more I can do for you? [Pause] I would not find shame in being an adviser to you in your court. [Pause. Ariel seems hurt] No, I understand most clearly. I have yet to see much of this world. Perhaps I will travel upon the seas myself. The sun has always watched patiently over my doings, and kept me warm. [Pause] I will lead the best life that I can. I know you will do the same.

Ariel waves goodbye to the imaginary Prospero. After a beat, he stares at his hands. They begin to tremble, but soon evolve into a full tremor. Through his shaking, he pulls a glass bottle from the sand nearby. He scoops a handful of sand and begins to slowly pour it into the bottle. He closes it and attempts to toss it into the sea, but cannot through his trembling. Suddenly, a pounding from inside of the chest breaks Ariel from his spell. Confused, Ariel slowly approaches. He removes the article of clothing from the top and holds it tight. He then kneels down and slowly unhinges it. It swings open to the sound of a man gasping. Caliban emerges from the chest. He bathes in the sand

CALIBAN

Oh, who knew a man could miss the grainy pebbles beneath his feet. Sweet air I have missed thee.

ARIEL

Caliban. I thought you may have escaped somehow.

CALIBAN

Escaped? You give me more credit than I once thought, servant boy.

ARIEL

Did my master come to trap you in this chest?

CALIBAN

He seems to devise all sort of plans without your knowing.

ARIEL

What did you do to wrong him?

CALIBAN

Aside from taking my mothers life like some kind of fruit from the tree? Perhaps your opinions of me have not changed.

ARIEL

I never saw this done.

CALIBAN

Mysticism, as always, is just too unknowable. Your master is cruel and that is simply all there is to it.

Ariel ignores the comment. He gently unfolds the fabric revealing it to be a long green and crimson robe. He is enchanted by it, stroking his hand along the fabric. With a flourish, he puts the robe on. It drags on the ground beneath him.

CALIBAN

Your master's robes highlight your childishness well.

ARIEL

I require your service once again.

CALIBAN

In my memory, my servitude was never yours to have.

ARIEL

Perhaps. But I rightfully receive what my master left to me.

CALIBAN

You talk fondly of a man who dictated your every act.

Ariel scoops some sand and begins to pour into Caliban's mouth.

ARIEL

If you are to talk that way about my master again, you will be back in that chest at the bottom of the sea.

CALIBAN

Very well. Speak what you must say!

ARIEL

I need you to behave as part of my court.

CALIBAN

You have no court.

ARIEL

We have been invaded by strangers. I must make them believe I am king.

CALIBAN

You have no kingdom. You may play your tricks and spells. Your power ends there. Not even your Prosp-

Ariel jolts over to him in a fury.

ARIEL

You do not speak my master's name! You have done nothing to deserve that right.

CALIBAN

(Over-exaggerated)

My apologies. I have forgotten my place.

ARIEL

I do not want to send you away. Yours is perhaps the only sign I have of the past existing. Will you help me, or no?

CALIBAN

What stops you from doing your own bidding? Soar around their camp and drive them into madness. Most men would rather drown in the ocean than live with demons.

Ariel does not respond. Caliban stares for a moment. He slowly approaches Ariel and begins to sniff him. Ariel stands still, but watches him the whole time.

CALIBAN

What has become of you?

ARIEL

How do you mean?

CALIBAN

You are suffering, but from no outwardly visible ailments. Your face and knotted hair remains the same, but you are not the Ariel I once knew. What has changed you?

Ariel tries to speak but nothing will come out

CALIBAN

I will come to your aid. While I could retreat to the woods or the stones overlooking the sea, you are in greater need than I.

ARIEL

It is greatly appreciated. Now you must make yourself unseen. I hear footsteps approaching.

CALIBAN

An all too familiar command. Perhaps you were taught more thoroughly than I believed.

Caliban exits into the woods. Ariel sneaks behind the chest. After a moment, William Strachey enters. He takes some notes of the land in a journal. Ariel rises from his hiding spot.

ARIEL

You do not belong here intruder.

STRACHEY

I do apologize, fair stranger. I did not see you there. Do you live in this place?

ARIEL

A king must rule over his kingdom.

STRACHEY

King? This is a desolate land. Where I am from they call it the Devil's Isle.

ARIEL

Do you see any sign of the devil?

His eyes wander the space for a moment, observing Ariel's "court".

STRACHEY

I see no signs of anything other than what stands before me.

ARIEL

You do not seem to fear me as being him.

STRACHEY

If you were him, you would have stolen my soul by now.

ARIEL

His powers are infantile compared to mine.

STRACHEY

Then what do they call you, wild man?

ARIEL

I am Ariel, and to be addressed as king. You will not be warned again.

STRACHEY

You do not appear a king either.

ARIEL

And I suppose your judgmental nature brought you and your people here?

STRACHEY

We had no other choice. A great storm raged in the night, overtaking our ship. Balls of light bounced around the mast first playfully, then bursting with a great fury through our sails, setting them to a great blaze.

ARIEL

(Hesitantly)

Your eyes must woefully deceive you. These sound like the powers of some great conjurer.

STRACHEY

I promise you what I saw is true. There are still markings where the heat grazed my face. After the storm had quelled, we were separated from our fleet and brought to this place. The lord is angered. His wrath has been invoked by our eager exploration.

Ariel lets out a large laugh.

STRACHEY

You laugh at my words.

ARIEL

I find them laughable.

STRACHEY

So you are wise to who took down our vessel?

Ariel flashes a cunning smirk. Strachey understands what he is implying.

STRACHEY

You, sir?

ARIEL

As your wise eyes may have observed, my court has nearly emptied. I am need of servants. So, I brought you here.

STRACHEY

I've my own leaders to serve.

ARIEL

And what food do you have? What resources of this island will you be able to cull without my permission?

STRACHEY

You dare threaten us into starvation? What do have that will stop us from overtaking you?

ARIEL

A soldier never reveals his final blows to his opponent before they come.

STRACHEY

Then I beseech you, if these powers that you supposedly control are as great as you say, prove them for me.

ARIEL

Your distrust will be your undoing.

Ariel stands and draws a circle in the sand with his foot. Once he finishes, he kneels in the center, with his arms extended to the side. There is a moment where nothing happens, but is soon followed by a gust of wind and a low rumble in the air. They are both equally taken aback by this. Strachey looks to Ariel, then kneels.

STRACHEY

I am a fool for ever doubting you! Please accept my decree to serve you as an apology.

ARIEL

I do not require you to beg. If your pledge is true, I will point you and your people in the direction of the freshest goods this land has to offer.

STRACHEY

I pledge to you wholly, King Ariel.

ARIEL

What shall I call you, servant?

STRACHEY

I am called William Strachey.

ARIEL

Rise, William Strachey. Return to your camp and tell your people to head inland. There they will find resources. Report to me when this next day's dawn.

STRACHEY

Your kindness is unmatched good king. You have saved the lives of many.

Strachey stands, bows, then exits quickly. Ariel steps back into his circle in the sand, examining it with a quizzical expression. Caliban returns, watching Ariel.

CALIBAN

A successful trick, it would seem.

ARIEL

(Pointing to the sky)

That was due to you? But how could you produce such a power?

CALIBAN

I learned from an early age that the hollow palmetto trunks make a wonderful drum. Conveniently their tune imitates the distant thunder. Your man seemed properly intimidated.

ARIEL

Our actions must be light to keep him in good states.

CALIBAN

He presents a greater problem.

ARIEL

How now?

CALIBAN

Some being appears to be making your craft his own. A fiery light? Was that not the same treachery you once favored?

ARIEL

You seem all too sure I was not responsible.

CALIBAN

Your skin does not shimmer in the way that it once did. I fear my predictions were correct, and you are not who I once knew.

ARIEL

I was taught not to fear loss. And I plan to fight in restoring my strength. There is no concern.

CALIBAN

And I shall remain until that changes.

ARIEL

I thank thee. From here forward, we start fresh and leave behind the lives we once lived.

CALIBAN

Can you survive without looking back?

He does not answer. They break from eye contact and move in opposite directions. Caliban exits. Ariel goes to the chest and removes a long velvet sheet. He attempts to turn the chest on its side. It is an extreme struggle, but he eventually manages to flip it. He covers it with the fabric. He takes a seat, trying his best to look regal. After a moment, a large bird skeleton falls from the sky. Ariel looks at it with some puzzlement. He moves towards it and picks it up. Just then, William Strachey enters carrying a small box. They both notice each other, but neither is sure what to say. After a beat of stillness, Strachey falls to his knee, presenting the box to Ariel.

STRACHEY

For you, my king.

ARIEL

Gifts will not bring you more favor than you deserve.

STRACHEY

And neither should they. It is my offering to you for your kindness.

With a smile, Ariel opens the box. He removes a small ivory sculpture.

ARIEL

What is this material? It feels of wood, but rots in smell.

STRACHEY

Ivory, my lord. Retrieved from the greatest of mammals.

ARIEL

It once belonged to a creature?

STRACHEY

Indeed.

ARIEL

This shall not be how you live here. The earth grants us many good things. To kill is a sign of great disrespect.

STRACHEY

You forbid us from hunting? How will we eat?

ARIEL

Learn that this place has other things to give than the meat of an animal.

STRACHEY

And what of that bird you took down? You hold its bones in your hands.

Ariel looks to the skeleton he is still holding.

ARIEL

It is a reminder.

STRACHEY

To what?

ARIEL

A bird is weightless. She soars through the air with ease, does she not?

STRACHEY

Aye, my lord.

ARIEL

But inside, she is not. Her true weight still remains after death, only she can no longer fly.

Ariel splays the wings of the skeleton, slowly moving them back and forth.

ARIEL

What has been designed from her at the beginning of everything is to defy expectation. To be what she physically cannot. She does not belong anywhere, so she must move through the skies, going from place to place, until she no longer can.

STRACHEY

You did not hunt it yourself?

ARIEL

As I never would take away the gift of something so beautiful.

Ariel snaps out of his daze and places the skeleton down gently next to his new throne. He places the box on the opposite side. Strachey writes this down hurriedly in his notebook. Ariel looks on curiously.

STRACHEY

If we may not hunt, where may we seek food?

ARIEL

By the time you return, your men will have found my spring. You will be given the bounty of gifts when you begin to deserve them. I have eyes in the trees all along these shores. They will decide when it is time.

STRACHEY

I will be sure that you are thanked in our prayers.

ARIEL

You mustn't.

STRACHEY

Why is that my lord?

ARIEL

Your camp must hear of these things from one of their own. While I have won your favor, I fear others may not be pleased with my oddity.

STRACHEY

But if you can offer them food and shelter, will they not see your kindness?

ARIEL

You yourself claimed this place a devil's isle. If I frighten them, I will be attacked. The assistance I provide must remain unseen.

STRACHEY

My service will be kept secret. You need not fear a thing.

Strachey writes again.

ARIEL

What is that you scrawl?

STRACHEY

This? It is a but a notebook, my lord.

ARIEL

You scribe conversations with an unmatched dedication.

STRACHEY

I am a writer. It is the entire intention of my journey to the new world.

ARIEL

I have known writers from all parts of the world. Why must you come so far from your home to do so?

STRACHEY

My hope is to observe the native people there.

ARIEL

They sent you into the unknown to let fate be your guide?

STRACHEY

No, my lord. I chose to travel by my own decision.

ARIEL

But what can simple writings do? As living souls, can they be so easily cut down to what can fit upon the page?

STRACHEY

The more wealthy will see it as a way to gauge safety.

ARIEL

A foolish thing, as safety can never be guaranteed. But you and your people will have it, for now. Go, back to your camp.

STRACHEY

Sleep well, my lord.

Strachey exits. An idea sparks in Ariel's mind. He goes to the chest and removes a long rope. He then hangs it from one of the treetops above him and begins to climb it. Caliban enters pulling a large rug that has been crafted out of palm leaves. Despite a surprisingly acrobatic jump, Ariel struggles climbs the rope. He only ascends a few feet before falling flat on his back onto the sand. He takes only a moment to catch his breath before getting up and trying again. This time he makes it slightly further, only to fall on his back once again. This cycle continues.

CALIBAN

For what reason do you have to do this?

ARIEL

Some force wishes to steal my flight away from me. It is my challenge alone to earn it back.

CALIBAN

You cannot earn these things like a prize.

ARIEL

Precisely. My powers run in my blood. I am challenged to come by them again. Even a man such as my master could not take that away from me.

CALIBAN

You miss him, do you not?

ARIEL

I do not need your queries breaking the silence. This is the task I must focus on.

CALIBAN

Avoidance of the question only allows it to linger and grow.

Ariel falls onto his back a final time, but does not try to get up. He lays staring at the sky.

ARIEL

I've begun to have dreams about flying. Short glimpses of what I once was capable of. Only these more vivid and freeing than what I remember. I dance with the wind, the sun gleaming on my face. There are no forces pulling me back to the ground.

CALIBAN

But they may not be dreams.

Ariel sits up and looks at him, confused.

CALIBAN

You have no way of knowing that these visions are dreams or memory. You are yearning for what you once could do, and yet you have only known the feeling of floating.

ARIEL

So a dream may not be based in the actions of the past?

CALIBAN

I never made that claim. But what if you can never get your flight back? Your dreams would be all for nothing.

(MORE)

CALIBAN (cont'd)

They would be the imaginations of a fool. Would you not rather these images live in you as a memory? Remain in your mind as a reality that once was?

ARIEL

Cease this nonsense, Caliban. I asked assistance of you, and you merely stand there and watch me fall. Now tell me, what do you make of these visitors?

CALIBAN

I tend not to trust those who reek so fragrantly of some foreign garden.

ARIEL

This is how you judge a man?

CALIBAN

Their intentions seem harmless. For whatever reason, a storm brought them here.

ARIEL

But who could have done it. And why?

CALIBAN

They seem to think it was you. You have continued to perpetuate that lie. Sooner or later, they will catch on and you will be skewered and used as dinner for the entire settlement.

ARIEL

Enough. They are at least a civilized people.

CALIBAN

Do not speak so casually about it. I was seen as savage to you, yet I have defied what you once perceived.

ARIEL

You have observed nothing from watching them then?

CALIBAN

Nothing of suspicion.

ARIEL

Keep me aware if anything comes to light.

CALIBAN

This is my home as well. I will work to keep it that way.

Caliban gives an exaggerated bow and exits. Once Ariel is sure he is gone, he ties a circle in it and sticks his head through. He tugs the other

side of the rope pulling the knot around his neck. He finds, to his surprise that it does choke him slightly. This is should not be a dramatic act, but merely one of curiosity.

ARIEL

How easy it would be.

Ariel returns the rope to the chest. Upon doing so, a glass bottle filled with sand tumbles out. It rolls towards the ocean, but Ariel dives after it before it can get there. He looks at it, relieved that he was able to save it. In a panic he replaces it back in the chest. His eyes do not break from it. Lights

Scene 2

The stage is now filled with various furniture from the ship. Ariel sits in a wooden chair behind a table. He looks uncomfortable and continually resituates himself. Strachey comes in pulling a sizable metal claw foot tub on a rope. Ariel stands and watches.

ARIEL

You bring more oddities. Which of your crew has gifted me this?

STRACHEY

Myself, sirrah.

ARIEL

Deed upon deed, you prove a worthy man. So, what is it?

STRACHEY

A bathing tub, good king. Made for royalty just prior to our venture.

Ariel studies the tub, somewhat confused at Strachey.

ARIEL

I am to enter it? (Pause) A strange thing, this is.

STRACHEY

If you choose to do so, I shall help you disrobe.

(CONTINUED)

Without saying a word, Ariel lifts his arms. Strachey patiently disrobes him. Once he has become fully nude, Ariel revels in the freedom for a moment. Strachey begins to pour a pitcher of water into the tub. Ariel slowly makes his way in. Strachey reaches out to help Ariel, which causes him to jump.

ARIEL

No. Stay your hand.

STRACHEY

I merely wished to assist you, good king.

ARIEL

I need no assistance. Please. I'll just sit and allow the water to cleanse me.

Ariel begins to play with the clean water in his hands. He is in a lost state, entranced by the act of bathing.

ARIEL

I once lived as part of this elemental fluid. It melded with my soul and I flowed through it as a fish in the sea. With a blink of my eye, there were no boundaries between myself and this realm.

Silently, he submerges in the tub water. After a beat he begins to struggle, losing breath. Strachey panics and lifts him out of the water. Ariel explodes at him.

ARIEL

No! NO! Leave me!

STRACHEY

What game are you playing at, my lord? I will not watch you drown!

ARIEL

Do not touch me! I belong with the water!

Ariel submerges again. Strachey reaches out his arms but is swatted away. Ariel stays down longer this time, but ultimately struggles again. He throws himself over the side of the tub, gasping for air. He emits a guttural yell. Strachey has no idea what to make of the situation and merely watches in silence.

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

What am I anymore? I don't belong any place. I've no seat in the courts of Milan, and no longer too good for the Earth. I wake one morning to find a part of myself gone, left with no reason or explanation.

STRACHEY

But you rule over a land. No matter how small, this is something any man in our settlement would give anything for.

ARIEL

The men of your settlement know nothing of my hardships.

STRACHEY

I do. I left my family behind to come to the new world. And I did so without hesitation.

ARIEL

You have a family?

STRACHEY

I cannot be sure if they will be there upon my return. I promised them this voyage would bring prosperity and riches. Even if I do ever return to England, I cannot guarantee the success of my writing.

ARIEL

Your wife will be waiting for you upon your return, William Strachey.

STRACHEY

Your words are kind, yet not even you can speak so surely, my lord. Yes her love may keep her from straying. But the hunger of my children? The inability to keep collectors at bay? She will find someone who can aid her and soon replace me.

ARIEL

It would appear that we both find ourselves lost in the world.

STRACHEY

I apologize for discounting your sorrows, good king.

ARIEL

There is no place for that. You have done the work of a friend. And that is all that any one being could ask.

STRACHEY

It is my pleasure. Do you wish to be finished bathing?

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

No, please. Allow me to remain for just another moment.

Neither of them move. The sound of the waves take over the space. Ariel moves from the tub. With the assistance of Strachey, he dons Prospero's robe once again. Strachey takes out a brush and begins to tidy Ariel's hair. Once he finishes, he steps away from the tidied Ariel, and begins to slowly exit. Ariel remains statuesque. Lights.

Scene 3

Ariel sits atop his chest eating berries. Strachey scrubs the inside of the dried bathtub. More items have been added to the space. At this point, it is nearly passable for a royal court.

ARIEL

I think I owe you an apology, William Strachey.

STRACHEY

How's that my lord?

ARIEL

When you and your people first arrived at this place, I found myself afraid to let you all stay.

STRACHEY

An understandable fact.

ARIEL

Your service could not be more greatly appreciated.

STRACHEY

Thank you, Lord Ariel.

ARIEL

I think I would like to have council with your leaders finally. It will be good for me to begin to oversee your settlement.

STRACHEY

I do not feel that is the wisest plan, my lord.

Ariel hops off the chest and approaches.

ARIEL

And why do you think that?

STRACHEY

The Lord Governor may not appreciate knowing I have given my service to another. I do not wish to spur on violence.

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

We have discussed this before. Do not forget your place. You serve me and me alone. I do not wish violence either.

STRACHEY

We have done a more than adequate job of keeping ourselves alive, my lord. Is there a reason we cannot continue live in harmony?

ARIEL

I do wish to live harmoniously. You will tell your leaders of my powers, and I am sure they will not hesitate to hand over their leadership to me.

STRACHEY

I mean not to offend you sir, but we lifted our structures with our own strength. Our ship is being steadily repaired by weak and exhausted men. You promised to help us survive here and there is no evidence of that.

ARIEL

How do you think your access to these things was granted? The gifts of the earth do not exist here, they are under my control.

STRACHEY

But do we not deserve more than what any man could merely stumble upon?

ARIEL

Greed is unbecoming of you, William Strachey.

STRACHEY

Friends of mine are suffering, dying of starvation and famine. The least you can do as a kind person is keep them alive. I ask a single favor of you. Perhaps if you were to show your kindness to the other travelers, they would be more than willing to let you join us.

ARIEL

I do not wish to join as one in a crowd. I am king of this place and anyone who steps foot here.

STRACHEY

These are good people! You are willing to let them die?

ARIEL

If they are not strong enough for this place, they were not meant to survive.

(CONTINUED)

STRACHEY

You cannot ask me to give up on my people so easily.

ARIEL

I did just that. I asked you to abandon all other commitments. You agreed to do so. This includes leaving behind these "friends" of yours. If you cannot abide by my promise, I'm afraid I will be forced to banish you from this place.

STRACHEY

Why must you be so cruel? I know you to be a good person.

ARIEL

I am being a just and powerful ruler. And if you are unable to see that, then perhaps your journey has been wasted and your family deserves their fate.

Strachey interrupts him with a slap to the face. Ariel holds his cheek, stunned. He whimpers and does his best to hold himself together, but cannot help but to tear up.

STRACHEY

I will take no more of this. You may leave my friends to wither away but you will not insult me or my family! For months, I have served you with the utmost loyalty, with the promise that you would provide my people with resources. And what have you done? Bully me into providing for you? You are the one who has lacked his promise. I found sadness in you and I wanted to serve a king such as yourself, because I felt no one should live such a horrid life. I pitied you, and there is nothing more to it. Yet now I see that you deserve to live and hopefully die alone.

Ariel does not know how to respond to this. Caliban enters. Neither make eye contact with him. Ariel does his best to speak strongly.

ARIEL

Caliban, please escort William Strachey back to his settlement.

Before Caliban can move, Strachey quickly exits. Neither Ariel, nor Caliban move.

CALIBAN

You can't expect time to reset itself. Try as hard as you may, you'll never get that time back.

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

Leave me.

Caliban hesitates, but eventually decides to leave. Ariel approaches the tub and runs his hand against the dry side of it. After a moment, he sits in the empty tub holding his knees. The lights begin to dim as the day passes into night. Slowly, small lights begin to flicker in the distant woods. There are sounds of yelling and hooping in the distance. Ariel suddenly notices the sounds are getting closer to him and he close himself tighter. Through the yells Ariel begins to whimper. Caliban rushes on in a panic, but upon noticing Ariel, stops. He waits only for a moment before speaking calmly.

CALIBAN

Ariel. We must retreat to safety.

ARIEL

Has there ever been a place of safety on this land?

CALIBAN

You and I will go to the high rocks. The visitors will not move to points that unstable.

ARIEL

You will go without me then. I must keep watch over what is still mine.

CALIBAN

The starving men have begun to revolt. Their resources have depleted and they see no other means. If they find you, king or not, they will not leave you unharmed.

ARIEL

Then so it shall be.

CALIBAN

Your life is not worth a cloak and some glass bottles!

ARIEL

In truth, you and I know it is.

Knowing he cannot sway Ariel, Caliban runs off towards the rocks. Ariel looks around to assure Caliban has left. He begins to gaze at his hands. William Strachey walks on stage slowly, carrying a pistol in his hand and a dagger at his side. Ariel notices the sound of someone walking up, but does not look to see who it is.

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

I request that the only thing you take is my life.
Please leave the chest.

STRACHEY

I see no need for that.

ARIEL

You have returned.

STRACHEY

A servant is meant to protect his king when danger
arises.

*Strachey turns his back to the bathtub, readying
the pistol for any attackers.*

ARIEL

I do not wish you to pity me any longer. If the earth
wishes to take me, let it.

Strachey doesn't move.

ARIEL

As your king, I order you away. That, or turn that
weapon to my head.

Strachey still does not move.

ARIEL

Your assistance is not needed, you poor servant! Go to
your ill-spirited men and let us live apart.

Ariel turns to see he is still not moving.

ARIEL

Do you not understand me? I do. Not. Need you.

STRACHEY

Yes. I know.

Ariel slowly turns back around, relaxing.

STRACHEY

I simply hope you will excuse my disobedience in this
matter. Punish me if you will. Sleep if you need. I
shall not leave my post, good king.

*Ariel lays back in the tub and closes his eyes.
Strachey keeps his eyes out to the woods. The
yelling begins to get quieter. The lights in the
woods cease their flickering. Soon all that can be
heard is the sound of the waves against the sand.*

(CONTINUED)

William Strachey turns, and lifts Ariel from the tub, carrying him offstage.

Scene 4

Strachey roots through the chest. He pulls out a bottle of sand, and examines it for a moment before replacing it. Caliban enters, watching him carefully.

CALIBAN

This is the first time I have seen Ariel asleep. There is something deeply unsettling about it.

STRACHEY

He seems like a man who will never rest.

CALIBAN

And what of you? I would think a dignified servant as yourself might see it as crime to rifle through his master's belongings.

STRACHEY

Oh, yes. I am sorry. I merely thought I might-

CALIBAN

Do not worry, William Strachey. I will not report you to Ariel.

STRACHEY

You do not address him as a king?

CALIBAN

I would call him many things before I graced him with that title.

STRACHEY

So what do you call him then? Brother? Friend?

CALIBAN

To call him brother would mean we shared a father.

STRACHEY

He does have a father?

CALIBAN

He once had something of the sort. Like any kind of family, it was not without complications. While Ariel would never admit this, the man was never keen on affection.

(CONTINUED)

STRACHEY

You speak all too cryptically. He rules over everything here, does he not?

CALIBAN

We may try to deceive you, but it would seem you and your fellow travelers have proved differently.

STRACHEY

He falsified his powers.

CALIBAN

They disappeared soon after his master's departure. What was once fantastic illusion has been replaced with infectious thoughts.

STRACHEY

Why does he stay?

CALIBAN

This is our home. While those with power on your side of the world hope to expand, Ariel only wishes to be happy. He does not want a kingdom. He searches for love and acceptance.

STRACHEY

I cannot give him that.

CALIBAN

Both he and I know that. And as much as I may be something of a brother to him, I am afraid it is not in my nature to be so.

STRACHEY

So then he is destined to loneliness? We must stand so idly by, letting him suffer?

CALIBAN

No one is entirely unable from being saved. He may not feel loved, but you give him the feeling of respect. You may have already done a great service.

STRACHEY

You know I am bound on my journey.

CALIBAN

Not a word will be said.

Caliban turns to leave.

STRACHEY

What kind of man could have broken him so?

(CONTINUED)

CALIBAN

He...Prospero was the last and only man who accepted him. Do not become him.

Caliban exits. Strachey replaces the items and begins to return everything to what it once was. Once it is finished, he sits atop the chest. After a moment, he exits and returns with Ariel in his arms, still asleep. He places Ariel down in the sand, and sits. Thunder begins to boom. The wind starts to pick up. In his sleep, Ariel begins to shake and turn violently. Strachey strokes his hair in an attempt to calm him.

STRACHEY

Once an old ship sailed proudly upon the sea. It was not grand ship, nor was it a fast ship. It was simply well crafted. In its first life, men used the ship to transport a great family of royalty to all corners of the earth. A tradition was started. Anywhere the ship would travel, a small piece of the ship must be left behind before moving on to its next port. And they saw no times of sorrow. A time later, the ship was used for adventure and exploration. Thousands of new lands were discovered. While some men were lost along the way, it prospered along. Years passed before the ship came under attack. The royal family hired a team of pirates to take the ship back, as they wanted it for their own. Blades of steel whipped around on the small vessel and yet, it still remained unharmed. The ship was returned home but, in the tradition, the family requested a piece be left behind. Due to its well traveled nature, the pirates were forced to leave behind its smallest mast. They feared they would not see their mission out to its completion. But the ship was once again returned home. And though surviving many years to travel and battle, the main deck was undone by a rainstorm. The wood used to build the ship could not be replaced. It was torn apart and thrown away so the family could commission a new ship. A small village found the mast that was left behind and made it part of a strong grand vessel that undid all the armies of of the world. It never traveled much of the ocean, but it never collapsed. And to this day, it still has not.

Ariel awakens, and dons Prospero's robe. The pieces of furniture that have been added throughout are slowly pulled away. Just as the night turns to day, the only thing left in the space is Ariel's chest.

ARIEL

I pray to you, as I always do, that this will be the final letter I will have to send. If only my troubled mind could see you once more, only if to make for certain that you were in happy states. Yet, I've been struck. Beaten down with a fog that lays itself over mine eyes, growing thicker every time I close, then open them. I once was the all observant fairy you respected with supportive claims and poetry. Now I see nothing. [Pause] Please, my master. Please come save me. I ask one favor of you. You have yet to fulfill your promise of freeing me. I cannot do it myself. Return to your prison to collect the last of your belongings.

He retrieves an empty bottle, and fills it with sand. Closing it, he contemplates putting it into the sea. It remains clenched in his hand. Strachey walks on, taken aback somewhat at his presence. He carries a small bag at his side.

STRACHEY

Good day, my king.

ARIEL

How long did I rest for?

STRACHEY

Only a handful hours. You missed nothing of importance. Your lordship holds.

ARIEL

You say such words with a grave face. This is a joyous moment for us.

STRACHEY

'Tis, my lord.

ARIEL

Then tell me, what ails you? You wear it on you like a crude mask.

STRACHEY

I spoke with your adviser last night.

Ariel gives him a confused look.

STRACHEY

Sir Caliban.

ARIEL

He is my adviser then.

(CONTINUED)

STRACHEY

As I have witnessed so.

ARIEL

And this is what distresses you. Seeing the other man that serves me as his king in such a weary state. I assure you I care for your life far more than I do his.

STRACHEY

As kind as those words are, my lord. That is not what distresses me.

Ariel is suddenly worried that he is completely oblivious. He approaches Strachey calmly.

ARIEL

That man was born as a savage, and lived most of his life that way. Whatever he may have told you, cannot be taken as truth.

Strachey remains quiet at this.

ARIEL

Fine, what has he told you? What sort of slanderous attributes has he placed upon me? Come, out with it.

STRACHEY

My lord, please-

ARIEL

I want no excuses, William Strachey. Tell me what he has told you.

A silence holds for a few moments. Strachey stares at Ariel, unwilling to break.

ARIEL

Very well. If you will not reveal to me, I shall go to the blackened source of these lies. Caliban!

Ariel begins to storm off stage.

STRACHEY

My lord, will you accompany us to the new world?

ARIEL

Do you ask me to leave my kingdom behind?

STRACHEY

Merely the land. I will still serve under your power upon our arrival.

(CONTINUED)

ARIEL

I do not care to speak about the uncertain. When the day comes for your people to set sail, we may discuss this then. For now, we have a traitor in our midst that we must be rid of.

STRACHEY

That day is today.

Ariel falls silent. He is at a total loss.

STRACHEY

The men load the ship at this very moment. Did you not notice that your furnishings had gone?

Ariel spins in the space, realizing everything has vanished.

STRACHEY

We have no more time to delay this conversation. You belong with people who will respect you. I beg of you to join us.

ARIEL

You took away my court.

STRACHEY

It was not yours to own.

ARIEL

I could have you beheaded for this.

STRACHEY

I do not wish to hear your threats. Your company would be welcome upon our ship, but this is the path I have always been set upon. I cannot abandon my family.

ARIEL

So you will abandon me in their place.

STRACHEY

Is your home this important? Must you cling onto your past with such desperate need?

ARIEL

My past is not of your concern.

STRACHEY

There is no swaying you?

ARIEL

As there is no hope to do the same of you. There is no sense in delaying you any longer.

(CONTINUED)

STRACHEY

You do not have to live alone.

Ariel nods and looks to the bottle still clenched in his hand. From his bag, Strachey retrieves a hefty stack of torn out notebook pages. He holds them out for Ariel.

STRACHEY

A final gift for you.

ARIEL

What is this?

STRACHEY

They are writings of my time here.

ARIEL

You wrote of me?

STRACHEY

Every day. Every moment we've spent together is there. I did what I came on this journey to do.

ARIEL

This is treasonous behavior.

STRACHEY

It is why I give them to you. I did not seem proper for me to steal your life from you. It is not what you deserve. You may keep my work and I will start anew.

Strachey bows to Ariel and turns to leave.

ARIEL

Hold just a moment.

Strachey is stopped in his tracks. Ariel takes off his robe, and places it back in the chest. One by one, he pulls out dozens of bottles filled with sand. He strokes the lid for only a moment before locking it. He lifts it with incredible ease and carries it over to Strachey to take. Strachey makes an attempt to object, but realizes Ariel will not fight him on it. Strachey stares at Ariel hoping for some kind of goodbye. After a beat, he sighs.

STRACHEY

I truly hope he comes for you.

ARIEL

You are dismissed, William Strachey.

Strachey exits. The space is now empty, only occupied by the bottles of sand underneath Ariel's feet. Caliban slowly wanders on behind him.

ARIEL

You are not welcome here any longer.

CALIBAN

I do not intend to stay long.

ARIEL

Where will you run to? The cliffs cannot house what you have become.

CALIBAN

I am bound for America.

ARIEL

You have taken their shallow offer. To what? Be a servant. A slave. You are dreaming to believe they will accept you as one of their own.

CALIBAN

My fate is not yours to decide.

ARIEL

What sort of man do you think you have become? Your nature cannot allow you to behave as civil.

CALIBAN

I cannot stand see you in this state. Your own ignorance has my body reeling in pain. Do you keep track of the days anymore?

ARIEL

As expansive as the time may get from the point my master left this land to me, I do not see the end just yet.

CALIBAN

There never will be one. We've lived a life together, you and I. On this land. And neither seems to conclude.

ARIEL

Has he not taken enough away from you? Are you willing to lay down your fight with such ease?

CALIBAN

My mother died long ago. I fought my war already and I will not continue to live the rest of my life as a slave to your Prospero!

(CONTINUED)

The name causes Ariel physical pain. He seizes up every time Caliban speaks the name.

ARIEL

I have warned you never to utter that name.

CALIBAN

What will you do to stop me? You have nothing left to harm me with! All that is left is for you to continue to live in the permanent shadow of Prospero. Prospero was a cruel master. Prospero only sought to gain for himself. You are only alive because Prospero made it so! If there is one lesson you must take from Prospero, it should be on the life not to lead.

ARIEL

He promised me my freedom. He made an oath as my final test in his service. In order for it to conclude, I must continue to wait.

CALIBAN

What choice was there in your promise? Where would you have gone?

ARIEL

I would have a home, beside my master! I no longer have the elements. I no longer have your horrid mother, chaining me to her bosom. I no longer have my trickery and illusions. He is all that there is left for me in this realm. And if he is no longer, than I do not deserve life. But until then, I will remain steadfast, waiting for his royal banner to land on these shores once again. So go, to the new world. Where promise shines like a glowing beacon to the mosquitoes and plagues you call noble. For I would rather die a mad, insufferable wreck in this disease ridden sand than spend a single second attempting to serve under some inferior leader.

Something in Ariel has just broken. His head begins to quiver slightly. He has sunken in the sand. Caliban can only watch him fall apart.

CALIBAN

A land of no man is no land at all.

ARIEL

Let us pray you do not discover the same on your travels.

Ariel begins rocking back and forth almost catatonic. Caliban places a hand on Ariel's shoulder.

ARIEL

He will come. He will come.

Ariel repeats this at varying volumes. Caliban slowly removes his hand and exits. Ariel looks to the pile of bottles next to him and begins to hurl them into the ocean. He reaches the final one, but cannot seem to let it go. Suddenly, he is interrupted by a distant thunder. He stands upright quickly, eyes gazing hopefully to the sea. He begins to draw a circle in the sand with his foot. He outstretches his arms, attempting to cast his "spell" again. There is nothing. He makes another circle. He kneels again. Nothing. He continues to draw circles in the sand. The lights fade with the slow, rhythmic sound of the sand swooshing beneath his feet.

END OF PLAY

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WITHOUT PROSPERO: A STAGED READING



WRITTEN BY SAM ROBOTHAM

FRIDAY, MARCH 27TH @ 7:30PM
SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH @ 1:00PM
SUNDAY, MARCH 29TH @ 7:30PM

AS PART OF THE THEATER AND PERFORMANCE SENIOR PROJECTS.

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