

PAUL DAHLGREN
University of California, Irvine

REFLECTIONS ON A SMALL ISLAND:
HANNAH ARENDT, SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*,
AND THE POLITICS OF CHILDHOOD

Although Hannah Arendt never wrote anything like a formal interpretation of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare's play clearly influenced her thinking up until nearly the end of her life. In fact, at the end of the volume *Thinking from The Life of the Mind*,¹ she quotes her favorite lines from this play:

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Of his bones are coral Made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.²

This quotation serves as what would be the final word on her "method," although Arendt was not fond of that particular term. Arendt claimed that these lines stated "more succinctly" than she even could what one must do when investigating the past when authority no longer holds the sway it once did. She had used these lines almost a decade earlier to describe the work of her friend, Walter Benjamin, and, in a private letter to Kurt Blumenfeld, had described her own work as *Perlenfischerei*.³

While there has been some effort to understand the relationship of these terms to Arendt's political philosophy, relatively little attention has been paid to the play from which these lines were drawn. In what follows, I will examine what might have been the draw of Shakespeare's play by giving an interpretation of *The Tempest* through Arendt's writing. While I do think such an interpretation has a value in itself, I do not think that Arendt's work should be used for literary interpretation alone. After all, Arendt's own work suggests, in the words of one

¹ Arendt, Hannah. *The Life of the Mind: One Volume Edition*. ed. Mary McCarthy. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978) 212.

² (1.2.397-402). Quotations from *The Tempest* follow Stephen Orgel's 1987 Oxford edition of this play. Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. ed. Stephen Orgel, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

³ Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 94-5.

critic, that narrative language has a “moral resonance.”⁴ So, in keeping with this conviction, I will show how the “moral resonance” we find in a reading of *The Tempest* might have inflected Arendt’s work differently, had she been interested in that play in the way I suggest she might have, but did not, read it. A connecting thread through all of this work will be a reflection on children and citizenship. Using terms like “natality” to describe civic acts, Arendt’s political language often relies on tropes related to childhood. Themes about minors entering the political world as citizens are also a major element of *The Tempest*. The “child,” or its civil equivalent, the “minor,” are members of political symbology and political theology and understanding their role in political life is a challenge worth taking on.

Like a precocious child, I have gotten a little ahead of myself. Before exploring childhood itself, we should understand the significance of these lines from *The Tempest* for Arendt. Since Arendt used these lines to describe her historical methodology, understanding Arendt’s stance towards history is a necessary task in unpacking these lines. Following the rise of totalitarianism, Arendt rejected most forms of historicism as inadequate for dealing with the world she found herself in. History simply failed to explain Nazi death camps. Authority, in the form of tradition, had broken down and without it, the past ceased to be an effective guide for action in the present. Yet, the political actor still needs some reference to the past, even if historicism cannot provide an adequate reference. As the political theorist Seyla Benhabib explains, the “storyteller” has a very different role than either the historian or political philosopher: “to be without a sense of the past is to lose one’s self, one’s identity, for who we are is revealed in the narratives we tell ourselves and of our world shared with others. Narrativity is constitutive of identity.”⁵ So, in a present whose authority had been shattered by World Wars, Arendt struggled to find a new relationship to the past, one that was “rich and strange.” Elements of the past, the authority of a “father”-figure, have been, in essence, destroyed, but something remains, “pearls” from the past which may still have a use. In her own career, Arendt discovered a number of pearls, from the *Vita Activa* of the Athenian citizen to the “lost treasure” of the American Revolution.⁶ Indeed, we might see the way Arendt has wrestled these lines from their original context in Shakespeare’s play, a mere song sung by the servant spirit Ariel to a prince lost and gathering his bearings on an uncharted isle, as a “new and strange” way of thinking about, and writing about Shakespeare more generally.

⁴ Benhabib, Seyla. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. New Edition. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2003) 91-101.

⁵ *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 92.

⁶ These terms are from *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution*, respectively. Arendt, Hannah *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution* Reprint Ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1990).

As Arendt never interpreted *The Tempest*, nor generated any particular strategy for interpretation, my reading can only be speculative. It is certainly not historically grounded, nor could it have anything to do with Shakespeare's intentions. Yet, we will find many of the themes in Arendt's work have a noticeable resonance with this play. Shakespeare's work deals with authority, speech, and political action in ways that speak to Arendt's explorations of these subjects. The play is also concerned with the nature of narrative itself. I believe it is this last element of *The Tempest* that may have attracted Arendt to the play. Critics have long read Prospero as a stand-in for Shakespeare, and the play as a statement about the nature of art. In a letter, W. H. Auden described *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's "Art of Poetry," a mythopoetic work which encouraged adaptations and transformations of itself (Auden's own *The Sea and The Mirror* being one prominent example).⁷ This is to say that Arendt purposefully chose lines from a work about narrative to comment on her own method for generating narratives, or a story about stories.

The various narratives generated in this play originate in a passage uttered by subjects who range from minors (and thus are protected from full political participation) to full citizens (or even sovereigns). When Ariel sings the song Arendt quotes, he is an invisible spirit communicating to Prince Ferdinand, who believes his life as a minor has just come to an end. He believes his father was killed in the storm that opens this play, and it is now his responsibility to become King of Naples. Although this movement is somewhat thwarted by Prospero's machinations, by the end of the play Ferdinand is wed and presumably ready to take such a role when his father actually passes away. Ferdinand is not alone in trying to cross this threshold; Miranda, Prospero's daughter, must leave her father's island and join society. Most notable, however, is Caliban, who may not be a child at all, but was, at one time, Prospero's ward, and who enters the play as a slave. If slavery is indeed his punishment for bad behavior, then it is right to consider Caliban a ward of, or minor in, Prospero's state (however small that state may be).

Indeed, the relationship between Caliban and Prospero in particular has generated a considerable number of rewritings and appropriations of this play, from Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat*.⁸ Postcolonial rereadings of *The Tempest* have long been a staple of critics, including Leo Marx's opening of *The Machine in the Garden* and Ania Loomba's

⁷ Auden, W. H. *The Sea and The Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's The Tempest*. Ed. Arthur Kirsh. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). The letter is noted in the Kirsh's introduction. Auden was a frequent reference point for Arendt and one which appears in *Thinking* right after her reference to *The Tempest*. Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb has written extensively about the relationship of Auden and Arendt. In particular, see *Regions of Sorrow: Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W.H. Auden*.

⁸ Césaire, Aimé. *A Tempest*. Trans. Richard Miller. (New York: Theater Communications, Inc, 2002). Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa. *A Grain of Wheat*. Reprint. (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994).

Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism.⁹ There is one full length monograph about the history of Caliban himself.¹⁰ Throughout the play Caliban is described as a “fish,” “slave,” “villain,” “monster,” and “moon-calf,” all terms that suggest either supra- or sub- human qualities.¹¹ Postcolonial critics have often noted how Caliban’s subhuman characteristics, racially marking him as other, all too conveniently correspond with the various European discourses which rationalize exploitative colonial regimes. More recent criticism has emphasized the complex interplay between old world and new world geographies, suggesting that Shakespeare’s play is just as much about Virgil as Virginia.¹² The various rewritings, appropriations, and contestations about this play are not just paradigmatic of literary discourse as it is practiced in the academy, but also are representative of the various conflicts that occur within the play itself.

Postcolonial critics are right to point to the conflict between Caliban and Prospero as the most important problem in the play itself. Prospero, more than any other character, suggests the importance of narrative to political action. In fact, in act one, scene two he almost has trouble doing anything else aside from narrating, perhaps to the dismay of his captive audience. He tells Miranda about how he was disposed from Milan and sent to the strange isle where he now rules as a master of the elements. He also manages to explain how he raised Caliban and won the service of Ariel. Not only do these narratives give the play’s audience the proper background to understand why the play unfolds the way it does, but they also provide Prospero a context for action. He is explaining the foundations on which his regime operates. In providing a background narrative, Prospero orders his future and “founds” the authority for his action to come (and it is ultimately Prospero’s actions that generate all of the major events in the play). Prospero admits: “The government I cast upon my brother,/ And to my state grew stranger, being transported/ And rapt in secret studies” (1.2 75-78). As Prospero becomes a “stranger” to statecraft, Antonio gains “the manage” of

⁹ Marx, Leo. *The Machine in the Garden :Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. Reprint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Loomba, Ania. *Shakespeare, Race and Colonialism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁰ Vaughan and Vaughan give the most comprehensive history of Caliban, which I will be unable to fully unpack in this venue. To be brief, I am placing Arendt’s conception of Caliban in the era just after World War II where his status is most questionable. In this time period, Caliban is often seen as “the embodiment of imperialism victims” (280). Yet it seems equally appropriate, particularly given Arendt’s very complex relationship to empire and political authority, that it is possible to give a generous reading to Prospero as an “Enlightenment *philosophe*,” a reading that the Vaughans associate particularly with the eighteenth century to 1950. Vaughan, Alden and Vaughan, Virginia. *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹¹ For more on Caliban’s name, see Peter Hulme’s *The Tempest and its Travels*. Hulme, Peter. *The Tempest and its Travels*. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

¹² Wilson-Okamura, David Scott. “Virgilian Models of Colonization in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.” *ELH* 70.3 (2003) 709-737.

Milan. In Arendtian terminology, Prospero has become too deeply immersed in the *vita contemplativa* and his brother has usurped his position. They suggest the need for Prospero to take a more active hand in his fate. That is what ends up happening. More than any other character, Prospero ends up being the engine for action in this play.

When discussing Antonio's betrayal, Prospero states: "my trust, /Like a Good parent, did beget him/ A falsehood" (1.2 93-5). These are perhaps the earliest lines in which we see pregnancy as a political metaphor. Prospero's trust "did beget" Antonio's falsehood, causing him to believe that he was the true Duke of Milan, just as the proverbial good parent breeds bad children.

These metaphors involving pregnancy have a strong valence with Arendt's work, but to understand this valence, we need probe a little bit more of Arendt's sense of history. Shakespeare is not the only author Arendt used to explain her purpose in doing historical work. Frequently, she cited a comment by Faulkner: "The past is never dead, it is not even past."¹³ History, oftentimes in the form of tradition or authority, is still with the political actor. To act, for Arendt, was to bring something new into the world. In *The Human Condition*, she explains: "The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable."¹⁴ As many other scholars have fleshed out the various degrees of contingency, power and risk involved in Arendt's notion of acting, I will not do so here.¹⁵ Rather, I want to emphasize one particular word Arendt frequently used to explain the horizon of action, perhaps the only neologism to appear in her writing: natality.¹⁶ In the first instance of the use of this word that I can find, again in *The Human Condition*, Arendt suggests: "Action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt by the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is of acting" (9). Arendt relates the ability to act to what she calls "natality" or the condition of being able to give birth.

The metaphor implied in natality helps Arendt do a number of things in her work, and it can help us understand Shakespeare's play. In giving birth, a

¹³ Quotation from Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition* p. 10.

¹⁴ 178.

¹⁵ See Benhabib, Disch, and Beiner. Briefly, action is contingent is because it is continually in the state of reinterpretation in the public sphere. The actor does not control the reception of his or her actions, nor even the results and transformation of this action. True action, in the Arendtian sense, is performative and opens the door for new preformative actions. See Honig for more on Arendt and performance. Disch, Lisa. *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). Biener, Ronald. *Political Judgment*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). Honig, Bonnie. "Towards an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity" *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*. Ed. Honig. (University Park, The Pennsylvania University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Arendt's *The Human Condition* is the first place the OED notes this particular usage occurring.

person has shockingly little control of how their child will turn out, and such is also the case with action in Arendt's writings. This lack of control does not mean one is not responsible for one's children or one's actions, it simply means that the parent or the actor do not have the last say on how things turn out.¹⁷ Actors have no foreknowledge of how their actions will bear out, nor how others will perceive them. Prospero exemplifies this dilemma. His inaction made him lose Milan, and despite what we can only hope were his best efforts, he loses control of Caliban as well. If we see Caliban as a dominated subject, it is hard to suggest that Prospero's domination of Caliban has been complete. Furthermore, it is Caliban, more than any other character, who highlights the inability of the speaking subject to master his own use of language. Although Miranda has tried to give Caliban a sense of language, or "endowed thy purposes/ With words that made them know" (1.2 360-1), Caliban has responded with resistance: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse" (1.2 366-7). Both Prospero and Miranda try to impose both language and a narrative as to how Caliban has ended up their servant, but Caliban reclaims language and uses it against both of these characters. It is, of course, the ability to speak that enables action in Arendt's philosophy, but she is always careful to measure what the effects of speech will necessarily be. The speaking subject never gets to interpret his words to others, rather, these others create that subject through his words. While Ariel and others may execute Prospero's commands, it is Caliban who is inclined to re-interpret the meaning of the various things Prospero says.¹⁸

The contrast drawn between Prospero and Caliban is clearly one of the most important dichotomies structuring the play. It is worth emphasizing that according to Arendtian categories, both Prospero and Caliban are bad citizens. Prospero, as I have mentioned, has been locked into the *vita contemplativa*, and until the play opens is unable to take part in the public realm. Caliban, in contrast, is stuck in the condition of the *animal laborans*—the life of labor. Prospero strongly associates Caliban with labor when he says, "We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,/ fetch our wood and serves in offices./ That profit us—" (1.2 313-5). He is, in other words, a slave whose sole purpose is to perform labor so that Prospero and Miranda can go about their own business. For Arendt, to engage solely in labor is sub-human.¹⁹ Labor is the work of the body and only relates to the work of reproducing the self. Rightly or wrongly, feminists, postcolonialists, and other critics have criticized Arendt for maintaining too strict a separation between the work of the body and public

¹⁷ Arendt worried that American parents were not taking enough responsibility for their children, a theme she developed in "Reflections on Little Rock," as well as "The Crisis in Education." Arendt, Hannah. "The Crisis in Education." *Between Past and Future*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1968).

¹⁸ Greenblatt derives an interesting reading of Caliban's resistance to Prospero, which I am building my argument on, somewhat. See *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁹ See *The Human Condition* 79-93. This point is one she originally developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.

speech.²⁰ In recent criticism, however, a number of critics have emphasized the ways Arendt makes these categories more porous than they might first appear.²¹ Would Arendt see Caliban as subhuman? It is possible, but I would like to suggest that there are plenty of reasons to think not. Caliban has, after all, been reduced to the status of a slave, but at the end of the play we hear him state: "I'll be wise hereafter/ And seek for grace" (5.1 298-9). The ability to be "wise" at least suggests some human qualities.

Though Caliban is the child of the Algerian witch Sycorax, much of his moral education, or at least his socialization, has been left to Prospero. Prospero again tells him and us: "I have used thee,/ Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee/ In mine own cell, till thou did seek to violate/ The honour of my child" (1.2 348-51). Prospero's claim is that Caliban was at least a potential equal, someone who deserved "humane" care, until Caliban left the realm of civility through a violent act. It is worth noting that seeking "to violate/ The honour" of Miranda implies rape, but we should also note that Caliban has not been convicted of any crime. The play gives no indication that Miranda consented to be with Caliban, but it also provides no definitive evidence that she did not. If Miranda actually consented, her consent may explain why Caliban is so "unforgiving"²² in his response, and many critics have emphasized as well as how "out of character" are the lines Miranda utters after him. She may be trying to conceal her complicity in that action. After all, Caliban has been one of only two men Miranda has seen while on the island and when she sees a third, Ferdinand, it is not a long time before she professes her love to him.²³ Indeed this may explain why she does not "love to look" at Caliban when he is on stage (1.2 312). She may feel guilty, or be trying to hide her complicity in the act that cost Caliban her father's humane treatment.

While what exactly happened between Miranda and Caliban remains somewhat mysterious, it is not because Caliban attempts to deny action. Caliban only laments not having succeeded in his endeavor, stating: "Would't had been done!/ Thou didst prevent me. I had peopled else/ This isle with Calibans" (1.2 352-4). Tellingly, Caliban does not lament any thwarted sexual desire, but rather his failure to "people" the island with his children. If we return to Arendt's terminology, Caliban's choice of the term "Calibans" is deeply disturbing. For

²⁰ By far the most extensive list of these challenges as well as a number of attempted recoveries of Arendt happen in the volume *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* ed. Bonnie Honig.

²¹ See Honig.

²² This is the term a variety of scholars use to describe Caliban's response to Prospero. See Orgel and Greenblatt. Orgel, Stephen. "Introduction." *The Tempest*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

²³ My sense is that Miranda is the character that makes *The Tempest* the comedy it was originally classified as in the first folio. As *The Tempest* would have been performed both in the court, and in the liberties, it seems possible that in one of these locations she might have been played as a bawd. This will not excuse Caliban's suggestion to Stefano that Miranda will be his wife, but it may explain why he is not too worried by her consent.

Arendt, “natality” represented that aspect of human being which cannot be predicted. In other words, children are not mere replacements or expansions of their parents, but something radically new in the world. Caliban’s language suggests the attempt to expand his own personality throughout the island, a rule which in Arendt’s vocabulary is authoritarian and potentially totalitarian. We can still recover some sympathy for Caliban, however. He is a solitary creature, doomed to loneliness if Prospero continues his rule over the island.²⁴ Also, if Caliban has what might seem to be a disturbing sense of what fatherhood entails, it may be because the only parental figure he has frequently plays the role of an irrational tyrant.²⁵ However tyrannical Prospero attempts to be, his control over Caliban never becomes total.

If Caliban represents some kind of mistake on Prospero’s part, then he cannot simply represent a singular accident, but must be a problem relating to one of the paradoxes of sovereignty that Shakespeare explores. At least one potential way to look at Caliban may be offered by Arendt’s paradoxical reading of Shakespeare’s song. We may see Caliban as a distorted image of Prospero, or any other individual in the play. New Historicist criticism has emphasized the colonial origins of Caliban, frequently making him into a Native American.²⁶ More recent criticism, including Wilson and Goldberg, has stressed how the play seems to straddle two hemispheres. I find this description particularly useful in thinking about Arendt, who in life and theory moved from old world to new world (for instance, *The Human Condition* focuses on recovering an Aristotelian form of political philosophy and draws greatly from classical Greek thought against the decidedly modern philosophy of Hobbes and Marx, while *On Revolutions* celebrates and attempts to recover the power of the American Revolution). It is also helpful in that it reminds us how Native American figures often had a classical understanding imposed upon their culture.

²⁴ At the end of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt makes a distinction between solitude and loneliness explaining: “Loneliness is not solitude. Solitude requires being alone whereas loneliness shows itself most sharply in the company of others... All thinking, strictly speaking, is done in solitude and is a dialogue between me and myself; but this dialogue of the two-in-one does not lose contact with the world of my fellow-men because they are represented in the self with whom I lead the dialogue of thought...Solitude can become loneliness; this happens when all by myself I am deserted of my own self...What makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one’s own self which can only be realized in solitude, but confirmed in its identity only by the trusting and trustworthy company of my equals” (476-7). I use both terms to suggest Caliban’s potential to end up on either side of this equation. Lupton develops this idea in her forthcoming article on Caliban’s Minority.

²⁵ By suggesting Prospero is a less than perfect parent, I do not mean to suggest that there can be something of a perfect parent. Prospero may be particularly constrained because he has entered what is, in a sense, an extended minority by having his dukedom stolen from him.

²⁶ For New Historicist accounts, see Greenblatt. Wilson is cited above. Goldberg, Jonathan. *Tempest in The Caribbean*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

While Kant and other enlightenment figures put Indians outside of history, in the seventeenth century there was a different tradition emerging in political theory. A comparison between Thomas Hobbes and John Locke is particularly revealing. In his chapter on the state of nature where he explains that famous condition of every individual against every other individual in the state of perpetual war, Hobbes comments: "It may peradventure be thought, there was never such a time, no condition of warre as this; and I believe that it was never generally so, over the world: but there are many places, where they live so now. For the savage people of America...have no government at all."²⁷ Native Americans are in the state of nature, according to Hobbes, and are, in fact, crucial proof that once upon a time so were Europeans. Locke makes similar comments in his chapter "On Property": "Thus in the beginning all the World was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as Money was any where known."²⁸ In this Biblically evocative passage Locke suggests that before the world knew money, the world was "America." Both of these thinkers use America as a kind of repository where Europe's mythic past becomes alive in the present state of a distant continent. Yet, as Arendt would point out, this past is not dead, but very much alive. It requires both a teleological view of history as well as racism to be intelligible, but this may give us a stronger sense of what Caliban represents in the play. Caliban represents several kinds of pasts, but pasts that are inescapable and all too present. He represents not only Prospero's grave mistreatment, or even a state of savagery that predates European civilization, but also a mythic past that presents itself as an opportunity for rethinking political theory. Starting anew, a *topoi* in American political thought since before there were Americas, presents an unparalleled opportunity for remaking the political world. Yet there has never been a way for this newness to emerge *ex-nihilo*. Caliban is a past that Prospero, despite his horror, understands to be his own and identifies with. In a sense, it is only logical that Prospero must state, "This thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine" in order to regain his sovereignty (5.1 278-9). Caliban is his, but not his property; rather, he is his past, from his "darkness," a time that he does not remember but that nonetheless exists. In order to be a civil ruler, he must confront and civilize the past.

For all the trauma Caliban endures from Prospero, rather than being reduced to the status of bare life he seem to be elevated to some form of sovereignty, if only self-sovereignty. At least, that is what might be suggested when Caliban proclaims his last lines in this play: "And I'll be wise hereafter/ And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass/ Was I to take this drunkard for a god,/ And worship this dull fool!" (5.1 298-301). Not only do we see repentance on Caliban's part to Prospero, but also Caliban seems to shift the way he will perform his citizenship. Rather than continuing his various fights with Prospero (which are, by default, over), Caliban will "be wise" and seek "grace." Although we might think of "grace" as some kind of private relationship between the

²⁷ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan* ed. Macpherson. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1982). 187

²⁸ Locke, John. *Two Treatises on Government*. Ed. Laslett. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

individual and his God, that reading may be a decidedly modern one. Regardless, wisdom is not a private end, but something that requires actions in the public realm. Suggesting that Caliban has entered the public the moment he has gotten his private island back may seem paradoxical, but it may also be way of stating that Caliban has moved from being a minor to an adult.²⁹ After all, although Prospero, Miranda, and company are leaving Caliban's island, it is not entirely out of the question that they might return, or that others might come to the island. Indeed, given that Shakespeare was writing at a time when many countries were seriously pursuing colonialism, this seems like a fairly reasonable assessment. Caliban has his private island back, but it may soon become part of a neighborhood of nations.

Thus far, I have discussed political metaphors concerning children and fictional minors. However, on at least two occasions, Arendt discusses actual children. The one that appears closest to the time the Benjamin essay was published is "The Crisis of Education," which appeared in the book *Between Past and Future*. This essay focuses on what Arendt has elsewhere described as "the crisis of authority" in the modern world. In the essay, she criticizes progressive pedagogy: "Education can play no part in politics, because in politics we always have to deal with those who are already educated."³⁰ She advocates a rethinking of the educational priorities of American schools, suggesting that natality itself is endangered by the mistaken assumptions of progressive educators. She identifies three major mistakes in progress education: 1. The belief that there is a world for children that is politically separate from adults. 2. The belief that teachers should be able to teach any subject (and are therefore perpetually only one hour ahead of their classes) and 3. The replacement of knowing with doing, or worse, "obliterating as far as possible the distinction between play and work – in favor of the former."³¹ In that last category, Arendt accuses progressive educators of infantilizing older children by making them imitate young ones. I would suggest, briefly, that the line between childhood and adulthood is much more ambiguous than Arendt makes it. While, legally speaking, one has to draw such a line, in both teaching and parenting we must necessarily cross it repeatedly. Returning to *The Tempest*, for a moment, we might outline the difficulties of a parent crossing this line with their child as "the Prospero problem." Periodically, adults must assume that minors can act as full-citizens, even if this assumption is only temporary and situational. If they do not occasionally make this assumption, the response they may get is not unlike Caliban's statement: "I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer/, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island" (3.2 40-1). The parental figure appears both tyrannical and supernatural. Prospero is not only unfair, but can be that way because his authority extends far beyond his rule of Caliban to things that cannot

²⁹ This is a crucial distinction in Arendt's thought. Children deserve the protection of the private realm, while adults must face the public world.

³⁰ 177

³¹ 183

normally be manipulated.³² Occasionally, it may be necessary to ferment rebellion in children so they may be properly active political players when they enter the public realm. However, too much authority is just as dangerous as a lack of authority.

It is, of course, the lack of authority, or the power of tradition, that Arendt suggests is the real cause of the crisis of education. She locates this crisis in World War II but one has to wonder if the kind of rigorous tradition she seems to desire ever really existed. As she relates action to the condition of natality and frequently talks in terms of rebellion, one wonders if the so-called crisis of authority is more a crisis of maturity, which involves the individual moving into the public realm. As I have suggested, that process is by no means an easy one. It is frequently traumatic and fraught with considerable danger. By looking at what has become perhaps the most controversial of Arendt's writing, we may begin to understand these perils more. Although many critics would consider her most controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, I would suggest that the article that has garnered considerably more controversy in recent criticism is "Reflections on Little Rock."³³

Eventually published in *Dissent*, this essay was originally commissioned for *Commentary*, and when it finally was published it was accompanied by two responses, both objecting to the article. Clearly, Arendt had hit a nerve.³⁴ Rather than look at Arendt's fairly complicated response to desegregation, I want to focus on Arendt's understanding of children in this essay. Although it appeared nine years earlier than "The Crisis of Education," we can already see elements of Arendt's future understanding of childhood in it. For instance, Arendt explains:

³² Although I focus on Caliban and Prospero, another reading might be made of the Caliban/ Miranda relationship. Arendt suggests that if there is too little of presence of the parents, children are subject to "the tyranny of the majority" (181). We might suggest that this is what almost happens to Miranda when Caliban plans to usurp Prospero and give Miranda to Stefano. I will be unable to fully draw out this reading and its implications at the moment, but will briefly suggest that there are several issues about sovereignty here as well. Stefano and Tinculo may represent a spirit of rebellion not unlike Hobbes's behemoth which needs to be put under control by a proper sovereign.

³³ There are a number of articles that deal with this essay. Two paradigmatic ones are Anne Norton's "Heart of Darkness: Africa and African Americans in the Writings of Hannah Arendt" and Kristie McClure's "The Odor of Judgment: Exemplarity, Propriety, and Politics in the Company of Hannah Arendt." Norton, like many of the early readers of "Reflections on Little Rock," practically accuses Arendt of racism, while McClure attempts to reconstruct Arendt's intentions in this essay (although he is ultimately fairly condemning as well).

³⁴ Arendt suggests that the only effective difference between the South and the rest of the country was that in the South segregation was enforced by law, rather than by custom. While it is important for these laws to be removed, it is equally important to deal with a number of social issues these laws raise (particularly as a number of them are anti-miscegenation laws). Perhaps because of her own poor choice of words, Arendt was frequently misread on these issues. Many of her critics seem to have thought that she put anti-miscegenation laws above political equity, which simply is not the case.

[I]f I were a Negro I would feel that the very attempt to start desegregation in education and in schools had not only, and very unfairly, shifted the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of adults to those of children. I would in addition be convinced that there is an implication in the whole enterprise of trying to avoid the issue. (194)

Arendt sees the burden of law as properly belonging to parents, rather than children. Parents are the ones who make the law and they need to take the responsibility to change them. In a later reply to Ralph Ellison, Arendt would admit that there were things, such as the “ideal of sacrifice” and its necessity in a racially charged situation, which she overlooked. Arguably, we might suggest that Arendt was being an overprotective parent of other people’s children. She imagines herself a “Negro” parent and tries to figure out what is the best way to handle integration. In brief, she suggests that the schoolyard is not the best battleground to begin desegregation. Rather, one should start with the churchyard and eliminate laws against mixed race marriages. While such a solution is tone-deaf to American racial politics, there may be aspects of this argument that Arendt’s critics have missed. In Arendt’s account, children have a right to associate with whom they choose and, more profoundly, the right to only enter the political world when they are ready. As the public realm represents one of the most challenging aspects of being human, this is no “minor” right. It does seem to be the thing that Caliban and Miranda need most.

Miranda, by the time the play begins, is well ready to leave her father’s household and enter into the world, however she might find it. While she does not have the abject loneliness that seems to infect Caliban, she clearly desires some kind of companionship. Although by modern standards it is doubtful that she’ll be able to find equality with her husband, the play gives us some promises that we might have hope in this area. It is, after all, Miranda who initiates her relationship with Ferdinand, and even as her part in the play comes to a close she will not let him use her improperly in their game of chess. Caliban, on the other hand, also needs to leave the presence of Prospero and to find his own place in the civic life of his community. Both of these individuals need to ways of relating to the world so that they may also help produce a new form of natality. Yet arguably, because of Prospero’s exile both were forced into the public realm long before they were ready. Had Arendt a better understanding about how individuals, particularly children, were forced into the public light, her essays on children might have been a little more adept.

The past, which is not dead, may be our parents or it may be ourselves when we imagine our children looking at us. Children, inasmuch as they may represent some kind of continuation, are also an indication that the world will change, and that change cannot entirely be controlled or predicted. At least, that is what we might get from Arendt. The figure of “the child” hardly begins or ends with her work. Not only do children play a major role in much of classical liberal political theory including Locke, Rousseau, Mill and others, but children are a continuous

subject of literature from Shakespeare onward (and before, as well). While I do not think it is the responsibility of literary criticism, cultural critique, or political theory to tell anyone how to be a “good” parent, what we think about our children tells us a lot about what we think of ourselves. For this reason, I hope others will continue to look at the figure of the child in theory and fiction.

PAUL DAHLGREN is a Ph.D. student in the English program at the University of California, Irvine. He works on American literature, rhetoric and critical theory. His dissertation will explore political theology in early American oratory and literature. He has a long standing interest in political theory, especially Hannah Arendt.

Hannah Arendt's Renaissance: Works Cited

- Arendt, Hannah. The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
- “Introduction.” Illuminations. Essays by Walter Benjamin. Ed. Hannah Arendt. NY: Schocken, 1969.
 - The Life of the Mind. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1978.
 - Love and St. Augustine. Ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelsius Stark. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
 - The Origins of Totalitarianism. First Edition: New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951. Second enlarged edition: NY: World Publishing, Co., Meridian Books, 1958. Third edition, with new prefaces: NY: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1066, 1968, 1973.
 - Responsibility and Judgment. Ed. Jerome Kohn. NY: Schocken, 2003.
 - “We Refugees.” In Hitler's Exiles: Personal Stories of the Flight from Nazi Germany to America. Ed. Mark M. Anderson. New York: New Press, 1998. 253-62.
- Lupton, Julia Reinhard. *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- “The Minority of Caliban: Thinking with Shakespeare and Locke.” Forthcoming *REAL: Yearbook of English and American Literature*. 2007.
- Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

@2006 Paul Dahlgren. All Rights reserved.

Dahlgren, Paul. “Reflections on a Small Island: Hannah Arendt, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and the Politics of Childhood.” *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 7 no. 2 (Spring 2006): 34-46.