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A Postdramatic Engagement with Robinsonade Motifs in Tim Crouch's *I, Caliban*

"nothing on this island is as simple as it seems"

(*I, Caliban* 64).

In his collection, *I, Shakespeare* (2011), Tim Crouch recreates several Shakespeare plays by putting their marginal characters like Malvolio, Banquo, and Peaseblossom to the centre stage. Among these works, *I, Caliban*, as a sequel adaptation of *The Tempest*, transforms the source text by eliminating all characters except for Caliban. In this adaptation, Shakespeare's play is turned into a one-actor performance, and the previously silenced character Caliban is given a voice. Caliban tells the story of his experiences in *The Tempest* such as how he was exploited by Prospero and others, how Prospero tried to get control of the island from him, and eventually how they all left Caliban there alone as they turned back to Milan. The play portrays an imaginative version of what might have happened after the ending of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. As it is claimed, "*The Tempest's* action is elliptical, leaving readers and audiences to speculate about events that happened before the play begins and to wonder about what will happen after it ends" (Vaughan and Vaughan 75). As Crouch's play provides an example of such an attempt, the performer acting the role of Caliban discloses his emotional state to the audience to give an idea as to what happened to Caliban at the end of Shakespeare's play and states how he feels betrayed mostly because he was left behind rather than for being abused. In this regard, Crouch's work adds another dimension to the previous and conventional postcolonial readings of Shakespeare's work. Much as it is a play that enables

discussions of (post)colonialism, it is also possible to interpret the work as a personal record of Caliban's psychological state that stems from forced solitude on an island setting. When considered from this aspect, apart from being an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, *I, Caliban* could also be viewed as a work that both maintains and sometimes subverts some of the commonly observed Robinsonade motifs. Since the work portrays Caliban as a lonely man trying to survive on the island, it can be considered as an example of a Robinsonade as a dramatic genre. The play follows some of the patterns and structures of the Robinsonade narratives such as the theme of isolation, loneliness, island setting, and power politics. Thus, it is possible to observe the points where Crouch's adaptation of *The Tempest* correlates to Robinsonades and where it departs from the genre.

Tim Crouch's works are notably studied and discussed as examples of post-dramatic theatre, which is a type of theatre that prioritises performance rather than the written dramatic text thereby enabling the production of much more experimental works. In postdramatic theatre, the audience is more activated, there is almost no aesthetic distance between the performers and spectators, and the plays are performed in preferably small spaces. The aim of postdramatic theatre is to break the illusion of dramatic theatre and to allow the audience to be a part of the performance experience. Visuality is also very important for postdramatic theatre, and various objects, whether related to the topic or not, are used by Crouch's performers (mostly himself) to convey meaning through visual means. By way of such representation, *I, Caliban* "de-dramatises" Shakespeare's play by turning it into an experimental performance piece rather than a play based solely on the written text as created by the writer. It produces an alternative *Tempest* by removing the plot of the play and turning it into a narration in the form of storytelling. Some of these postdramatic elements render it possible to consider *I, Caliban* in relation to Robinsonades as these transformations employed by Crouch make the adaptation of *The Tempest* closer to the Robinsonade narratives than the source text.

Crouch's target audience in *I, Shakespeare* collection are school children. Most of the works in this collection including *I, Caliban* are examples of site-specific theatre as they are performed at schools. *I, Caliban* itself was first performed at Downsview School, Brighton in 2003. The fact that Crouch writes and performs most of his works for young audiences illustrates a common point between his work and Robinsonade narratives that are particularly organised to appeal to child readers (Smith 161). In accordance with the idea of interacting with the audience in the postdramatic theatre, Caliban allows children to participate in the performance by addressing them certain questions and

collecting photographs from them to be used in the play. The photographs of random people provided by the audience suggest the roles of Prospero, Miranda and other excluded characters of Shakespeare's play. Moreover, Caliban tells his story to the audience rather than acting/performing it to decrease the distance between actor and audience in dramatic theatre performances. It is not an adventure story as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Instead of seeing a plot as in Shakespeare's *Tempest*, the audience listens to and witnesses Caliban's intimate feelings and psychological state as he gives a narrative account of what happened before on the island and how he feels now after all others have left him. To make this storytelling element more interesting and richer, various objects such as toy boats are also used to enhance the suggestion that the play is set on an island, and that it tells the story of a tempest. For instance, a toy boat is used to represent a real boat in which Caliban and his mother Sycorax had first landed on the island, and he uses a better toy boat to suggest the boat that took Prospero and Miranda to the same setting. In addition, since the emphasis is on theatre as experience, the audience is involved in the play in other ways, as, for instance, to evoke the atmosphere of an island, Caliban throws water and plastic fish to the audience in the accompaniment of gentle sea sounds given from a tape. Such postdramatic elements used in *I, Caliban* emphasise Caliban's solitude and the deserted island setting, which recall the structural organisation of Robinsonades and other captive narratives.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau praises the adaptability of *Robinson Crusoe* as follows:

Robinson Crusoe on his island, deprived of the help of his fellow-men, without the means of carrying on the various arts, yet finding food, preserving his life, and procuring a certain amount of comfort; this is the thing to interest people of all ages, and it can be made attractive to children in all sorts of ways. (147)

Defoe's work has provided a rich source for numerous adaptations that follow a similar pattern collectively known as Robinsonades. Janet Bertsch describes a Robinsonade as "a story... where an individual or a group of individuals with limited resources try to survive on a desert island" (79). When Caliban's representation in Crouch's work is considered along these lines, it is observed that the structure of this work resembles that of the Robinsonade genre. What particularly makes it possible to discuss *I, Caliban* as an engagement with the Robinsonade genre is the protagonist of the play as an islander. However, as the play is a transformation of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, it also transforms some of the commonly observed elements of Robinsonade narratives. For instance, Caliban

represents the lonely figure on the island that tries to survive in such works; yet, his survival struggle is not a matter of trying to stay alive. Rather, the survival theme in this work is related to Caliban's inability to cope with loneliness after Prospero and others have left the island. In the play, as Caliban waits for the others to come back and take him from the island, he wears a life jacket, which indicates that he gets ready for a tempest or a shipwreck to be encountered on the way as another concept observed in Robinsonades. A different treatment of Robinsonade motifs in terms of the representation of the protagonist is Caliban's identity as a native of the island. In conventional Robinsonades, it is mostly the experience of those who come from a distant place that is told. Alternatively, Crouch's version focuses on the indigenous character's experience as he is alienated from his own context instead of that of an outsider. Moreover, the idea of isolation in Robinsonades is also treated in a different manner through the representation of the protagonist Caliban. In Robinsonades, the isolation of the hero, or the protagonist, is a result of an unwanted accident such as a storm or a shipwreck. In this work, Caliban's isolation is more of social exclusion because of his difference from the mainstream. He does not, all of a sudden, find himself in an alien place but he is deliberately left on the island.

As John Robert Moore observes the many identical details of the plots of *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Tempest* (53), though they are examples of two different literary genres, they share common concepts such as the island setting, a natural disaster in the form of a storm followed by shipwreck, survival theme, and master-servant relationship. Both of these works have intensely been studied in (post)colonial studies as the power dynamics between the masters (Prospero and Robinson) and servants (Caliban and Friday) are considered in similar terms. An unknown and distant setting, mostly an island, isolation theme, civilisation, identity and power politics are among the common characteristics that define Robinsonade narratives. As a rewriting of *The Tempest* that responds to the ideological formation of the source text, *I, Caliban* also inevitably uses such common aspects observed in Robinsonades. For instance, an island setting is used which is emphasised with various postdramatic techniques such as the sea sound and the toy boats. Isolation and solitude constitute the major themes of the play. There is a note on the civilisation process of Caliban, which is left half-finished as Prospero leaves him behind. Lastly, the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, as it is understood from Caliban's words, is also a problematic one that is based on the exploitation of Caliban by the other.

The island setting is a remarkable common aspect of *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe*, and *I, Caliban*'s representation of an island reinforces this similarity.

There is much emphasis on the possession of the island both in *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe* and in *I, Caliban*. To remember Robinson's claim of the island, he asserts: "I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession" (Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* 76). Similarly, in Crouch's work, Caliban's words about his island bear resemblance to Robinson's unreserved assertion of ownership of the island: "Here they all are on my island, my island, my island. Washed up on my island by the storm" (*I, Caliban* 62). This is a transformation of Caliban's words in Shakespeare's work as he protests Prospero for trying to control the island: "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me" (*The Tempest* 1.2.396-397). Evidently, the island setting is a common element that relates all three works to one another.

The point where *Robinson Crusoe* and *I, Caliban* depart from each other is their treatment of the master-servant relationship. The representation of the two native figures in *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* is similar as they are both silenced and underrepresented characters. Both Caliban in Shakespeare's work and Friday are abused by their masters, and Friday even goes through an identity transformation under Robinson's supervision. However, in *I, Caliban*, the native has agency, and he claims his right even though he has been betrayed. While the indigenous characters in Shakespeare's play and *Robinson Crusoe* are rather meek as they cannot seek their right, Caliban in Crouch's play asserts his right and states how he was abused by the outsiders when they were on his island. He describes Prospero as "the tyrant whom I served for years, the tyrant for whom I scraped trenchers and washed dishes" (*I, Caliban* 67). In *The Tempest*, Prospero has access to the resources of the island with the help of Caliban, and as he comforts Miranda for bearing to be with such an "[a]bhorred slave," he states his intention to use Caliban as his slave:

We cannot miss him; he does make our fire,
Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
That profit us . . . (*The Tempest* 1.2.310-314).

In Crouch's adaptation, this idea is also given as Caliban says in his storytelling that he was ordered to fetch wood for Prospero, which means he served Prospero and provided him with the resources of the island. Yet, he is observed to be much more protesting in the latter version. Additionally, while Shakespeare's Caliban remains silent as others despise him with words like "Filt'h; 'Hag-seed', 'beast' and 'misshapen knave . . . a 'deboshed fish' and 'half a fish and half a monster'" (Vaughan and Vaughan 33), in *I, Caliban*, he expresses his regrets for having respected the wrong people:

And then it was just me. Just me on the island. Just me. Just me. And I wasn't very big. I hadn't even really learnt how to speak. But I knew where the springs were for water and I knew how to catch crabs and dig for pig nuts. I knew where the clustering filberts were. I managed. I was never very clean, but WHO CARES WHEN YOU'RE THE ONLY LIVING THING YOU EVER SEE. I was the king of the island. For years. Until HE came along. UNTIL HE CAME ALONG AND SPOILED IT. (*I, Caliban* 58)

As illustrated in this subversive speech, Crouch's adaptation provides a counter-discourse to the conventional representation of the native both in *The Tempest* and in Robinsonades.

The dominant theme of survival of the master or the outsider in Robinsonades is also related to Caliban in Crouch's work. In *The Tempest, Robinson Crusoe* and other castaway narratives, the survivor figure is the outsider who finds himself/herself in an unfamiliar place. Alternatively, in this adaptation, the native Caliban's survival struggle is portrayed. Instead of the stranger figure that finds life on an unknown land difficult to cope with, this time, the native turns into a captive on the island though it is a familiar setting for him. The biggest challenge in Robinsonade narratives is to confront difficult natural phenomena. Alternatively, in this adaptation, Caliban's struggle is not with nature but with forced solitude. Despite his stronger representation in this work, Caliban seems rather weak when he recognises he is a captive on the island. He even wears a life jacket and calls the others to come back and take him as well: "Come back. I'm sorry. Please come back. Can I come? / Can I come? I've packed a bag. I've got my life jacket" (*I, Caliban* 67-68). Isolation is a common motif in Robinsonades, and it is usually used as a motivation for the protagonist to find ways to survive in harsh conditions. In *I, Caliban*, this motif is also used in an alternative way as Caliban's isolation is not related to a survival struggle. Loneliness is already among the problems of a Robinsonade character. For instance, concerning Robinson's forced isolation, Richetti argues that "[f]ar from being an ideal, isolation was an imposed state. Crusoe . . . stays as sane as he can, under the circumstances, but his longing for companionship and community is constant" (101). At this point, it is necessary to note Robinson Crusoe's opinions on solitude which is reflected in Daniel Defoe's *Serious Reflections* (1720). In the section titled "Of Solitude," and narrated by Robinson Crusoe, he philosophises about isolation and stresses that human connection is not only essential but also imperative: "Man is a creature so form'd for society, that it may not only be said, that it is not good for him to be alone, but 'tis really impossible for him to be alone: We are so continually in need of one another; nay, in such absolute necessity

of assistance from one another . . .” (Defoe, *Serious Reflections* 12-13). Caliban’s representation in Crouch’s adaptation is quite analogous with this spiritual statement about loneliness by Crusoe. This also indicates that there is more in common between Robinson and Caliban’s experiences as loners on an island. Apparently, although *Robinson Crusoe* is not mainly about social connection, as it is seen from the narrator’s further account, he also believes that human connection is of utmost importance, which should also be seen as an integral part of Robinsonade narratives. However, despite this common point, another difference between Crouch’s work and conventional Robinsonades is that in the latter, the outsider needs to develop new skills to survive. In Shakespeare’s *Tempest*, too, Prospero goes through a similar process as he makes use of the resources of the island provided by Caliban. On the other hand, in Crouch’s work, Caliban does not need to develop any survival strategies other than managing to live on his own. In this regard, Crouch’s play transforms the idea in Robinsonade narratives that focus on the experience of the outsider. While the stranger needs the native’s help in conventional Robinsonades, here the native Caliban cannot rely on himself, and cannot survive without a stranger. Therefore, the concept of survival is transformed altogether as surviving is not necessarily related to finding food and other natural resources but forming human connection.¹

Another issue that makes it possible to discuss *I, Caliban* in comparison to the Robinsonades is civilisation. As a common aspect of this genre besides isolation and survival, civilisation defines the power relation between the characters. With regard to the idea of Caliban’s civilisation with the arrival of Prospero in *The Tempest*, it can be argued that Caliban,

an islander by birth, grew for his first twelve or so years without the benefits of European culture, religion and language; to Prospero he resembles the bestial wild man of medieval lore – unkempt, uneducated and thoroughly uncivilized. His ‘savagery’ is thus opposed to the ‘civility’ brought to the island by Europeans. (Vaughan and Vaughan 33)

In Robinsonade narratives, the protagonist confronts nature, and by making use of what he finds, initiates a civilising process in his surrounding. In *The*

1 Helen C. Scott also mentions another function of the emphasis on the lack of human connection in Crouch’s work by associating it with some of Britain’s current social problems as follows: “Caliban here stands in for the dispossessed generation, those who inherit the precarious employment and shredded social safety net of Austerity Britain” (n.p.).

Tempest, Prospero's books suggest a similar idea. There is much emphasis on his use of books and magic, which is extraordinary on the island setting. In *I, Caliban*, where the emphasis is on the native, he does not go through process of civilising even though there is an implication that he receives Prospero's education. In the play, it is indicated that Caliban sees Prospero's books as a way of civilisation as he asserts that Prospero "knows everything . . . he's read all these books and he's learnt to do MAGIC" (*I, Caliban* 60). In a longer version, Caliban talks about the irony of regarding Prospero as the civilised character when he is actually a usurper:

Only HE HAS BOOKS . . . And he knows how to read them. And I'm finding it hard enough to *pronounce* the word 'book', let alone read one. So he takes me under his wing. At first, he's like a man in front of a bear – all quiet, and soft and gentle; feeding me and helping me and lulling me, and stroking me and giving me water with berries in it, and playing me his music . . . and teaching me the words for sun and moon and me teaching him about the island. And then he gets the measure of me; then he gets into his stride and starts to treat me like a sullen dog and beats me and orders me and shouts at me and I become his servant even though I WAS THE KING. (*I, Caliban* 59-60)

Although Prospero represents knowledge and sophistication with his books, it is not certain whether he helps Caliban improve or not. Caliban's narration indicates that the so-called civilisation that Prospero left is of no use to him, which, in a sense, answers one of the crucial questions of *The Tempest*: "Does civilization uplift or corrupt?" (Vaughan and Vaughan 36). Civilisation is already problematised in *The Tempest* as Caliban curses Prospero's attempt to teach him his language with the words:

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (*The Tempest* I.ii.366–368)

In this adaptation, Caliban's loneliness and his inability to carry out his life with the so-called civilisation tools left behind suggest that civilisation, as it appears, hardly has an inspirational function. As Caliban mentions at the end of the play, "all that I am left with is the flotsam and jetsam, the detritus thrown up by the storm, his music, his beautiful music and a pile of books" (*I, Caliban* 68). One may get the idea that all these things that stand for Prospero's civilisation

as opposed to Caliban's savagery are actually useless, that is, what is supposed to civilise him, indeed, has no such function. With this alternative representation, *I, Caliban* also subverts the idea of civilisation as it is commonly treated in Robinsonade narratives.

Much as the themes of entrapment and isolation, freedom is also a dominant theme usually observed at the end of Robinsonade narratives. As Robinsonades focus on the experience of the outsider, freedom is also related to these characters. This is actually why no detail is given at the end of Shakespeare's play as to what happens to Caliban while Prospero and others leave the island. It is a happy ending for almost all characters except for Caliban. When Crouch's adaptation is considered in this respect, it is seen that the work also subverts this aspect of Robinsonades. In other words, freedom is a dominant concept in Robinsonade narratives, which is again used in an alternative sense in Caliban's experience as his definition of freedom is not common with the rest of the Robinsonades: "Freedom, eh. You spend all your life fighting for it. And when you get it, you don't know what to do with it" (*I, Caliban* 56).

Different from former postcolonial responses to *The Tempest*, *I, Caliban* exemplifies the various ways used in contemporary transformations of Shakespeare's plays with elements of postdramatic theatre. While the centralisation of Caliban makes it possible to consider the play as a work on identity politics, it is also possible to see the play as a variation of Robinsonade genre based on the formerly established similarity between *The Tempest* as the source text and *Robinson Crusoe*. The island setting, representation of Caliban as a captive, reference to the tempest as a natural disaster that took the others to the island, Caliban's survival experience, master-servant relationship and the idea of civilisation can be listed as basic common aspects of *I, Caliban* and Robinsonade narratives. While Crouch's adaptation follows some of the patterns related to Robinsonades, it transforms others. As the work can be discussed both in relation to Shakespeare's *Tempest* and the Robinsonade genre, this discussion also shows the possibility of reading an adaptation in relation to a work that is not initially intended as its source text.

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| Abstract

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A Postdramatic Engagement with Robinsonade Motifs in Tim Crouch's *I, Caliban*

Tim Crouch's *I, Caliban* is a postdramatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* included in a collection titled *I, Shakespeare* in which he recreates Shakespeare's most marginalised characters. The focus in this sequel adaptation is on Caliban who tries to survive after Prospero and all others have left the island. Different from the representation of Caliban in postcolonial reworkings of Shakespeare's play, Caliban, in this work, is not preoccupied with taking revenge. Instead, he emphasises the need for social interaction as he has been left alone on his island. Drawing on former structural comparisons of *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* based on their common themes such as the island setting, master-servant relationship, colonial expansion, and power politics, the aim of this paper is to discuss Crouch's adaptation as a transformation of common motifs of the Robinsonade in its attempt to respond to the ideological formations of Shakespeare's text. Among such transformations, the concept of

survival, for instance, is handled from the native's viewpoint in Crouch's work. Instead of the figure of the stranger who finds life on an unknown land difficult to cope with, this time, the native turns into a captive on the island though it is a familiar setting. Another motif used in an alternative manner is isolation, which is not presented as fuel for civilisation but as Caliban's psychological trauma, which he explores through storytelling as a postdramatic element. Apart from the narration, the play demonstrates other uses of postdramatic elements to suggest an isolated figure on an uninhabited island like the use of objects such as toy boats and tape of sea sounds. Instead of seeing Crouch's work as a postcolonial response to Shakespeare's work, this paper will try to investigate how the use of island setting and the theme of isolation can make it closer to a Robinsonade. By this means, it will also try to ask whether an adaptation could also be read in relation to a work that is not intended as its source text.

Keywords: postdramatic theatre, Robinsonade, Tim Crouch, *I, Caliban*, Shakespeare adaptation

| Abstrakt

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Postdramatyczne użycie motywów z robinsonady w *Ja, Kaliban* Tima Croucha

Ja, Kaliban Tima Croucha to postdramatyczna adaptacja *Burzy* Shakespeare'a wchodząca w skład zbioru *Ja, Shakespeare*, w którym odtworzone zostały najbardziej zmarginalizowane postaci z Szekspirowskich dzieł. Adaptacja koncentruje się na Kalibanie, który próbuje przetrwać po tym, jak Prospero i inni opuszczają wyspę. W odróżnieniu od postkolonialnych przeróbek sztuk Szekspirowskich w tej wersji Kaliban nie jest pochłonięty myślami o zemście. Jako że jest sam na wyspie, skupia się głównie na potrzebie interakcji społecznej. Na podstawie zarówno strukturalnych porównań pomiędzy *Burzą* a *Robinsonem Crusoe* Daniela Defoe, jak i podobnych tematów takich jak wyspa, relacja pan – sługa, ekspansja kolonialna i polityka władzy, celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie adaptacji Croucha jako przykładu transformacji typowych motywów dla robinsonady w odpowiedzi na ideologiczne adaptacje tekstów Shakespeare'a. Wśród tego typu transformacji wymienić można pojęcie przeżycia, które w dziele Croucha ukazane jest poprzez percepcję tubylców. Tym razem zamiast osoby obcego, który zmaga się z życiem na nieznanym terytorium, przedstawiona jest osoba tubylca, który staje się niewolnikiem na wyspie w znajomym sobie środowisku. Izolacja jest kolejnym motywem użytym w sposób alternatywny.

Nie jest ona przedstawiona jako stymulator wprowadzania cywilizacji tylko jako trauma psychologiczna Kalibana, którą analizuje za pomocą opowieści jako element postdramatyczny. Nie tylko narracja jest tu wykorzystana w inny sposób. Inne postdramatyczne elementy to między innymi izolacja na niezamieszkałej wyspie, która wzmocniona jest zabawkowymi stateczkami i odgłosem morza. W artykule odchodzę od analizy dzieła Croucha jako postkolonialnej odpowiedzi na sztukę Shakespeare'a. Skupiam się natomiast na tym, w jaki sposób użycie motywów wyspy i izolacji zbliża dzieło do robinsonady. Kolejnym celem jest odpowiedź na pytanie, czy adaptacja może też być odczytana w relacji do takiego dzieła, które niekoniecznie jest pierwotnym tekstem źródłowym.

Słowa kluczowe: teatr postdramatyczny; robinsonada; Tim Crouch; *Ja, Kaliban*; adaptacja Shakespeare'a

| Bio

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