Timed Writing One – “The Tempest” Film Analysis

In the film adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Julie Taymor uses makeup design, staging, and emotional acting to explore the concepts of colonialism introduced in the original play. The enslaved monster Caliban is portrayed by a black actor but the costume department decided to texture his skin and add splotches of white makeup all over his body. As stated in the article “Acknowledging Things of Darkness: Postcolonial Criticism of *The Tempest*”, many critics argue over whether Caliban is intended to represent colonized Native Americans in the New World or enslaved Africans in the Mediterranean Sea. Due to Taymor’s design of the character, Caliban has many skin colors; he does not represent any one single race. He represents all who have been colonized. Caliban represents the colonized in other ways as well. When we are first introduced to Caliban in the scene where Prospera seeks him out, Caliban stands on the higher ground which would normally imply that he has the authority. He should be the one in charge: this island is his native home and he is well-suited for its environment. This is not the case. Prospera stands lower and is very obviously a foreigner yet she ironically has all the power in this interaction. This relationship reflects the one between colonists and natives peoples. Prospera holds the power because of the unfair advantage of the magic of her staff which can be compared to the superior weapons and technology that European colonists used to dominate natives. Like many adversaries, Prospera and Caliban do not have the most respectful communication. They take on equally menacing stances when speaking with each other. They do not talk so much as rain curses upon each other. Caliban starts the insult throwing by hoping a hot “southwestern wind on you [Prospera] and blister you all o’er”. Prospera continues the trend by threatening, “For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps, side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up". This exchange continues back and forth until Caliban eventually yields. The slave yields to the master, just like in history, because the master can actually inflict the punishments he or she threatens the slave with. Caliban curses Propera in a fit of anger but know it is not wise to push his master too far. This relationship of heaping ill wishes on each other is typical of a master and slave communicating. However, just like Caliban and Prospera, just like the slave and the master, natives nearly always back down for fear of the colonists acting on their threats. This emotional acting, in combination with makeup design and staging, serves to touch on the concepts of colonialism present in Shakespeare’s play The *Tempest* and its film adaptation.