



The Ambivalence of the Colonial Project in The Tempest

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare in his last play *The Tempest* (1610-11) dramatizes Prospero to display a cultural consciousness and a way of seeing in which the self is highly exalted and ennobled while the other is degradingly condemned as the wicked and the rapist savage. Such an ideology is conspicuously presented through demonstrating two extremely contradictory characters of Prospero, the dethroned Duke from Milan and Caliban, the native citizen of the island Prospero controls. Prospero is presented as the wise and the powerful duke who can control not only human and spirits but also nature and natural phenomena. He is the rational, civilized and the benevolent agent with humanitarian concern whose source of power is magic that he uses for good tasks in contrast to the malignant magic power possessed by his rival Sycorax, Caliban's mother. Soon Prospero starts to show irascible, tetchy characteristics and furious rage in dealing with the natives he controls by the power of his books of magic. At an early stage of the play, the distinction between Prospero as a benign power and Sycorax, the foul and abhorred evil witch is breaking down.

Keywords: Self, other, ideology, usurpation, representation, ambivalence, magic power.

1. Introduction

Shakespeare's hierarchal representation concerning people of other world invites the reader to think about the problematic issue of race, culture and an ideology that detriment one's ways of seeing concerning the other and the complexity of the pattern of white and black. This ideology, and during the Elizabethan time, has dictated the English relationships, and European in general, with people of other race and urged a system of representation based not on the assumption of difference but rather on the assumption of superiority and inferiority in classification,

That I am Prospero, and that very duke
Which was thrust from of Milan; who most strangely
Upon this shore, where you were wrack'd, was landed,
To be the lord on't). [*The Tempest*]

(V.i.159-62)

Prospero is presented as the wise, and the powerful agent whose capability exceeds that of an ordinary mortal. He is capable of controlling nature and natural phenomena like raising storm and roaring the sea, cable of reading people minds and inner thoughts. He is the caring father and the forgiving person who replace his revenge and fury against those who wronged him once by usurping his kingdom with forgiveness, mercy and grace. He raises storm and roars the sea in his usurpers not to harm them but rather to bring them to forgiveness and to teach them grace and repentance. Yet this God-like character soon and in early scenes of the play he loses the audiences' sympathy at displaying aspects of irascibility, tetchiness and unjustified "unmitigated rage" in dealing with the natives of the island he controls who turns them into slaves by means of threat and nightmare to serve him and be at his disposal. However, this legendary Prospero who controls and enslaves Ariel that "is more a figure of vast suggestiveness than a character possessing an inwardness available to us" (Bloom 1994) is faced by Caliban's disturbing resistance, curse and accusation that drive him atrocious and resentful. A sub human, a low creation and "mis-shapen knave" (V.i.268) like Caliban is able to provoke the God-like character and deprive Prospero from his heavenly wisdom and serenity by dragging him down to the level of a common revengeful and resentful human being,

For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
 Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up, urchins
 Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
 All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd
 As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
 Than bees that made 'em (I.ii.327-32)

When Caliban, the 'uncivilized' turns the confrontation with his oppressor into a debate of reason and logic, of which he shows considerable aptitude, and reminds Prospero of his rightful inheritance of the island through his mother, "This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st fom me." (I.ii.334-35), Prospero, fails to refute Caliban's accusations and fails to convince the audience with a simple reply that discredits the 'savage's claim. The audience's doubt about Prospero is doubly sharpened in Prospero's incapability to respond to Caliban's voice of reason and logic. Audience's suspicion grows greater at Prospero's twisting the argument to a non-related digression that adds nothing but a deep ratification to Caliban's claim. No doubt Prospero tries to avoid engaging with Caliban's claim concerning the latter's rightful inheritance of the island. Prospero knows that he usurps the island from Caliban by force and intimidation. He is hysterical, furious and spiteful because Caliban's claim stands on a firm ground (Barker & Hulme 2001).

1.2 Power

1.2.1 The Oppressive Power

No one in the island Prospero controls is detached from his subjugation even Miranda for whom he claims to do “nothing but in care of” (I.ii.14) and whom is presented as the one with “piteous heart” and Christ-like nature due to her sensing others’ miseries and pain, “O, I have suffered/ With those that I saw suffer!” (I. ii. 5-6); “O the cry did knock against my heart” (I.ii.8-9). Prospero’s relationship with Miranda is not an uncomplicated ordinary and simple relationship like any relationship between a father and his daughter (Orgel 2008). Miranda is employed by her father as “an object of exchange between Prospero and Ferdinand” (Williamson 1986) to guarantee Prospero’s return to Milan by setting a political alliance and personal interest. Miranda’s repressed feeling, maybe for both hers and that of Caliban’s, finds its way out to burst into emotional words exposing what actually dwells in her heart against her father despotic control. A sensitive and caring character like Miranda no doubt would have a profound sympathy with Caliban’s suffering as the oppressed slave whose land has been taken by force and who has been excluded from human company by confining him into “the hard rock.” No doubt the sense of Miranda’s sympathy with Caliban grew slowly, but steadily, during the twelve years of her staying in the island especially he is the only one in the island with whom most of the time she used to spend as a companion. And as a child [Miranda], when she arrived to the island she was three and “he probably had to carry her on his back, the way we have seen African servants showing their affection to European children” (Lamming 1986). Twelve years of companion must have rooted a strong bound between Caliban and Miranda. What strengthens and crystallizes this bound to develop is the compatibility and the symmetry between Caliban and Miranda; both are motherless, both are lonely and ignorant and have no knowledge of the world beyond the island, both are naïve and lured by appearances and both are controlled by Prospero’s authority. Prospero’s totalitarian authority and oppressive control can be seen vividly through his way of instructing all the inhabitants of the island under his control. More related indication in this concern is the way he addresses Miranda, whom he is supposed to love as being his motherless and only daughter, while he is recounting his past to her, “ope thine ear. / Obey, and be attentive” (I.ii.37–8); “Dost thou attend me?” (line78); “Thou attend’st not!” (line 87); “Dost thou hear?” (line 106).

1.2.2 The Credibility of the Power of Magic

Prospero’s power is dependent on the existence of magic books which the audience were not given a single evidence of their material existence in the play as whenever Prospero wants to consult them, he goes offstage, “I’ll to my book, / For yet ere supper-time must I perform / Much business” (III.i.94-96). Prospero books of magic, mentioned in the play four times, have no material existence. Audience never been exposed to these books by sight or touch. They are always off-stage and elsewhere whenever Prospero speaks about (Kearney 2002). Such power is situational and its efficiency is conditioned with some “fetish” or spells—resemble the fetish and spells the colonizer has always accused the colonized of. These books of spells/ or a book cannot function beyond the space of the “phantasmagoria” it

creates because it “is a fetish that charms but whose power is the more invulnerable in that we do not seem able to see it or touch it. But when the book goes, so does Prospero” (Kearney 2002). Prospero usurps Caliban’s island by the power of magic and sorcery, “... I am subject to a tyrant, a, / sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island.” (III.ii.40-42), and “I say, by sorcery he got this isle; / From me he got it.”(III.ii.51-52). No matter whatsoever distinction between Prospero’s and Sycorax’s magical powers was made by the presenter as two different powers, one is benevolent and the other is evil, yet both forces spring from the same demonian and evil sources. Such art of illusion, apart from being disobedient to the Christian church, is used to shake the order of nature and environment to the extent of raising storm and wakening the dead from their graves. Such an unlimited human power, which cannot be possessed but only by God as it is “a role that Christianity reserves for God and for Jesus” (Bloom 1994) has been used and employed in destructive and abhorred activities. No doubt, evil and iniquitous acts lead to a big loss and despair of which there is no way out but by much “prayers” to be relived and freed from its heavy and repugnant burden. Such power that is used to conduct such acts of despair and destruction is neither real nor benevolent with benign or good intention at all.

All theories generally agree that all forms of magic are considered as evil or black magic. George Lyman Kittredge argues the notion of white and black magic, “But the distinction (white and black magic) is, in practice, often ignored or forgotten, since the same person may use the arts of sorcery for good or for ill”(Kittredge 1956). The Christian church Prospero obsequiously seeks relief from his “despair” by “prayer, condemns magical operations even when they aim at good. People of England and Scotland showed common disdain and the ardent rejection of all kinds of sorcery. Such disdain and abhorrence reached its highest level during the reign of James I that made those who involve in magical practices socially repudiated because they were seen by secular and religious society as evil and immoral. The merciless practices of hunting these people by King James I and people of England and Europe in general was of deep concern of both the court and the public. In 1603 the number of witches and sorcerers increased to a level that aroused discomfort and vexation among people as well the English parliament which ordered that all witches and sorcerers are to be arrested and imprisoned for trail (Seligmann 1971).

King James I, during his reign the play was initially staging in celebrating his daughter’s wedding, was the sinister figure in hunting such practices and “encouraged and patronized witch finders and was always eager for fresh victims”(Kittredge 1956). He showed deep disdain and detestation of magical practices and developed momentous zeal to eradicate all sorts of witchcrafts, sorcery and necromancy and their practitioners and even those who “consult them” (Larmer, 1985) in England as he did in Scotland. This was publicly recognized especially during and after the trials of 1590 for treason by sorcery when his throne was threatened by the Earl of Bothwell conspiracy and a group of witches against the king’s life. It “was alleged that over 300 witches had gathered at various times to perform treason against the king” (Lamer 1985). The irony in this story is that the witches were supposed to have raised storms while the King was at the sea, a compatible act to that of what Prospero did to those who wronged him. Such analogical resemblance between the act of Bothwell’s witches and Prospero’s act against his enemies necessitates a serious consideration and contesting survey.

1.2.3 Prospero's Benevolence

What are Prospero's beneficent and benign contributions during his long stay on the island? Can we locate any civil or human traces in his behaviours with all those who are under his control or with the environment itself? A human aspect in man is to take humanitarian responsibilities of relieving others by supporting, defending and enhancing people's affairs as well as the environment. Usurping and enslaving others, pursuing the art of "rough magic", ecological subversion, disseminating fear and threat of re-imprisonment and torture cannot be considered at any level as aspects of civilization and Christianity. Do not we have here an ignominious legacy resembles that of all the rapacious colonial powers throughout history that eventually ended disgracefully? Why then don't we have a logical and reasonable ending to such power like that of Prospero's? All Prospero's aspects and characteristics in the play are neither benevolent nor pleasant or accepted (Patterson 1989).

Being "The prince of power" (I.ii.54) in Milan, which is presented in an equivocal way in the play, is insufficient to satisfy Prospero's megalomania and the obsession of gaining unmitigated power. He finds insubstantial pride in distorting the environment and takes delight in hunting people with his spirits of dogs and hounds in the same way the Spanish hunted the natives of the New World with dogs that Bartholomew Las Casas talked about the viciousness of the "civilized man" in treating the "uncivilized" (qut. Skura 1989).

The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous wins,
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault
 Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder
 Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
 With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluc'd up
 The pine and cedar: graves at my command
 Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
 By my so potent Art ...

(V.i.42-50)

He demonstrates the destructive power in man who seeks to go beyond his limits and challenges God's authority. A challenge that leads us to very central questions in this concern and these are: why Antonio refused to repent at the end of the play? Why there is not a single reference to people of Milan from other witnesses rather than Prospero's recounting? Why Prospero referred to his wife casually in the whole play while she is supposed to be his loving wife who is "a piece of virtue" and the closest to his memories which should be brimful with her presence in his exile? Is Prospero really loved by his people and all those around him, including his wife? Is Antonio really the wicked brother who usurped Prospero's dukedom and shattered the peace and happiness of people of Milan and Prospero's family? If Prospero's rule over Milan, and his family, was wise, parenting with amiable memories of happiness and warm attachment, why then Miranda's memory is without any glimpse of her mother's presence while she does remember four or five women who were taking care of her as a child?

And rather like a dream than an assurance
That my remembrance warrants. Had I not
Four or five women once that attend me. (I.ii.45-47)

If freeing the native Ariel from his confinement of “a cloven pine” is considered as benevolent act, Ariel after long years of compliant servitude and threat wishes he never be freed at all,

I prithee,
Remember I have done thee worthy service;
Told the no lies, made no mistakings, serv'd
Without or grude or grumblings: thou did promise
To bate me a full year.

(I.ii.246-49)

However, freeing Ariel from his confinement is not due to the sympathetic sense and philanthropic concern in Prospero but it is stimulated by a utilitarian incentive of servitude because “Ariel and Caliban are two agents of labour and public relations without whom he [Prospero] would be helpless”(Lamming 1992). Teaching Caliban the English language is not an ethical commitment or humanitarian responsibility and devotion; it is to serve Prospero’s colonial purposes in strengthening his control on his subject people through his language and rules (Hawkes 2001). Or perhaps teaching Caliban language is only a scheme that is highly and cunningly orchestrated to awake temptation in the sensuous Caliban by alluring and dragging this naïve and natural creature closer to the trap of raping Miranda to make the scenario of the other wickedness and betrayal dexterous. Otherwise how is it logically reasonable to accept that such a wise duke who learns from his mistakes—his mistake of “trusting” a wicked brother by leaving his dukedom to him unguarded— and has the accessibility even to people’s minds allows to bring a lusty slave who cannot control his instinctual urges like Caliban closer to a beautiful teenage female whose knowledge of the outside world cannot go beyond the existence of two men in her world, here father and Caliban?

1.2.4 The Colonizer’s Language

The colonial Prospero realizes that Caliban’s “gabbling” language resonates specific culture and identity which are seen by the colonizer as a source of dire threat that should be contained. For Prospero this “gabblish” represents a ‘Calibanian’ identity and a sovereign past that should be denied and erased in order to impose the colonial “dictation” and to validate the notion of the absence of the colonized’s culture. Such colonial denial of the other’s singularity represents “characteristic trope by which European articulate their authority over land to which they could have no conceivable legitimate claim” (Baker & Hulm 1996). So, and to enforce the idea of the absence of non-white culture and heritage, Prospero dismisses Caliban’s language and replaces by a new set of instructions that is called Prosperian, so to speak, in features and corruptive in function. Such set of ‘globalizing’ Caliban awards Prospero the right to interfere at anytime and to anywhere in defense of what

is called in our time as the national security. George Lamming argues in this concern: “This gift of language meant not English, in particular, but speech and concept as a way, a method, a necessary avenue towards areas of the self which could not be reached in any other way” (Lamming 1992). Prospero in teaching Caliban the English language is employing the strategy of erasing the past of the native people, like any colonial power, as this past functions as the reminder of independence, singularity and a history where the colonized was a free and sovereign. For Prospero, this singularity is a threat because it provides Caliban with a specific identity and the privilege of equality which invalidate the confine and bondage imposed by Prospero as a colonizer against Caliban as a colonized. Thomas Cartelli writes in relation to this idea,

In *The Tempest*, what appears to disturb Prospero even more than Caliban’s foiled attempt to violate Miranda’s honour is Caliban’s insistence on recalling his former sovereignty, his repeated effort to lay claim to a history and inheritance which imply a state of equality at odds with his assign status as a slave. It is in the face of Caliban’s assertion that “I am all the subject that you have,/ Which first was my king” (and not to any denial of his attempt to rape Miranda) that Prospero responds, “Thou most lying slave,/ Whom stripes may move, not kindness” (I.ii.343-4,346-7)

2. Conclusion

Shakespeare whether is influenced by reading the account of the Bermuda wreck pamphlets of 1609 or he is directed by a highly organized discourse through which the text is produced, *The Tempest* is not a fixed text in history or has no dimension beyond the moment of its production. As fiction, *The Tempest* is a text designed to assert an antithetical structure to normalize the imperial rule and to canonize the colonial enterprise. Such structure imposed arbitrarily and forcibly in the life of people and against their will is doomed to failure and contradiction becomes it is “an intervention in an ambivalence and even a contradictory discourse” (Brown 1985).

One of the ambivalence and contradiction of the colonial discourse *The Tempest* represents can be seen clearly in the cause which disposes and evicts Prospero from his dukedom. His obsessive indulgence in books of magic to master the craft of sorcery which led to dethrone and dispose Prospero is the same reason that accords him the ultimate and insurmountable authority and limitless power in another land and over another race. Another aspect of contradiction presented in the play is the issue of punishment and reward within the mentality of the colonial powers. If Prospero believes in the absolute righteousness in shipwrecking his usurpers and bring them to judgment to accomplish justice, then who would shipwreck him as being the usurper of Caliban’s island? If the “Providence divine” that dispatches Prospero ashore safe in a “rotten carcass of a butt, not rigg’d” (I.ii.146) after involving in studies of “liberal Art” (I.ii.73) is the same Divine authority that rewards him a safe and honorable return home after years of practicing oppression and usurpation what rewards can be awarded to those who have been enslaved, oppressed and treated like animals just because they welcome a brother-betrayed stranger and offer him home? If Prospero and the Western civilization belief in the absolute and universal justice of the Christian faith that rewards the beneficent and punishes the sinner, so how Caliban would be judged after years

of injustice, slavery and mental and physical deterioration enacted by the ‘messengers of civility and humanity’ against him? After twelve years of practicing colonialism, violent acts, intimidation, torture and notorious exploitation, who really in need of “seek [ing] for grace”?

In the second scene of the play, Miranda and the audience are being informed, by Prospero only, about the acts of injustice enacted against him by his ‘perfidious’ brother and his assistance who usurped Prospero’s kingdom. At hearing Prospero’s version of the tale of his past we, as audience, after witnessing the black turbulent waters that filled Prospero’s usurpers with awe and panic, are highly gratified by the poetic justice that righteously punishes the malignant. This relief turns out to be a shock and indignation at witnessing Prospero’s expropriation of Caliban’s island under the pretext of Caliban’s attempt to rape Miranda. If Prospero has the right to punish Caliban and dispossess him from his rightful inheritance as a revenge for only a foiled attempted rape, which is seen by some critics not as “an instance of the lust of savages but of . . . edenic innocence”(Orgel 1987) so, Prospero’s brother and people of Milan have more than one right to punish Prospero by dethroning him from Milan for committing, not an attempt to commit, two deadly violations which are much more pernicious in their effects. The first is the non venial violation of the Christian faith by studying books of magic and practicing sorcery which is condemned by the church and the public whether it is beneficent or malignant because both emerge from contacting with demons. The second violation is the dereliction of his duty as the supreme authority of the dukedom because of his obsessive engagement in studying liberal arts of which King James I warned his son and heir not to seek (Orgel 2008). Such negligence of governmental duties which is seen as a violation of moral duty urgently necessitates dethroning Prospero because he becomes a nonqualified to rule as the head of the state putting the whole country at stake as he “And to my state grew stranger” (I.ii.74). He becomes unqualified in the same way as that alleged by the Western conscience concerning Caliban’s non-qualification to rule his island. George Lamming argues Prospero’s dubiety in this concern: “we begin to distrust this duke. Why should we believe, in the light of all that has happened now, that the people of Milan really loved him. For it is a difficult love: the love of a dispossessed crowd for a rich and absent idol” (Lamming 1992).

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The Tempest vs. Robinson Crusoe- The Ambivalence of Mastery â†. by stperry1 | 18 January 2011 Â· 1:42 am. â†“ Jump to Comments.Â In The Tempest Prospero enslaves Caliban and treats him as though he is essentially worthless. Although both these individuals are trapped on the same island, they are portrayed completely differently and lead very different lives. Prospero acts far superior and as though he knows so much more than Caliban simply because he is of more pure European descent.Â They really portray the colonial expeditions that were occurring at the time and expeditions in the future. As opposed to accepting the native peopleâ€™s, the European man always sees himself as the superior being and the native as savage. Colonialism in the Tempest - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or read online for free.Â MEREDITH ANNE SKURA MANY YEARS IDEALIST READINGS OF THE TEMPEST presented Prospero as an exemplar timeless human of values. They emphasized the way in which his hard-earned the "magical" powers enable him to re-educate shipwrecked to Italians, to heal their civil war-and, even more important, triumph over his own vengefulness forgiving enemies; they emphasized the way he has by reconciled new achieves, if not a wholly "brave," at least a harmoniously world.