

The tempest

Literature



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In "The Tempest" Shakespeare, William. Graff, Gerald and James Phelan, ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins. 2000. read pp. 91 - 108. Then find a critical article pertaining to the play (you may use the library data base or the internet) and read that article.

Discuss the internet article you read in relation to Graff and Phelan's debate between the Postcolonial Professor and the Traditionalist Professor. How does your internet article relate to this argument Then discuss what your own personal view in this debate is. Are you are postcolonialist or a traditionalist

I am looking for a well-supported opinion, you know, critical thinking. Write a convincing argument.

Literature has always had a dual function. For some, its primary function has been to entertain and amuse. For others, it is a source of information about the times we live in and those that preceded ours. It provides us with a historical context for certain events that we witness, it educates us and it sometimes informs our opinions about our world. It is exactly this duality in The Tempest that literary theorists have been grappling with for the past two decades.

The Tempest has often been described as a magical play. It was first performed in the year 1611 and is considered Shakespeare's final play. It contains a mixture of everything required to create an instant success- Intrigue, conspiracy, betrayal and love. It also deals with certain issues that became apparent only during the early part of the 20th Century.

In the debate under study in this essay, the English professor claims that, "it's a disservice to our students when we teachers use great literature as an excuse for our pet political agendas." However, in our day and age, it would <https://assignbuster.com/the-tempest/>

be difficult to ignore the issues that a play like *The Tempest* explores. As the Comparative Literature professor puts it, the play 'practically reeks with political struggle in every scene'

The play is a text about nascent colonization. This is evident from Prospero's treatment of Caliban and his usurpation of the latter's island. The theme of usurpation runs through the play. It is a vicious cycle. The dispossessed Prospero becomes the conqueror when he takes over Caliban's island. This is one of the central points of the debate between the two professors. While the English professor refuses to 'politicize' the play, the Comparative Literature professor views it as an instance of imperialism.

The English professor's refusal to place the play in a postcolonial context seems cowardly. He claims that one must not impose 20th century concerns on the play. He believes 16th century audiences viewed the play only for what it is. They did not concern themselves with sub-texts within the play. While this may be true, we must remember that plays like *The Tempest* influenced 16th century attitudes and behaviors towards the natives of colonized countries to some extent.

In the play, Caliban is the dispossessed native. Prospero manages to make Caliban submissive, first through education and then through force. It is a reflection of the history of almost every colonized nation. Colonization first began with the arrival of missionaries who came to evangelize the natives through religion and education. They were followed by their rulers who took over completely and denied the natives freedom in their own countries.

In his essay, *National and Colonial Education in Shakespeare's The Tempest*, Allen Carey-Webb states that Prospero came to Caliban's island in the role of a teacher-colonizer. By educating Caliban, Prospero empowered him. Once
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the pupil began to understand, the master's intentions, he rebelled. By educating Caliban, Prospero allows him to think for himself. By teaching him language, Prospero allows Caliban to curse him in his own tongue and as a result of this Prospero has to subdue Caliban through force.

According to Caliban, without his books Prospero would be just like him. To Caliban, the source of Prospero's power is in his books. Therefore as Carey-Webb puts it, " At stake in the struggle between Caliban and Prospero is ownership of books, the technology of power/magic and the implements of educational practice."

Education is the means to gaining power and in the hands of Prospero it is a potent tool. He educates Caliban to think less of himself. By making Caliban believe in his own inferiority, Prospero has already triumphed over him. It is the first step towards absolutism.

Prospero is the wisest and most manipulative individual on the island. He engineers events to suit his own needs. Education is central to Prospero's success. He has enough power to harness the forces of nature and unleash them as he wishes. Through his knowledge of magic, he manages to release Ariel from his captivity and make him his slave. It also seems like Prospero does not wish for others to be as knowledgeable as him. This becomes evident when he destroys his books at the end of the play, ostensibly to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands.

The play also affirms various hierarchies. In the debate between the two professors, the English professor says Caliban deserved his punishment because he was trying to defy the Elizabethan concept of the Great Chain of Beings. He implies that Caliban must always be Prospero's inferior and must never fight back. Since Prospero is infinitely superior to Caliban, it is his right

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to demand his dukedom back from Antonio. It is in fact Prospero's prerogative to challenge Antonio. Yet Caliban is denied the same right. Any attempts on Caliban's part to win back his island will be futile because he simply cannot challenge Prospero's authority. As Carey-Webb puts it, " The final lesson of Caliban's education is an acceptance of the inevitable failure of revolt. In his last scene, Caliban appears in scraping submission to Prospero's authority."

Caliban is a lowborn savage who must work and will be rewarded only according to Prospero's wishes. He is not allowed to fight back. He only gets his island back when Prospero leaves it at the end of the play. Until then he must work for Prospero.

Hence we see that it is impossible to read the play for what it is, especially if the reader belongs to a postcolonial nation. When one's history has been full of similar instances of imperialism, one cannot dismiss them in a cavalier fashion. Perhaps the best we can do is to acknowledge the dual role of such texts. It would be utter folly on our part to not address issues that appear in them. They will only continue to appear in more blatant forms. It sounds ironic, but by neglecting to take notice we might end up encouraging future Kiplings, Conrads and maybe even Shakespeares.

Sources:

Carey-Webb, Allen. National and Colonial Education in Shakespeare's The Tempest. 1999. <http://www.shu.ac.uk/emls/05-1/cwebtemp.html>

The Tempest. Shakespeare, William. Graff, Gerald and James Phelan, ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins. 2000.