

Caliban's Use of Language in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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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!

(Act I, Scene II, *The Tempest*)

Richard Eyre, a distinguished English director said, "The life of the plays is in the language, not alongside it, or underneath it. Feelings and thoughts are released at the moment of speech. An Elizabethan audience would have responded to the pulse, the rhythms, the shapes, sounds, and above all meanings, within the consistent ten- syllable, five-stress lines of blank verse. They were an audience who listened".

(*Shakespeare's Language* 4)

At the outset, the audience has to make a distinction between some modern connotations of the word 'language' and those current in Shakespeare's day, when language was neither neutral nor purely verbal. A neutral view of language is typified by such statements as Saussure's remark:

From the excursions made into regions bordering upon linguistics, there emerges a negative lesson, but one which...supports the fundamental thesis of this course: the only true object of study in linguistics is the language, considered in itself and for its own sake. (*Course in General Linguistics*)

Such an empirical approach was alien to the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, where all concerns of life were moralized, including language, in so far as most writers looked for ways of integrating their subject with the current dominant Christian concepts.

Language and knowledge has been the key to power on the island in the play. Prospero is a well educated man, and has many books, which provided him his magical supremacy. He is the ruler of the island

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and has a control on many creatures living there. He possesses the power to cause weather to vary and also the fate of the people who are shipwrecked on the island.

On the basis of language, the courtiers and the natives have been sharply contrasted in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In postcolonial terms, the island conspirators, the drunken sailors, Stephano and Trinculo and above all Caliban whose actions are based on combination of gross and vulgar language are able to manifest their frustration against unquestioned rule of Prospero. Their anarchic instincts are less the result of reasoning, the privilege of their supposed betters than the product of drink which obliterates in them the true sense of their situation which are released by the uncivilized language. Their language seemed to be a mixture of poetic and absurd which was natural and energetic, posing a question and a threat to the colonizers like Prospero who by his courtly language tries to crush the revolt of the natives.

Caliban expresses his desires to rule the island in place of Prospero which is expressed in his speeches. On the other hand, in the words of Gonzalo the God's are invoked to crown the new born vision of humanity with an appropriate symbol of royalty: the 'Gods' which brings the harmony in the play.

The present paper aims to express the desires of the natives (Caliban in this play) to claim freedom from the colonizers through the language of Shakespeare in *The Tempest*.

The role of language in the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare is of great significance. To Miranda and Prospero, the use of language is a means to know oneself but Caliban does not have the same vision. Prospero taught Caliban to speak, but instead of creating the feeling of empowerment from language, Caliban reacts to it in a rebellious manner. It is language itself that not only intimates him the intent to which he differs from Prospero and Miranda but also how they have altered him. Language also gives Caliban the impression of how he was when he wasn't a slave. He criticizes Prospero for 'civilizing' him because in doing so he took away his freedom.

Caliban's character, in relation to Prospero's, expresses the actual relations between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of settlers and natives, Caliban being the native of the island, and Prospero, the settler. Caliban is introduced as a "villain", "slave" and even a "tortoise". He and his mother, Sycorax, a witch, were the only inhabitants of the island. After Sycorax's death, Prospero with Miranda settled on the island and enslaved Caliban. Caliban offered them the knowledge of the island and in return, they taught him language. He is described as a "monster", "thing of darkness" and "a freckled whelp". He is intended to represent the "savage" of the island by his appearance and language. Caliban extremely resents Prospero's actions, as he says,

...and here you sty me

In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me

The rest o' th' island. (Act I Scene II)

Caliban shows remorse towards Prospero as Prospero tries to explain his gift of language. In return, Caliban says, "...The red plague rid you for learning me your language!" In translation, Caliban wished the plague to destroy Prospero for offering Caliban anything of his.

Heminge and Condell, Shakespeare's first editors knew his work and praised his 'easiness' but of a special kind:

What he thought, he vttered with that easinesse, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. (*Explorations in Shakespeare's Language* 4)

The theme of language is attached to Shakespeare's search for a definition of man in this 'mankind' play. A language experiment is plotted, given that the concept of language in the Renaissance includes non-verbal communication and that language was believed to mirror the speaker's mind. The first experiment isolates the unique human ingredient, defined by its absence at the demarcation lines of the human: both the spirit Ariel and the demi-devil Caliban lack identification with the feelings of others. Thus they lack 'the very virtue of compassion'

Caliban's involuntary cursing had been fore grounded to give notice to the audience that moral judgements are to be given to speech styles. Comparisons with the other swearers, the courtiers, were thus

established, and contrasts with Miranda's language were made, since much was made of their common ground in language, which Caliban failed to acquire. This was the basis of a language of virtue and vice which the audience were made aware of.

Shakespeare staged a wide range of non-verbal language. For instance kisses, singing and tears all came together in the marriage of Mortimer and his Welsh wife, who shared no language, whereas the articulate Hotspur and Kate found it hard to express their affection and share their thoughts. The 'excellent dumb discourse' of gesture was admired in *The Tempest*, and Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* was eloquent in silence.

The morality of language should go beyond the regulative, proposing, in an ideal world of love and an untrammelled interchange in the language of the spirit. Donne points out that the holy ghost 'needed not to have invested, and taken the form of a Tongue, if he would have had thee think it enough to heare the Spirit at home...'. Charity reverberates beyond 'the tongues of men and of angels' and deeds speak loudly, as do the charitable acts of Gonzalo in *The Tempest*. Also tears and music win instant response according to Renaissance theories of communication. They are, indeed, among the most engaging of the rhetorical means the play employs, in so far as a play is a communicative act, as well as an 'imitation of an action' (*Language As Social Semiotic; The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* 17)

Though Shakespeare makes it clear that there is not an inborn, natural language, since Caliban is able to acquire it, yet Caliban is made to state that his use of language is thereafter involuntary. He cannot help swearing. The Elizabethan commonplace that language shows the heart is thus activated for the audience. Our first piece of information is that people of noble birth have brought him up. His main speech companion, Miranda, 'from a good womb on her father's side and 'a piece of virtue' on the mother's, is also ideally educated:

And here Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit
 Than other princes can that have more time
 For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful (Act I Scene II).

Prospero - the most learned man of his generation has given all his time and care to the education of Miranda since coming to the island. She in turn took the trouble herself to teach the much older but languageless Caliban. From the beginning, Miranda is defined as virtuous as well as noble and educated. Her immediate characteristics are seen in two aspects of her language, in that she shows 'the very virtue of compassion' in her tears (1.2.27), which are part of body language, and in the directness of her speech. This directness, judged unfeminine, in her speech to Caliban:

Abhorred slave, Which any print of goodness wilt not take,
 Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
 Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
 One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
 Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
 A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
 With words that made them known. But thy vile race –
 Though thou didst learn - had that in't which good natures
 Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
 Deservedly confined into this rock,
 Who hadst deserved more than a prison (Act I Scene II).

Caliban demonstrates by cursing that he has not acquired certain aspects of Miranda's linguistic quality. Miranda defines his swearing and unrepentant desire to rape her as hereditary, according to the OED definition of 'race' as 'natural or inherited disposition'. Furthermore, Caliban is made to assert the involuntary nature of his speech as he enters cursing, at his next appearance:

His spirits hear me
 Awlyet I needs must curse (Act II Scene II).

Swearing, resulting from anger, is too uncontrolled an expression of the passions. But Caliban cannot morally change for the better, while the others can and must change, as human beings specifically striving for grace:

- A devil, a born devil, on whose nature

Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,

Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost (Act IV Scene I).

Caliban's last words "and I'll be wise hereafter, And seek for grace" (Act V Scene I). are in the nature of a joke.

"The value of *The Tempest* is exquisitely, in its refinement of power, its renewed artistic freshness and roundness, its mark as of a distinction unequalled, on the whole... in any predecessor" said Henry James. Shakespeare thought the story "a thing of naught" but the style, he believed, demonstrated "its last disciplined passion of curiosity" (*Shakespeare's Language* 284)

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