

## [Lecture] Shakespeare and Colonialism

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## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

*The following are two special lectures given at the Institute, respectively, the first by Professor E. W. Ives of the University of Birmingham on the occasion of his and Mrs. Ives' courtsey visit to Kansai University on 11th May 2000, and the second by Professor Mimi Reisel Gladstein of the University of Texas At El Paso on her visit to Kansai University on 17th May 2000.*

### 第 1 回研究座談会並びに第 1 回特別研究会の記録

平成 12 年度第一回研究座談会並びに第一回特別研究会がそれぞれ本研究所会議室で次の通り開催された。

研究座談会。平成 12 年 5 月 11 日。16 時 20 分より。

テーマ 「シェイクスピアとコロニアリズム」

講 師 英国バーミンガム大学歴史学教授 E. W. Ives 氏

司 会 安川 昱

本学とバーミンガム大学が姉妹校関係を樹立するにあたり、バーミンガム大学側の代表の一人としてご尽力いただいた、当時 Pro-Vice Chancellor であったアイヴズ教授夫妻が、数年ぶりに、本学を表敬訪問された機会に、本研究所にお招きして、教授を囲む座談会を開いた。アイヴズ教授の講演内容の要旨は次の通りである。

近年、脱コロニアリズム、あるいはポストコロニアリズムが批評理論の主流となった趣がある。それにはそれなりの理由のあることではあるが、歴史家として、私は、シェイクスピアの『テンペスト』をポストコロニアリズム論の観点から読み直すことには反対である。シェイクスピアがコロニアリズムを意識してこの作品を書いた、とは考えられない。この作品は、宮廷仮面劇の様式で書かれた、宮廷用の余興的な作品であった、というのが私の結論である。

特別研究会。平成 12 年 5 月 17 日。14 時 40 分より。

講 師 米国テキサス大学エルパソ校英文学教授 ミミ・ライゼル・グラッドスタイン氏

演 題 「コロニアリズムとポストコロニアリズム——合衆国のメキシコ系アメリカ人の  
問題」

通 訳 澤崎 由紀子

司 会 安川 昱

グラッドスタイン教授の講演内容の要旨は次の通りである。

アメリカの歴史は、植民地獲得あるいは植民地化と事後の変遷の歴史である、といえる。実際、このプロセスは現在も進行中である。

アメリカにおけるメキシコ系の経験は、内なる植民地化と見られる。戦争や革命を逃れ、経済的な理由でメキシコ国境付近のアメリカ南西部の州に移住したチカーノは、人種差別や貧困、教育の欠如という不利を被ってきたが、近年、一部のチカーノは社会的な地位を獲得し、行政や地方政治に関与するようにさえなってきた。アメリカ南西部は、本当に、単なるポストコロニアル状況にあるといえるだろうか。むしろ、植民地時代から、脱・植民地時代を経て、ポストコロニアル時代へ、そして新たな植民地時代へ逆戻りしているのではないだろうか。私は、この状況を“recolonization”と呼ぶことを提唱する。(安川 昱記)

# Shakespeare and Colonialism

E. W. Ives

## The University of Birmingham

I am very pleased to be able to talk to Kansai University students again. It is ten years since we first came from Birmingham to visit Kansai to set up an academic link and I am delighted with the way this has progressed.

Our subject this afternoon is *Shakespeare and Colonialism*. My first academic post was at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon and I have since frequently taught and written in relation to Shakespeare, but I am by training a historian. For me, therefore, the first question has to be 'What was the history of colonialism in Shakespeare's England?'

The English were not among the first European nations to take colonisation outside Europe seriously. There were English expeditions into the Atlantic in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century and it is possible that Englishmen from Bristol discovered the North American mainland before Christopher Columbus discovered the Caribbean islands in 1492. But the English did not follow up on these early efforts at exploration and they only became active again in the second half of the 16th century. Even then they showed less interest in colonisation than in privateering and piracy or in trying to find northern routes into the Pacific, either by discovering a north-east passage between the Arctic and Siberia or a northwest passage between the Arctic and the North American continent.

Even when Shakespeare was born in 1564 the first tiny hint of interest in setting up an English colony overseas was still a few years ahead and nothing would come of it. No real efforts, indeed, were made until 1578 when Sir Humphrey Gilbert launched an expedition to explore the coast of N. America and find a suitable site for settlement. None of his

ships reached their destination. A small reconnaissance was successful in 1580 and plans to establish a colony were prepared. Gilbert led a further reconnaissance in 1583 which annexed Newfoundland. A seasonal European fishery had operated there for fifty years. However the expedition got into difficulties off the New England coast and Gilbert was drowned on the way home. The following year Sir Walter Raleigh sent two ships out to reconnoitre the area of what is now the coast of North and South Carolina. They landed, explored the island of Roanoke, established a fort there, met the natives and brought back to England two Indians and examples of American produce. A fleet of seven ships took out colonists in 1585 and settled 108 Englishmen at Roanoke. They survived the winter, despite shortage of food and attacks by natives, but before further supplies arrived an English fleet led by Sir Francis Drake called on the way home from a raid on the Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, and the colonists thankfully took the opportunity to desert America. When the relief ship arrived with more settlers and found the rest gone, it returned to England leaving 15 men at Roanoke. No more was heard of them ; they seem to have been killed by local Indians. One-hundred-and-fifty colonists went out in 1578, including wives and children and the first English child was born in America. But the threat to England of a Spanish invasion meant that the planned reinforcements and supplies could not be sent across the Atlantic in 1588, and when a relief expedition was at last allowed to sail in 1590 it found the colony deserted. What had happened to the colonists can only be guessed at.

With the lessening of the war with Spain, renewed efforts were made after 1600 but on a small scale. It was not until 1606 that the Virginia Company was set up with two separate colonising projects. One was to settle what is now New England, which again failed. The other, directed to Virginia proper, planted the first successful colony in 1607 at what is now Jamestown. Reinforcements came out regularly, including 500 colonists in 1610. Some of this party had a very lucky escape when one ship commanded by Sir Thomas Gates and Sir George Somers was wrecked on one of the islands of the Bermuda group. Shakespeare, of course, was now towards the end of his career. By the time that the colonies had realised that tobacco could be their saving economic resource he had stopped writing plays, and he was dead before further major colonising ventures were attempted, most notably the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620.

English colonising attempts in North America during Shakespeare's life were, thus, very limited and hardly a shining success. The reason for this was that England chose to exert its major colonising efforts in Europe in the attempt to settle Ireland. Geographically Ireland is one of the British Isles but it is, and always has been very different from the mainland. First of all it is much further from the mainland of Britain than is often realised. At the nearest, where opposite headlands approach, the distance from Scotland falls to 30 miles, but the island as a whole is as far from mainland Britain as Korea is from western Honshu. Secondly, Ireland was socially and economically quite distinct. In the sixteenth century, a small area was governed directly by the English king, a second and larger area was held by feudal lords who recognised the king, but more than half the country was thinly occupied by independent Irish speaking Gaelic, economically dependent on large herds of cattle and horses and in some ways nomadic. In the eyes of the mainlanders, English, Welsh and Scots alike, Ireland, at a time of increasing population, seemed to offer a great opportunity to individuals looking for land to farm. The wild Irish appeared very little different from the natives of North America and the economic potential of the country was more immediate, especially the possibility of exploiting the forests when England itself was becoming short of timber. Most important, establishing and supporting settlements which were only 80 miles away from Britain by a well established sea route was clearly infinitely easier than trying to do so across 3000 miles of the Atlantic Ocean. In Shakespeare's life-time settlers in America were numbered in hundreds, settlers in Ireland in perhaps tens of thousands.

Shakespeare would certainly have been aware of these British efforts at colonisation. Our next question thus must be, what influence did all of this have on his writing? The first point which strikes me, is that he displays no interest at all in the Irish dimension. The country is hardly ever mentioned, still less is there reference to colonising it. As far as I can see there is only one Irish character in the plays, the Captain MacMorris who appears in a single comic scene in *Henry V*. This silence does, I suggest, tell us something about Shakespeare. Ireland could surely have provided many opportunities for the dramatist but hardly any literary sources were available. Shakespeare was long dead when Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* was published in 1633. This makes me ask whether the dramatist's imagination was triggered by what he had read, more

than by what was going on around him or what he learned in conversation.

That certainly seems to be the case with overseas exploration. Shakespeare was undoubtedly interested in this. You will remember the mention of the new map in *Twelfth Night*, the reference in *Love's Labour's Lost* to the first Europeans being worshipped by the natives of Central America and how Desdemona was entranced by Othello's travel tales and stories of 'the Anthropophagi and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders.' Such references are fairly minor but all derive from travel literature. This is also true of *The Tempest*, the only Shakespeare play to focus specifically on the situation of Europeans encountering an unknown island, and which deals with the two themes which characterised English settlement in the New World: the deterioration in the relations between the settlers once they encountered the stresses of their new life, and the deterioration of relations between the new arrivals and the existing inhabitants. Volume eight of Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* explores this literary background in detail so I need not rehearse it here. The one source I must mention, and it is the most important of those Shakespeare used, is the account of the wrecking of the Gates and Somers ship on the Bermudas which I referred to. This occurred a year before the play was performed at court on 1 November 1611. Many specific details come from the Gates/Somers literature, including the description of the storm, the effect it had on those involved, St. Elmo's fire on the masts, birds caught on the rocks, gentlemen carrying wood, the plot against the Duke of Milan's life and so on.

The detailed dependence of *The Tempest* on travel literature has convinced many scholars that Shakespeare saw the play in the context of European and particularly English attempts to settle in the New World. In Act II.1 there is the specific use of the word 'plantation' in its technical sense of settling a new territory and in II.2 a reference to public interest in seeing a dead Indian. The crux of this interpretation, of course, has to be the character of Caliban. European exploration of the New World was certainly important as a source of knowledge about the physical world, but settlement introduced that basic phenomenon of colonialism, a clash of cultures. In *The Tempest*, scholars have seen this in the clash between the two largest roles in the play, that of the new arrival, Prospero, and that of the incumbent, Caliban.

The writers who advance this interpretation argue that the character of Caliban is a

complex of European views of the natives of North America. On the one hand he is a base, barely human savage. This was the most common assessment of the native Amerindians in English travel literature. For example, George Best, an explorer writing in 1578, reported that the natives of what is now northeastern Canada were 'desperate in their fight, sullen of nature and ravenous in their manner of feeding.' Caliban's name may even be derived from the word cannibal. On the other hand Caliban had welcomed Prospero and shown him all the richness of his island just as he does to Stephano and Trinculo. He is specifically said to be human, he is intelligent, he has learned Prospero's language and is highly articulate in it, he has real human emotions, speaks real poetry, responds to the wonder of nature and we can sympathise with his grudge against Prospero. Despite the welcome he had offered, Caliban had had his island taken from him by force, not of superior physical weapons but of superior magic powers. Here we have a link to an alternative, minority assessment of New World peoples. This saw them as human and virtuous, or at least capable of virtue, and equal, even in some ways superior to Europeans (a point specifically made by Gonzalo in Act III.3). This issue had first been argued out between the Spanish settlers who enslaved the Central American natives by force, and the Spanish missionaries who saw that as an affront to humanity and to Christianity. Eventually the missionaries won the argument, the great figure here was Bartholomé de las Casas, but the issue became of limited importance as the Indians of Central America experienced a demographic disaster under the impact of European diseases. Shakespeare possibly did not know of this great debate, but he certainly had access to an English translation of an essay on cannibals by the French philosopher Montaigne which argued that American Indians were a sensible and humane people, even though they may have eaten human flesh. Gonzalo's speech about plantation in Act II.1 of *The Tempest* is clearly based on Montaigne.

The suggestion that *The Tempest* is a play about a clash of cultures has led non-Anglo-Saxon scholars and writers to seize on the story, and particularly the character of Caliban as a general metaphor for colonialism. In nineteenth-century Latin America, Caliban was used as a symbol of Yankee cultural destructiveness and bullying but over the last eighty years that identification has been reversed, with Prospero now the bully and Caliban a symbol of oppressed Latin-Americans, especially the *mestizo* people. West-Indian writers



have also taken up the identification. In South Africa too, the label Caliban was first used for the supporters of apartheid but, as in America, the symbol has been reversed. The white settlers, the Prosperos, began by acting as benefactors to native black Africans but soon rejected them, reducing them to dependent, insecure and, in settler eyes, inferior Calibans. And the use of the symbol has not stopped with black Africa. Caliban has been invoked in India, Ireland and French-speaking Canada. He has become as a paradigm of all victims of European imperialism and colonisation.

This wider reference was, of course, never in Shakespeare's mind, but it can be argued as a legitimate elaboration of implications which are inherent in *The Tempest*. Thus in one adaptation published for black actors. Caliban was cast a black slave and Ariel as a half-cast slave. But such extensions are really a matter for writers or theatrical producers wishing to comment on 20th and 21st century issues and reflect contemporary concerns over colonialism and the post-colonial legacy. Our question this afternoon is whether Shakespeare himself would have recognised the placing of *The Tempest* in the context of Elizabethan and Jacobean colonialism.

This takes me back to my historian roots. Here we need to remember the context of the court masque, to which *The Tempest* has obvious associations. A Jacobean masque had three parts, an anti-masque (introduced in 1609), the masque proper and then the final dancing. The characteristic function of the anti-masque was to display the destructive effect of the forces of disorder, chaos, rebellion and catastrophe. The masque proper then entered and the gods and goddesses of peace, beauty and concord swept this disorder away by their magical powers. These divine roles were acted by members of the royal family, royal favourites and prominent courtiers. The regular theme of the court masque was, therefore, the conquest of disorder and chaos by a royal wisdom endorsed by the supernatural. That seems to me, as a historian, to be very much the original context in which *The Tempest* should be understood. Indeed, the masque in the play which blesses the impending marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda has to be stopped when Prospero suddenly remembers that he has not yet expelled the anti-masque of 'that foul conspiracy of the beast Caliban and his confederates.' The masque convention also explains why at the end Prospero has barely a rebuke for Sebastian and Antonio. Not only is forgiveness a regal virtue, punishment for aristocratic villains would have prevented social order being

restored. It is the plebeian anti-masquers, Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano, who end the play under threat of discipline.

Recognising the affinity of *The Tempest* to the court masque does, I suggest, remove many of the other alleged 'problem' which scholars have seen in the play. The most important of these is the lack of development, particularly in character. We may expect a play to conduct an argument or explore a situation. By contrast a masque was a display of verities. It seems clear to me that James I and his court would have identified Prospero as the force of wisdom, reason and virtue and Caliban as the embodiment of debasement and riot, and have seen the play as the vindication of the one against the other.

There are other more basic reasons, too, for rejecting the idea that Shakespeare in *The Tempest* was commenting on colonialism. The play specifically says that Caliban's mother originated from Algiers. The travellers who were wrecked on the island were returning from the wedding of Alonso's daughter to the king of Tunis, the state next to Algiers. *The Tempest*, therefore, is specifically located in the Mediterranean. Caliban's name may even come from the town Calibia in North Africa. In other words, Shakespeare imports the features which we have noted of New World exploration and settlement into a Mediterranean setting which he uses in his other plays, not vice-versa. In doing this he is behaving as all but a tiny number of his European contemporaries behaved. Today we see the discoveries and settlements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as marking a transformation in attitudes to the world. That was not recognised at the time. Not before the end of the seventeenth century can you really see Western thinking being changed to any degree, notably under the impact of greater contact with China. Until then, patterns of thought remained as obstinately centred on the Old World, as they had always been. In other words, for nearly 200 years after Columbus, Europeans made the rest of the world fit with their traditional expectations, ideas and priorities, not vice-versa. For example, throughout Shakespeare's life, Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*, dating from the fourteenth century, remained the best-selling English travel book. Even after Sir Walter Raleigh returned from an expedition to Guiana, he could still assert that there were headless people there 'with eyes in their shoulders and their mouths in the middle of the breasts,' because Mandeville had said that such a nation existed! I can see no evidence in what Shakespeare wrote to suggest that he espoused anything which would challenge such a

Euro-centric world view.

I think, too, that we must recognise that if we are to see colonialism in *The Tempest* and interpret it as a contest between cultures, Caliban versus Prospero, we have to accommodate the often-pointed-out fact that Shakespeare is careful to establish a similarity of background between the two. The reason the witch Sycorax arrived on the island was because she was exiled from Algiers; the reason the magician Prospero arrived on the island was because he was exiled from Milan. There is nothing to pick between them. When Caliban says that he was king of the island before Prospero displaced him, his claim to rule was only that his mother had arrived there first. Both characters are colonists. What is more, the play ends with Prospero renouncing both his magic and the island, which has to suggest that the island is left once more to Caliban. If that is the case, and we still seek to place Prospero's departure in relation to the issue of colonialism, the meaning must be that cross cultural settlement leads to a dead end. That certainly would correspond to the established principle in Elizabethan England that everything and everybody should stay in the proper places which God intended. However, I hasten to say that my conclusion from this is the unlikeliness of a colonial context for *The Tempest*, I have no wish to extend the argument further and suggest that the message of the play is about anti-colonialism!

If colonialism was an issue for Shakespeare we might expect that colonial issues could be glimpsed elsewhere in his plays. In reality they are hard to find and rarely of significance. The New World discoveries are referred to by Shakespeare primarily as a symbol of wealth. We have a mention of Spanish treasure ships from the Indies in *The Comedy of Errors*, in *Henry VIII* the union of Henry VIII with Anne Boleyn, the mother of the great Queen Elizabeth, is extolled in the line: 'Our king has all the Indies in his arms,' Falstaff describes Mistress Page as 'Guiana, all gold and bounty,' Titania has 'a lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king.'

What impresses me also is the absence from Shakespeare's plays of racism in a colonial context, that all-too-frequent feature of European settlement. Shakespeare can be racist. He makes derogatory remarks particularly about the French but also about the other inhabitants of the British Isles, the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish. We hear Portia mocking the national characteristics of her various suitors. Shakespeare is also very definitely

anti-Semitic, an attitude not based on experience of Jews (who were rare visitors to England) but on long established religious prejudice. However, colour seems not to have excited this response, even though that was not true of other writers. There is nothing anywhere in Shakespeare's work to compare with the brutal and demeaning treatment meted out to the Jew, Shylock. Shakespeare does not even introduce the element of colour when it would seem obvious to do so. In *The Tempest*, where if there were really an interest in colonialism colour would surely have brought in along with dress and painting or tattooing, Prospero berates Caliban in the strongest language but never mentions any of these matters. In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia specifically approves the physical appearance of the Moroccan suitor. Othello is portrayed as a figure of nobility with an impressive record of public service who never loses the confidence of the Venetian leaders. Shakespeare perhaps recognised that by drawing the character of the Moor in a way so unexpected he would be able to exploit the popular attitude of contempt of African people to good dramatic effect. However if he did, he went on to make very little of the colour issue in the play. There are a few racial jibes from Othello's enemies and one reference to his thick lips, but otherwise the fact that the main character is a black man is treated factually.

One case which is often read otherwise is Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*. George Hunter saw Aaron as what the audience would expect of a coloured person, 'a man whose colour reveals his villainy as (quite literally) of the deepest die'. I am reluctant to take issue with such an authority but I do not find this attitude in the play. Aaron, in fact, asserts exactly the reverse, 'Aaron will have his soul black like his face'. I can find relatively little in the play which concentrates on his colour, in very many ways he is an early version of Iago. The only dramatic significance of having a black rather than a white adulterer as a villain, is that this ensures that the queen's unfaithfulness to the emperor is demonstrated beyond question.

My conclusion, therefore, is that I remain unconvinced by scholars who suggest that Shakespeare was much concerned with issue of colonialism. Even within *The Tempest* it appears to me that the Prospero/Caliban relationship is social rather than racial. Prospero is the gentleman who commands and Caliban the peasant who obeys. However, as in Elizabethan society, the relationship is not only one way. Caliban reminds the wizard that

he is his only subject on the island and Prospero tells Miranda that they rely on the savage to make their fires, haul the wood and undertake other tasks profitable to them. If *The Tempest* was played at the Globe and if any of the groundlings sympathised with Caliban (both considerable conjectures), this was probably because they identified with the savage in the ill treatment he received from his social superiors. As in all his plays, whatever their setting, Shakespeare was writing about the society of contemporary England. If Caliban was anywhere, he was in the slums of Jacobean London.

Social hierarchy is, after all, the theme of both the opening scene and part of the last scene in the play. We see the storm reducing social distinctions to nothing. The leaders of society are bluntly told that they are in the way and must get below decks and stay in their cabins. When in Act V.1 Gonzalo tries to revive criticism of the Boatswain's earlier lack of deference his comment is ignored entirely. In the intervening scenes we see Antonio and Sebastian plotting to overthrow existing authority and the drunken butler Stephano subverting natural order by claiming to be king of the island. The parallel to *The Tempest* which I see as informative is that of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe does not use the setting of, first a desert island, and then an island where Crusoe is joined by Man Friday, in order to write about European colonialism. His object is to explore the nature of a man, first in isolation and then in a position of command. I suggest that in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare took advantage of popular English curiosity about foreign lands to create a setting where he could depict first the break down and then the restoration of civil society. I also believe that the dramatist did this in the light of the conventions of the court masque so as to be able to depict a monarch, endued with superhuman powers, who is the ruler and resolution of all harm. It is easy to understand why James I called for a second performance!

*Kansai 11 May 2000*

*E. W. Ives*