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First literary picture of Native-Americans: colonial approach to Shakespeare's The Tempest

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Abstract
This article aims to analyse Shakespeare's The Tempest from a colonial perspective. There is an exceptional interest in three key figures I do consider to be fundamental for the coming analysis. On the one hand, Prospero, the settler, and, on the other, Ariel and Caliban as colonised subjects. Along with imperialistic dynamics, language, representations or power will also be briefly discussed. This paper is moreover rather innovative considering the very few literature written on Shakespeare and colonialism. To that end, I have consulted not only postcolonial theorists but reviews on the subject at hand.
Keywords: British Theatre, Colonialism, Imperialism, Shakespeare, The Tempest

Título: Primera Representación Literaria de los Nativo Americanos: un Acercamiento colonial a La Tempestad de Shakespeare.

Resumen
Este artículo busca analizar La Tempestad de Shakespeare bajo una perspectiva colonial. Hay un particular interés en tres figuras que considero clave para el consiguiente análisis. Por un lado, Prospero el colono y, por otro lado, los sujetos coloniales, Ariel y Calibán. Junto con dinámicas imperialistas, términos como lenguaje, representaciones o poder serán también brevemente discutidos. Esta investigación es de carácter innovador teniendo en cuenta la poca literatura que puede encontrarse en referencia a Shakespeare y estudios coloniales. Para esa finalidad, no solo he acudido a teoristas poscoloniales, sino que me he referido a reseñas anteriormente escritas sobre el tema.
Palabras clave: Colonialismo, Imperialismo, La Tempestad, Shakespeare, Teatro Británico.

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By the time Shakespeare, one of the most well-known playwrights in history, was performing and beautifully composing sonnets, Europe was parallelly involved in a period of discoveries and colonisation. Exploration thus became part of the European dream, the need to expand, to name and map. The aim of this article is therefore to briefly explore the relationship between colonial studies and Shakespeare's *The Tempest,* with a special interest in the characters of Caliban and Ariel as the ''unfamiliar to a dominant subjectivity.'' (Boehmer, 2005: 21)

The first section of this paper will examine the role of Prospero as the ''colonial hero'' and the interaction between the dominant and enslaved subjects. Prospero needs to underline the differences between categories, needs to limit these bases between power and the external world. In this fashion, Shakespeare pictures the image of a settler whose intentions go beyond personal knowledge. Prospero, to the contrary, utters imperialistic monologues to justify his civilising actions. He, from his vantage authoritative position, conquers the land and ''raises savage peoples from superstitions, taboos and witchcraft to a more enlightened existence.'' (Kaya, 2010: 87) This aggressive cultural intrusion works as a tool for the creation of a hierarchical relation between the monopoliser and the oppressed.

Nevertheless, as stated by Loomba (1988), the bilateral negotiations for the settlers to incorporate native ideas into their agendas jeopardise colonial affiliations (61). In this play, Prospero saves Ariel's life and, as a consequence of this moral debt, the spirit swears loyalty to Prospero to ultimately become his 'comrade.' Much debated has been this controversial master-slave relation although, as stated by Chand and Chaudhary in the following quote, postcolonial scholars have timidly discussed enslavement and colonial oppression in this play:

> This in turn brings to surface what is not being presented by the postcolonial critics and the hidden intentions and strategies behind it. We could also say that Postcolonial critics are silent about Ariel since he is a good servant which implies enslavement is not always resented by the postcolonial critics. (Chand & Chaudhary, 2013 :37)

Shakespeare has created an airy spirit, – who symbolically represents the obscured, the unfamiliar, the transparent colonial identity– with neither figure nor sexual identity. It is a sexless nearly invisible entity who is subjugated to Prospero's desires. Shakespeare, needless to say, does not use language pointlessly. He introduces, as stated in the following quotation, this powerless/-ful relationship through titling or denigrating insults to delimit the domineering stablished capacities. This prerogative segregation is also reinforced by dis[re]membering the colonial subject whose partial memory is occasionally destroyed to be later restructured on the coloniser's interests. [470]

> Prospero: Thou liest, malignant thing! Hast thou forgot
>
> The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy
>
> Was grown into a hoop? hast thou forgot her?
>
> Ariel. No, sir. (Shakespeare: Act I, Scene 2).

Caliban, on the contrary, has been the subject of colonial scholars for decades because of his obvious analogies with the so-called 'savages' in America. Interestingly enough, as stated by Skura (1989), by the time *The Tempest* was written, there were no English portrayals of this inhabitants from the New World, becoming this the very first literary picture of an American aborigine in the English history (57). I would venture to say that Shakespeare's associations with Spain and its Renaissance cultural and colonial movements might have influenced his writing and knowledge on the West Indies.

From the very beginning, Caliban is always depicted, alluding to his savagery, as a monster.[471] While Ariel represents the air, Caliban represent the earth itself. He is the land to be conquered. The creature's origin is moreover mystified. His mother is a witch and his father a devil. It certainly echoes the colonisers' mentality towards the natives' pagan and polytheistic native American idolatry. He perfectly, as stated by Vaughan & Vaughan, represents colonial indoctrination and the imperial agenda:

> Caliban stands for countless victims of European imperialism and colonization. Like Caliban (so the argument goes), colonized peoples were disinherited, exploited, and subjugated. Like him, they learned a conqueror's language and perhaps that conqueror's values. Like him, they endured enslavement and contempt by European usurpers and eventually rebelled. Like him, they were torn between their indigenous culture and the culture superimposed on it by their conquerors. (Vaughan & Vaughan, 1991: 145)

This paper therefore briefly traces Caliban's evolution from an aborigine to a hybrid colonial subject through language. Prospero introduces the monster's language as it follows: ''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'' (Shakespeare: Act I, Scene 2). Although Prospero never gives Caliban access to his books because, in Focauldian terms, he is afraid of this correlation between *savoir* and *pouvoir*, his speech evolves, as the coloniser instructs him, from an elementary prose into a more sophisticated verse. This actually corresponds to the Fanonian idea of language as a humanising colonial mechanism, or in his words, ''[the Negro will turn] proportionately whiter in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.'' (Fanon, 1999: 18) He eventually masters the language so exquisitely that the slave dares using the coloniser's tongue as a way of resistance.

> Plays such as Othello and The Tempest thus evoke contemporary ideas about the bestiality or incivility of non-Europeans. But do they do so in order to endorse dominant attitudes to 'race' and culture or to question them? […] Does The Tempest endorse Prospero's view of Caliban as a bestial savage, or does it depict the dehumanisation of colonial rule? Both plays have been interpreted and taught in ways that endorse colonialist ways of seeing, but both have also inspired anti-colonial and anti-racist movements and literatures as texts that expose the workings of colonialism. (Loomba, 1998: 67)

To conclude, as stated by Loomba in the preceding quote, the debate whether *The Tempest* evokes patronising colonial discourses is not yet clear. As far as I am concerned, Shakespeare's knowledge on the New World and its inhabitants was

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[470] Although it is true that Ariel was imprisoned in a tree by the witch, and later saved by Prospero. The settler uses this argument not as an innocent anecdote, but as a colonial tool to delimit positions and stablish colonial power dynamics.

[471] As a matter of fact, his name is a pun from cannibal.

so limited that he, from his white European and imperially [i]legitimised position, tried to pictured Caliban, Sycorax or Ariel, among others, as characters bordering a humoristic Medieval fable. At the end, Caliban's attempt of camouflaging actually results into an act of parody and burlesque. The monster ultimately becomes a corrupted coloniser himself. While drinking wine, he conspires with Stephano and Trinculo to kill Prospero which also echoes those warlike tactics used by the colonisers to dethrone local rulers. Not to mention that the aborigine tries to rape –which remains an act of colonisation – Miranda and aspires to fill the island with ''little Calibans'' to civilise and secure the land. While innocently intentioned, Shakespeare's words prompted the imperial agenda by depicting people from the colonies as exotic, evil, uncivilised and keen to corrupt European values.

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