

Zabus, Chantal. *Tempests after Shakespeare*. New York: Palgrave, 2002, 332 pp., £ 19,99. ISBN 0-312-29548-0.
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Shakespeare studies have become subject to post-colonial readings since the late nineties of the previous century, a process emanating from the revisionist studies of new historicism, Marxism and feminism of the late eighties and early nineties (e.g. *Post-colonial Shakespeares*, 1998). These approaches attempted to 'postcolonialize' Shakespeare's work and provided new important insights into the relation between his texts and attitudes to race, class and gender.

Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* has since the early seventeenth century for all its ambiguity in intention, and being written at the beginning of the British colonialist pre-imperial expansion, invited numerous critical responses and reworkings/rewritings in several genres, where it was treated as a major ur-pretext mirroring the European domination (symbolized by Prospero) and oppression of Caribbean/African/Latin American cultures including slavery (e.g. George Lamming). The Prospero-Caliban relationship features particularly strongly in this debate around the psychology of British colonization, which practically destroyed the indigenous cultural (and linguistic) identity of the Americas. The role of Miranda came to be challenged and properly contextualized only later and this is what the book under review does especially well in Part II in the chapter called "Miranda and Sycorax on the 'Eve' of postpatriarchy".

Tempests after Shakespeare by Chantal Zabus is an eye-opening work of interdisciplinary cultural criticism working in loops and unexpected illuminating turns, which amazes even a well instructed reader with its erudite background and scholarly knowledge of various art forms and genres, where *The Tempest* has loomed very large during the past fifty years. Zabus most insightfully shows just how the rewritings of this play from the 1960s onwards can help us understand the three movements she tackles in each of the three

larger chapters: postcolonial discourse, feminism/postpatriarchy, and postmodernism. These are aptly represented by the *dramatis personae* of Caliban, Miranda/Sycorax, and Prospero. Zabus researches how these *fin de siècle* discourses vie for ownership of meaning. Clearly the characters of Prospero, Caliban, and Miranda are all somehow hostages of a power relationship:

In Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, and Québec, Caliban becomes the inexhaustible symbol of the colonized insurgent. In Canada and the Caribbean (after the 'Calibanic' phase), Miranda revisits the Bardscript while, in African American texts, Sycorax embodies the threat of gynocracy. Both women characters as well as Ariel represent 'Others', who "potentially challenge patriarchy" (2).

The book covers the period from the Sixties to the turn of the millenium in 2000 and considers a great geographical variety of writers, from the Commonwealth, Australia, Britain, Canada, the Caribbean, West Africa, Latin America, and the United States, occasionally even India, New Zealand, East and South Africa, including various genres, poems, plays, novels, film scripts, and critical essays, all of which have made a textual transformation of the original play *The Tempest*: imitation, parody, pastiche, satire, duplication, revision, inversion etc, i.e. rewriting as "the appropriation of a text that it simultaneously authorizes and critiques for its own ideological uses" (3).

When reading this book, it soon becomes evident that the play has been a much-visited site of contest and negotiation, since scores of writers (that it would be impossible to mention here) of diverse ideological, cultural, racial, and sexual persuasions have decided to rewrite Shakespeare's play, which can obviously accommodate various discourses "from countless subjectivities, and over multiple spaces" (7).

In Part I Chantal Zabus argues that the original dramatic text was first seen from the standpoint of Prospero-qua-colonizer and it became necessary to wrestle with this emblem of (post)coloniality and to rewrite *The Tempest* from Caliban's perspective. She

explores, for example, rewritings by Mannoni, Mason, Ngugi, Césaire, Fanon, Memmi, Lamming, Brathwaite, and Dabydeen. As an example, let me dwell here briefly only on the Australian component. Zabus describes the "Antipodean metamorphoses" of David Malouf. His novel *An Imaginary Life* (1978) speaks about exile as, in fact, most of his work does, about Australians as exiles who find death after encountering the 'Aboriginal' Caliban, although they also "feel themselves Calibans in relation to England", and "nonetheless tend to play Prospero in the South Pacific" (81). Zabus reads Malouf's novel as a "warped" rendition of the colonial encounter between the settlers and the Aboriginals. The (Wolf-) Child via Caliban becomes the Australian "Red Man", namely the Aboriginal whom Malouf never mentions, who teaches Prospero-Ovid the language *in exilio* at the very edge of the known world: "And possibly only an Australian, as someone who has been driven from the center to the edge, could comfortably speak of that transformation at the edge" (83).

The second work by Malouf under scrutiny, engaging more directly with *The Tempest* than his novel *An Imaginary Life*, is his play *Blood Relations* (1988) which takes the viewer back to the "edge", a dystopic island between the desert and the sea in remote Northwestern Australia:

In *Blood Relations*, the storm is the climax of the play rather than the prelude to it as in *The Tempest*, and the Prospero-Caliban encounter is etherealized in one abrogative moment, which is death itself, as in *An Imaginary Life* (89).

A Christmas family reunion in a secluded beach house brings together Willy, his children Dinny and Cathy, Hilda and her gay son Kit. Several other characters that appear in the play can also be preidentified in *The Tempest* and they sometimes merge into one single voice. Prospero/Willy's power is felt from the very beginning when he reminisces about his coming from a small Greek island some twenty years ago to literally change the Australian landscape: in the intricate and complicated story Dinny of partly Aboriginal stock is the Australian Caliban, who accuses Willy of having raped her mother *and* the ancestral land, which he now claims as his own.

He would occasionally break into an Aboriginal chant and additionally blame Willy for sending him, as a Stolen Generation victim, to a Brisbane school (cf. Malouf's own Brisbane school years) "to learn to think like a white boy", thus severing him from his "mother's people" (66). Zabus in her fine analysis of Malouf's play concludes that in both Malouf's novel *An Imaginary Life* and the play *Blood Relations*, written within a decade of each other, death is the ultimate transformer for the Australian Prospero while Caliban lives on.

The third Australian work based on *The Tempest and* discussed in the book is Randolph Stow's *Visitants* (1979), featuring the deprivileging of Prospero, often through death, and the rise of Caliban playing Prospero in the Pacific. Zabus aptly traces the precarious Australian history with Papua New Guinea, officially designated as an Australian territory until 1949, rightly claiming that Malouf's two works, and Stow's *Visitants* describe "crucial steps in the history of Australia, from the beginnings of convictism, whereby Prospero is marooned, through penal servitude, on the isle of Caliban, on to Australia's neo-colonial role in the South Pacific" (95).

Part II of the book discusses the characters of Miranda/Sycorax as virgin/whore on the "eve of postpatriarchy", blending the feminist critique of patriarchy, postmodernist technique of representation, and postcolonial retrieval of discourses "under erasure" (103). The figure of Miranda is thus elevated, rightly so, into both a pre-feminist and what Zabus calls a "postpatriarchal" icon. The third part of the book is about the future, the return of postmodern Prospero "in an intergalactic exile", this "global male oppressor", and more than that because he shows his fragility as the result of an increased introspection, in literary works (e.g. Fowles, Murdoch), films (Jarman, Greenaway), as well as contemporary science-fiction novels and films.

Chatal Zabus's book of critical essays *Tempests after Shakespeare* is sure to cause a few 'tempests' in the critical domain. It is a book *sine qua non* in contemporary postcolonial literary criticism and written in an assured and erudite style. It has to be consulted not

only by scholars working in the field of (post-colonial) literatures and cultures written in English but also by Australianists.