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The Tempest and the Postcolonial Typology

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[W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. . . the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is altered by the past.

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"

For the postcolonial writers and the theorists a text like *The Tempest* covers the shadowy imperfect forms, the types of colonialism that are actualized in their reality, the archetypes of their own time. Very much in the same way as the New Testament fulfills and completes the Old, the postcolonial adaptations of *The Tempest* (including criticism as a form of adaptation) are seen by their creators to fulfill and aggregate the story of colonialism. In the same way that generations of interpretations in the form of scriptures were enabled by the dialogic discourse, both with the Hebrew Bible and with each other, to enrich and improvise meaning into the Christian Bible, postcolonial "*Tempest* exegetes" have engaged with Shakespeare's text and revealing colonial origins and the fulfillment of these origins in the struggles of their present.

Shakespeare's imagination in the text combined with historical moment, as presented in *The Tempest*, enabled the postcolonial writers and theorists to understand and explore the content and psychological functioning of colonialism and witness to the centuries-long resistance to the system that defined the lives of many and their postcolonial era.

Northrop Frye, in his scrutiny of the theoretical and practical way biblical typology works, makes interesting observations that are relevant for the way postcolonial writers read and understand *The Tempest*. In *The Great Code* Frye acknowledges the historical nature of typology. He emphasizes that typology "is not allegory: allegory is normally a story-myth that finds its 'true' meaning in a conceptual or argumentative translation, and both testaments of the Bible, however oblique their approach to history, deal with real people and real events" (85).

Postcolonial typologists may not argue that *The Tempest* and its characters portrayed real events or figures in the same way biblical types were understood to be doing. What postcolonial typologists do share with a Christian typological approach is a conviction that these *Tempest* types are real in a manner that they are rooted in and they are the products of very real historic moment. These types are not just convenient allegorical symbols that happen to provide a useful metaphor for the moment when English colonialism was coming into existence. Just as Christian typology "sweeps across the centuries, underscoring what existence means" (Manning 58), postcolonial typology also sweeps across centuries to link the colonial and the postcolonial experience, and emphasizes on the centrality of Caliban and *The Tempest* diegesis as a type that expresses the truth of history and reveals the "promise of future things" (Augustine qtd. in Galdon 49).

According to Frye, typology is based on a revolutionary theory of history that progresses towards a kind of liberation and also illustrates its usefulness to the postcolonial generations who were convinced that revealing the centuries of repression also exposed the everpresence of resistance and the inevitability of liberation. In *The Great Code*, Frye confirms that:

Typology [. . .] moves in time: the type exists in the past and the antitype in the present, or the type exists in the present and the antitype in the future. What typology really is as a mode of thought, what it both assumes and leads to, is a theory of history, or more accurately of historical process: an assumption that there is some meaning and point to history [. . .] Typology relates to the future, and is consequently related primarily to faith, hope, and vision. (81-2)

Postcolonialists found in *The Tempest* types that foretold the antitypes of their own historic moment and proclaimed a suppressed and marginalized historical struggle that was finally exploding into the present and taking its place at the center stage.

The Pleasures of Exile by Lamming published in 1960, gives an illustration of the postcolonial typological method of approaching *The Tempest*. In the introduction, Lamming acknowledges that in writing *Pleasures of Exile* he used Shakespeare's play "as a way of presenting a certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the British Caribbean" (9). Lamming clears that he was attracted to *The Tempest* not because of its power to capture metaphorically "the predicament of a group of writers who originated in the English-speaking Caribbean and who arrived in Britain as part of a larger migrating labour force," but also because of the historical moment the drama covers. *The Tempest* became a turf on which a generation could interact with a world coming apart by exploring the same world as it came together. During the process engaged in a reordering of nearly four hundred years of history. The Christian vision of history and its meaning, "postcolonial exegetes" adopted *The Tempest* as their source and found a starting-point to shatter the dominant "dream of history" and bring their own experience at the centre of a new discussion.

In order to understand more completely the way postcolonial writers use interpretation of *The Tempest* typologically, it is relevant to examine just how postcolonial typology fits into a wider discussion of adaptation as a literary phenomenon. The literary critics approach theories of adaptation and they almost inevitably approach their subject through the medium of intertextuality. The term intertextuality, coined by Julia Kristeva in the early 1960s (Allen 14), brings to the front concept that all texts are "a permutation of texts" (Sanders 2). Kristeva's understanding of intertextuality emphasised the way texts are "permeated by the signs, signifiers, and utterances of the culture in which they participated, or from which they derived" (Sanders 2), but as the term entered general critical use, it came to mean "a far more textual as opposed to utterance-driven notion of how texts encompass and respond to other texts both during the process of their creation and composition and in terms of the individual reader's or spectator's response" (Sanders 2). Kristeva's original definition has more congruity to the postcolonial adaptations of *The Tempest* than the print-text-based understandings that have become more common. As the postcolonial writers and thinkers found in *The Tempest* types that were "permeated by the signs, signifiers, and utterances" of early flusters of colonialism, they were able to fit these types to create antitypes that revealed the nature of the struggle in their own time, and its relationship to a history that was not obscured and dismissed.

Postcolonial writers who adopt *Tempest* types to explore and understand the postcolonial experience, identify historical meaning in two moments of time to emphasize on a historical, metaphysical link between the *Tempest* types and its postcolonial antitypes. In adopting a typological approach to *The Tempest*, postcolonial writers explain what they see as an cemented truth: the wrapped history of colonial exploitation, subaltern resistance and the intensified battle for liberation. There may be a multiple voices in the postcolonial typological *Tempest* adaptations, but they remain within the *Tempest* matrix that includes the colonial/postcolonial experience and gives meaning to the overall exposure.

Even though critical thinking on adaptation gives useful means to understand postcolonial approaches to *The Tempest*, the discourse around intertextuality are many times based on assumptions quite different from a typological approach. When postcolonial writers take up *The Tempest*'s characters and narrative as types, rather than "destabilizing the authority" of *The Tempest*, they claim the authority of the play as "prophetic of a political future which is our present" (Lamming, *Pleasures* 13). Just as Christian typology claims the authority of the Old Testament to stabilize and support the authority and meaning of the New Testament, the postcolonial typologists confirm the authority of *The Tempest* to expose the obscured "truth" of history: that from its very beginnings colonialism preserved within it the seeds of resistance. Considering *Tempest* types with postcolonial antitypes, postcolonial writers expose "the basic evolutionary unity" between Caliban and his postcolonial antitypes in the same way that Christian typology reveals that "[t]here was no antithesis, no contradiction between the two Testaments, but rather a very basic evolutionary unity" (Galdon 41). Postcolonial writers often take on the job of challenging traditional interpretations of *The Tempest*, but the methods they use are formulated not to ignore the authority of the text itself but rather to use the play's authority to witness to the reality of their history and its meaning. The rejection of the real and grand narratives so important to both the Modernist and the Postmodernist theories, including critical thinking about adaptation, is less relevant to the postcolonial typology, and *The Tempest* and its types have been carried forward by a generation of writers to claim a narrative proving that the history of struggle with its promise of liberation is a reality at the empire's centre, even during its moment of inception.

Although enough of the theoretical thinking underlining the discourse surrounding adaptation is not immediately related to the understanding of postcolonial typological approach to *The Tempest*, the same cannot be confirmed about the methods mobilized in the process of adaptation. An argument particularly relevant to postcolonial adapters of *The Tempest*, Robert Stam contends that adapters take an "activist stance" towards their sources and put them "into a much broader intertextual dialogism" ("Dialogics" 64). Many postcolonial writers, particularly the writers of fiction and poetry, self-consciously recognize as activists, and their engagement with *The Tempest* and the claiming of the play as a type of their own history is part and parcel of their respective political activism. In the same way that Christian typology is manipulated by both religious and secular writers to indicate levels of meaning and narrative nuances, *The Tempest* is available to the postcolonial writers with an "activist stance." These writers recognize in the play the intertextual milieu from which their oppression emerged, and they see the reason for exploring their own history and conflict within the typological matrix it provides.

The Tempest, for long, proved itself to be a text that offers itself to adaptation, so it is not surprising that when postcolonialists turn to the play they find a medium to explore into their own history. However, the history postcolonialists find in the play is not one that they "create" but rather one that has been kept hidden and is only now being revealed in the light of their own

postcolonial experience. In the same manner, some texts are more hypotextual than others and offer themselves more readily to participation in "palimpsestuous" exchange. Hutcheon points out that there are some texts like *Carmen*, *Don Juan*, *Don Quixote*, and *Robinson Crusoe* that are "travelling stories" which have specific attractions to retelling and refiguring adaptations, and although she does not specifically mention *The Tempest*, the play is undeniably one of these "travelling" texts. Both Hutcheon and Stam interrogate through a biological model to understand how and why certain stories travel. Stam observes that the film *Adaptation*, with its self-reflexive commentary on adaptation at the same time as it adapts a book about hybrid orchids, "brings out the Darwinian overtones of the word 'adaptation' itself, evoking adaptation as a means of evolution and survival" (Introduction 3). *The Tempest* as a postcolonial hypotext, leaves out important elements, as postcolonial writers concerned with recovering the hidden truth of over four hundred years of history, *The Tempest* read and reframed typologically provides more than just a useful ideological weapon to turn against the enemy. It becomes the proof of an over-four-hundred year hidden history of oppression and, even more importantly, of resistance.

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