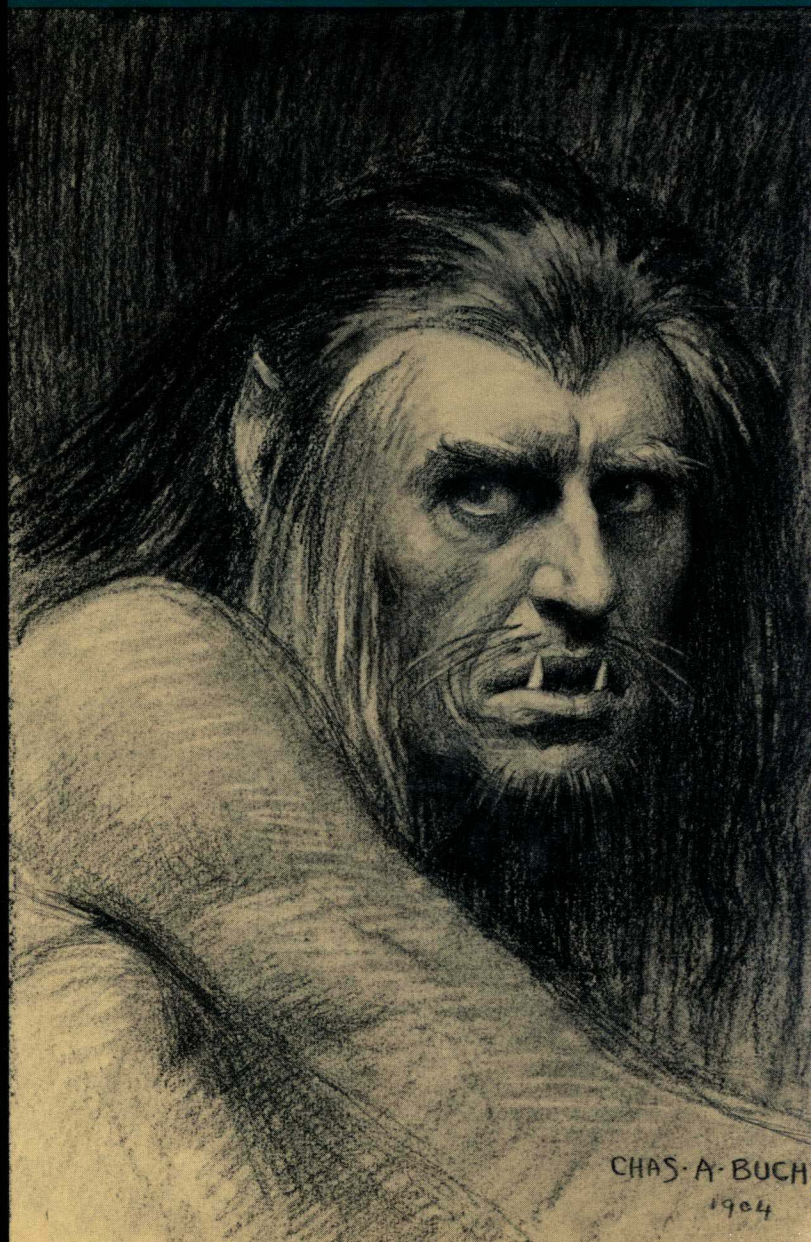


Modern Critical

INTERPRETATIONS

Edited and with an Introduction by HAROLD BLOOM

William Shakespeare's The Tempest



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The Tempest

Edited and with an introduction by

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Editor's Note

This book brings together a representative selection of the best modern critical interpretations of Shakespeare's romance *The Tempest*. The critical essays are reprinted here in the chronological order of their original publication. I am grateful to Dennis Fawcett and Susan Laity for their assistance in editing this volume.

My introduction, a defense of Caliban, finds Prospero therefore a somewhat problematic hero. Harry Berger, Jr., begins the chronological sequence of criticism with his remarkable exegesis of *The Tempest*, culminating in the question of whether Prospero truly desires to leave the island, or delays so as not to do so.

In a related reading, Marjorie Garber sees, as Berger does, the play struggling with definitions of the human and with human limitations, and invokes Renaissance glosses upon Daedalus to help illuminate Prospero. A brief New Historicist account of Caliban by Stephen J. Greenblatt complements Berger and Garber on the question of the limits of the human in *The Tempest* and so is inserted here, out of strict chronological order.

Julian Patrick's essay centers upon the play's concern with time, exploring its complex temporal organization. A comparison of the comic metastance of *The Tempest* with the tragic stance of *King Lear*, in James P. Driscoll's essay, is followed by Stephen Orgel's investigation of the female principle in *The Tempest*. Barbara Howard Traister analyzes Prospero's position as a magician within Renaissance dramatic tradition.

This book concludes with a New Historicist reading of *The Tempest* by Paul Brown. Little as I sympathize with attempts to relate Shakespeare to "the discourse of colonialism," I find exemplary Brown's emphasis upon the radical ambivalence of the play's conclusion.

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Introduction

The Tempest is not a mystery play, offering a secret insight into human finalities; act 5 of *Hamlet* is closer to that. Perhaps *The Tempest* does turn ironically upon Shakespeare's conscious farewell to his dramatic art, but such an irony or allegory does not enhance the play's meanings. I sometimes think *The Tempest* was the first significant drama in which not much happens, beyond its protagonist's abandonment of his scheme of justified revenge precisely when he has all his enemies in his power. Most explanations of Prospero's refusal to take revenge reduce to the formulaic observation: "That's the way things turn out in Shakespeare's late romances." Let us move again towards the question: why does Prospero not gratify himself by fulfilling his revenge?

The originality of representation in *The Tempest* embraces only Prospero, the supernatural Ariel, compounded of fire and air, and the preternatural Caliban, compounded of earth and water. Unlike *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* contrives to be a romance of the marvelous without ever being outrageous; the Shakespearean exuberance expresses itself here by cheerfully discarding any semblance of a plot.

Prospero, who is almost always sympathetic as Miranda's father, is dubiously fair to Ariel, and almost too grimly censorious towards the wretched Caliban. His peculiar severity towards Ferdinand also darkens him. But only this split, between loving father and puritanical hermeticist, makes Prospero truly interesting. He does not move our imagination as Ariel does, and Ariel, a kind of revised Puck, is less original a representation than Caliban is. Caliban does not run off with the play, as Barnardine does in *Measure for Measure*, but he makes us wonder how much humanity Prospero has sacrificed in exchange for hermetic knowledge and wisdom.

Caliban is uncanny to us, in precisely Freud's sense of "the uncanny." Something long estranged from us, yet still familiar, returns from repression in Caliban. We can be repelled by Caliban's degradation and by his de-

formity, but like Prospero we have to acknowledge that Caliban is somehow ours, not to be repudiated. It is not clear to me whether Caliban is meant to be wholly human, as there is something amphibian about him, and his mother Sycorax, like the weird sisters in *Macbeth*, has her preternatural aspects. What is certain is that Caliban has aesthetic dignity, and that the play is not wholly Prospero's only because of him. You could replace Ariel by various sprites (though not without loss), but you would not have *The Tempest* if you removed Caliban.

Why Shakespeare called the play *The Tempest* I cannot understand. Perhaps he should have called it *Prospero* or even *Prospero and Caliban*. Though the "names of the actors" describes Caliban as a "savage and deformed slave," I have never known any reader or theatergoer who could regard that as an adequate account of what may be Shakespeare's most deeply troubling single representation after Shylock. Robert Browning's Caliban, in the great monologue "Caliban upon Setebos," seems to me the most remarkable interpretation yet ventured, surpassing all overt literary criticism, and so I will employ it here as an aid, while yielding to all those who would caution me that Browning's Caliban is not Shakespeare's. Yes, but whose Caliban is?

Prospero forgives his enemies (and evidently will pardon Caliban) because he achieves a complex stance that hovers between the disinterest-
edness of the Hamlet of act 5, and a kind of hermetic detachment from his own powers, perhaps because he sees that even those are dominated by a temporal ebb and flow. But there is also a subtle sense in which Prospero has been deeply wounded by his failure to raise up a higher Caliban, even as Caliban is palpably hurt (in many senses) by Prospero. Their relations, throughout the play, are not less than dreadful and wound us also, as they seem to have wounded Browning, judging by his Caliban's meditation:

Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books
 Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:
 Vexed, 'stiched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,
 Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;
 Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;
 Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe
 The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;
 And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,
 A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,
 Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,
 And saith she is Miranda and my wife:
 'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane

He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge;
 Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
 Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
 And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
 In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
 A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.
 'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
 Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.

(ll. 150–69)

That lumpish sea-beast, “a bitter heart that bides its time and bites,” is the tortured plaything of a sick child, embittered by having been cast out by a foster father. As a slave, Shakespeare’s Caliban is rhetorically defiant, but his curses are his only weapon. Since he has not inherited his mother’s powers, Caliban’s curses are in vain, and yet they have the capacity to provoke Prospero and Miranda, as in the first scene where the three appear together:

PROSPERO: Come on,
 We’ll visit Caliban my slave, who never
 Yields us kind answer.
 MIRANDA: ’Tis a villain, sir,
 I do not love to look on.
 PROSPERO: But as ’tis,
 We cannot miss him. He does make our fire,
 Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices
 That profit us. What ho! slave! Caliban!
 Thou earth, thou! speak.
 CALIBAN: (*Within.*) There’s wood enough within.
 PROSPERO: Come forth, I say, there’s other business for thee.
 Come, thou tortoise, when?

Enter ARIEL like a water-nymph.

Fine apparition! My quaint Ariel,
 Hark in thine ear.

ARIEL: My lord, it shall be done. *Exit.*
 PROSPERO: Thou poisonous slave, got by the devil himself
 Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!

Enter CALIBAN.

CALIBAN: As wicked dew as e’er my mother brush’d
 With raven’s feather from unwholesome fen

Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye,
And blister you all o'er!

PROSPERO: For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
Side-stitches, that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinch'd
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made 'em.

CALIBAN: I must eat my dinner.
This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give
me

Water with berries in't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee
And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile.
Curs'd be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you!
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.

PROSPERO: Thou most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us'd
thee
(Filth as thou art) with human care, and lodg'd thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honor of my child.

CALIBAN: O ho, O ho, would't had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans.

MIRANDA: 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 endow'd thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vild race

(Though thou didst learn) had that in't which
 good natures
 Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
 Deservedly confin'd into this rock,
 Who hadst deserv'd more than a prison.

CALIBAN: 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!

PROSPERO: Hag-seed, hence!
 Fetch us in fuel, and be quick, thou'rt best,
 To answer other business. Shrug'st thou, malice?
 If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly
 What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,
 Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar
 That beasts shall tremble at thy din.

CALIBAN: No, pray thee.
 [*Aside.*] I must obey. His art is of such pow'r,
 It would control my dam's god, Setebos,
 And make a vassal of him.

PROSPERO: So, slave, hence! *Exit Caliban.*
 (1.2.307-74)

Is it, as some would say, that our resentment of Prospero and Miranda here and our sympathy (to a degree) with Caliban, are as irrelevant as a preference for Shylock over Portia? I do not think so, since Shylock is a grotesque bogeyman rather than an original representation, while Caliban, though grotesque, is immensely original. You can New Historicize Caliban if you wish, but a discourse on Caliban and the Bermudas trade is about as helpful as a neo-Marxist analysis of Falstaff and surplus value, or a Lacanian-feminist exegesis of the difference between Rosalind and Celia. Caliban's peculiar balance of character and personality is as unique as Falstaff's and Rosalind's, though far more difficult to describe. But Prospero's balance also yields reluctantly to our descriptions, as if more than his white magic is beyond us. Prospero never loses his anger or sense of outrage in regard to Caliban, and surely some guilt attaches to the magus, who sought to make Caliban into what he could not become and then went on punishing Caliban merely for being himself, Caliban, a man of his own island and its nature, and not at all a candidate for hermetic transformations. Caliban can be controlled and chastised by Prospero's magical art, but he is recalcitrant, and holds on to the strange dignity of being Caliban, although endlessly insulted by everyone who speaks to him in the play.

Alas, that dignity vanishes in the presence of the jester Trinculo and the drunken Stephano, with whom Caliban attempts to replace Prospero as master. The immense puzzle of Shakespeare's vision of Caliban is enhanced when the slave's most beautiful speech comes in the grotesque context of his seeking to soothe the fears of Trinculo and Stephano which are caused by the music of the invisible Ariel:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,
 That if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
 Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak'd
 I cried to dream again.

(3.2.135–43)

This exquisite pathos is Caliban's finest moment, and exposes the sensibility that Prospero presumably hoped to develop, before Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda. The bitterest lines in the play come in Prospero's Jehovah-like reflections upon his fallen creature:

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
 Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
 Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
 And as with age his body uglier grows,
 So his mind cankers. I will plague them all,
 Even to roaring.

(4.1.88–93)

This could be Milton's God, Schoolmaster of Souls, fulminating at the opening of *Paradise Lost*, book 3. True, Prospero turns to the rarer action of forgiveness and promises Caliban he yet will receive pardon and Caliban promises to "seek for grace." Yet Shakespeare was uninterested in defining that grace; he does not even tell us if Caliban will remain alone on the island in freedom, or whether he is to accompany Prospero to Milan, a weird prospect for the son of Sycorax. All that Prospero promises himself in Milan is a retirement "where / Every third thought shall be my grave." We want Caliban to be left behind in what is, after all, his own place, but Shakespeare neither indulges nor denies our desires. If Prospero is at last a kind of benign Iago (an impossible oxymoron), then Caliban's recalcitrances

finally look like an idiosyncratic rebellion of actor against playwright, creature against demiurge. A warm monster is dramatically more sympathetic than a cold magus, but that simplistic difference does not explain away the enigma of Caliban. I suspect that Prospero forgives his enemies because he understands, better than we can, the mystery of time. His magic reduces to what Nietzsche called the will's revenge against time, and against time's "it was." Caliban, who need not fear time, and who hates Prospero's books of magic, perhaps represents finally time's revenge against all those who conjure with books.

Miraculous Harp: A Reading of Shakespeare's *Tempest*

Harry Berger, Jr.

In many of the later plays, some analogue of dramatic control is imposed—and conspicuously imposed—on action which would otherwise get out of control; action which indeed, in earlier tragedies, did get out of control. The echoes of, or allusions to, earlier tragic patterns in such plays as *Measure for Measure*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, have often been remarked. The modes of resolution seem deliberately strained, unnatural, artificial, or unrealistic in these plays, especially since they resonate with allusions to earlier tragedies where resolutions were not forthcoming. This pattern tends to emphasize a crucial difference between life and theatre: in art, life's problems are displayed and then resolved, perhaps displayed in order to be resolved, perhaps resolved so that people can get up and go home. Yet on the other hand—and this distinguishes many of the later plays from the earlier festive comedies—neither characters nor spectators want to go home: sometimes this is because we are surprised by the unexpected and abrupt happy ending; sometimes because the play fading into a golden past makes us yearn after it; sometimes because the action is protracted, the ending delayed, by characters who seem reluctant to leave the play world and return to actuality. The plays often present themselves as temporary and all too fragile hiding places in, or from, the worsening world.

Such qualities of the last plays have evoked criticism of the sort leveled by Madeleine Doran at the earlier problem plays:

They do not seem to us to be satisfactorily resolved in the conventional happy ending of comedy. . . . [and this is so] because of the working out of a serious moral problem in an action built of improbable device and lucky coincidence. The result is only too often to make the solutions seem trivial or forced.

The difficulty with these plays is that the problems are realistically viewed, the endings are not. . . . the manipulation of intrigue and lucky chance to bring about the conventional happy ending gives the effect of an evasion of the serious moral issue the play.

The main difference between the problem plays and the last plays is that in the latter not even the problems are realistically viewed: Shakespeare would want us to distinguish the grim actuality of Vienna from the paste-board villainies of Cymbeline's court. Though Professor Doran's remarks are helpful as guides to description and interpretation, her intention to criticize detracts from their value. The critical mood is wrong mainly because Shakespeare has anticipated her by building her criticisms into the plays themselves. And in fact, the burden of the present essay will be to suggest that Shakespeare would or could or did level Professor Doran's criticism toward her own reading of *The Tempest*: "The action of the play is Prospero's discovery to his enemies, their discovery of themselves, the lovers' discovery of a new world of wonder, Prospero's own discovery of an ethic of forgiveness, and the renunciation of his magical power." This is, in epitome, perhaps the most commonly accepted view of the play, and the best defense of this sentimental reading known to me has been made by Stephen Orgel, who claims that from the first long dialogue with Miranda in 1.2, "Prospero's suffering . . . is essentially behind him," therefore he "leads the play . . . through suffering to reconciliation and a new life." Orgel goes on to cite the pattern of the masque of Ceres as evidence that "the play is at this point moving away from the island and back to civilization": "The conclusion of the revels, the vision of the masque as an 'insubstantial pageant,' and all that that vision implies for Prospero, provide a vital transition in the play to the renunciation of extraordinary powers and the return to the ordinary world." Orgel admits that "the transition is a painful one for Prospero," but his major emphasis is on the magician's return, and on his preparing to reassume his old job.

I find it hard to accept this reading as it stands, not because it is wrong, but because it does not hit the play where it lives. The renunciation pattern is *there*, but only as a general tendency against which the main thrust of the

play strains. There are too many cues and clues, too many quirky details, pointing in other directions, and critics have been able to make renunciation in this simple form the central action only by ignoring those details. Some of the puzzling items may be listed here: First, Prospero's language in describing the usurpation to Miranda, encourages us to believe that he is partly responsible for what happened, yet *he* never seems to take this into account; throughout the course of the play, he acts the part of the good man wronged by villains, and he is not above an occasional reference to his injured merit. Second, Gonzalo, for all his goodness, was in effect Antonio's accomplice; as Alonso's counselor he mitigated the harshness of Prospero's exile, but the fact remains that he was master of the design, responsible for its execution. Furthermore Gonzalo, for all his goodness, is just a bit of fool—maybe not as much as his knavish companions make him out to be, but a fool nonetheless. And yet the affinities between Gonzalo and Prospero are curiously insisted on in a number of verbal and ideological echoes. One more detail about Gonzalo: in any good romance his final speech would be the concluding sentiment; what ancient Gower is to *Pericles* Gonzalo would be to *The Tempest*; only it is not that kind of play, and his epilogue is badly timed, preceding the end by 113 lines.

Third: a very important set of questions emerging from the exposition in 1.2 have never, to my knowledge, been pursued: What are we really to do with Ariel, Sycorax, and Caliban? Why was Ariel punished by being stuck in a tree, why does he continually ask for his freedom, why the names *Sycorax* and *Caliban*, why the business about the witch's exile from Africa with its obvious echoes of Prospero's exile from Europe? What to make of a fact which many readers have noticed, the difference between Prospero's view of Caliban and ours? Why do we respond to certain qualities in Caliban which Prospero ignores, and why are we made to feel that the magician is more vindictive than he needs to be? Why the very full sense Shakespeare gives us of life on the island before the ship sailed in from Tunis, where Alonso had just married off his daughter Claribel to the Prince? In this connection, what are we to do with the odd set of references and allusions to Africa and Carthage, and especially to episodes from the first half of Virgil's *Aeneid*? These references prod us into remembering Aeneas's journey from Troy to Italy, from an old to a new world; they offer that journey as a shadowy resemblance to the various voyages and themes of the plot action, and they ask us to make some sense of the resemblance, or at least not to ignore it. Finally, why the twenty-line epilogue, in which Prospero asks the audience for applause, sympathy, and release?

The framework within which I shall consider these questions will be