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Teaching *The Tempest* in an American-Adamic Context: The New World Orthodoxy as Multicultural Pedagogy

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**"Teaching *The Tempest* in an American-Adamic Context:
The New World Orthodoxy as Multicultural Pedagogy"**

by Frank W. Brevik and Jessica L. White

Part One:

The Tempest has long been my favourite play, certainly the one whose criticism and background I know the best. It is also the play I consistently teach the worst, ten years on the trot and counting. What follows could be read as a poor excuse as to why the play has caused me so many pedagogical headaches in the past but more charitably, perhaps, as a contribution to a much-neglected debate over how to teach the play to a student body overwhelmingly unfamiliar with an erstwhile critical controversy that makes the text of *The Tempest* so disproportionately compelling to professors. One of the most central concerns of this paper is to facilitate a discussion over how to approach *patiently* the textual matter of *The Tempest* without forcing biased contextual points-of-view on students who, in my experience, at least, are generally ill-prepared to fathom the play's enormous contextual richness. The following essay is a collaboration with my student Jessica White, who took my latest Shakespeare course in autumn 2009. The essay is divided into two main parts, the second forming a case study of her paper as

a(n) (a)typical response to critical controversies over the play's purported New World relevance, its colonial resonances, and its significant sites of interest to post-colonial scholars and authors.

The paramount challenge now in *Tempest* scholarship should be how to transmit not only the play but also its criticism in a fashion that balances our own prejudice with the text itself and the students' own interpretations. Part of the pedagogical problem is that the text of the play has since ceased to be only one "text," and if we accept the critically well-founded questions as to what "text" really is, then thousands of *Tempests* exist now that will hardly be the same tomorrow. For instance, what post-colonial writers did in the '60s via creative adaptation and political rewriting to alter and multiply the meanings of the 1623 First Folio text was followed up by New Historicist and Cultural Materialist readings which, even though obviously greatly influenced by Reader-Response criticism, deserve much credit for having managed to enrich our understanding of *The Tempest's* hypertextuality. In fact, the historical-contextual camp has been so successful in stressing the play's indebtedness to myriad intertexts, obscure sources, countless travel tales, and New World-political pamphlets that, even though these connections still remain a fairly grateful topic to *lecture* about, it is by now extremely difficult to introduce and *teach* the play to critically inexperienced students and readers.

Pedagogical approaches being central to this essay, I argue that there is a challenging discrepancy between “Adamic” students who do not immediately appreciate the finer points of the contextual forces at work in *The Tempest* and a critical multicultural orthodoxy that often struggles to see the “text itself” behind them. I will argue that, in order to hope to explore the play in a student-centred manner, one ought to eschew criticism, political controversies, and historically relevant intertextual material until rather late in the discussion, ideally when these points are brought up organically. It is a sign of the times, perhaps, that this organic form of teaching is seen as a needlessly time-consuming exercise that does not yield the desired “truth,” one that may lead the professor astray from the important knowledge he so wishes to impart. I am unfortunately entirely guilty of this tendency myself, as I have reasonably maximum two weeks to devote to the play in an undergraduate Shakespeare course.

For I am constantly torn between my own wish to provide unbiased information—insofar as it is at all possible to attain—and my very real wish to elicit their own true responses whilst also introducing them to the most influential criticism over the last fifty years. There is a right syntax in which to do this, perhaps, and it is at the early stage in a pedagogical situation that Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development stresses that students understand for themselves with a sense of autonomous mastery and ownership that which the pedagogue has not spoon-fed to them. When teaching *The Tempest*, the traditionally understood “primary text” is not

only the most useful *ground zero* but also a position that can later illuminate its necessarily ancillary historical con-texts in a way that provides students with (or indeed provokes them to) a sense of Vygotskian independent mastery over both Shakespearean text and multicultural con-text as well as a maturer sense of meta-reflection. Especially important in this syntax is the dissemination of the play's New World and colonialist dimensions in a pedagogical climate that is as interesting as it is challenging: despite a college setting where multiculturalism is *the* accepted orthodoxy, precious few Shakespeare students in my own experience manage to reach independently the New World or colonial extra-textual link *de rigueur* amongst critics. This paper seeks to answer why this is so as well as to explore interpretative and pedagogical strategies in which such angles can be introduced and understood without doing violence to the students' autonomy and sense of mastery of the subject.

But first a clarification and some musings: the phrases “Adamic students” or “Adamic readers,” which I pilfer in part from R.W.B. Lewis's “American Adam” and here half-heartedly claim as my own, entail admittedly highly self-contradictory ideas. For even though one cannot assume an entirely utopian, *total* knowledge nor ignorance on the part of students' or professors' contextual savvy, it seems a fair bet that professors are far more knowledgeable than their students, yet the modern *pedagogical* consensus seems to be that the learning experience should be theirs—nearly to a fault. For what are, after all, the most “important” aspects of, for example, Shakespeare's last

unassisted play? Has the professor any right to assume the stage as a *central* actor when interpreting *The Tempest*? Yet is it not in fact part of the students' expectations that he do? But does that mean that it is simply understood that the professor has time and place and right (since *paid* by said students) to address extra-textual issues at the cost of students' own perspectives? These are basic questions, perhaps, but pressingly relevant vis-à-vis a Tempestian criticism that has lately been both pedagogically conservative and politically radical. My own pedagogical position is simply that students need *more* that they already know, but I feel that most modern teacher-scholars have a tremendously difficult time articulating just that, as a culturally pervasive democratic relativism leads us towards a position where our own authority is undermined, to a frustrating position where we are simply running out of time, our "educated" perspectives potentially the victim of student-centred democracy and time constraints. I have never seen any *Tempest* scholar address these concerns and will for that reason try to tackle them in the following essay with an emphasis on an "Adamic reading" that is a useful starting point as a *relative* concept that may facilitate discussion over pedagogical delivery that has hitherto been sadly under-researched and unacknowledged in *Tempest* scholarship.

Some of the myriad contradictions attendant with any "Adamic" response in general and certainly as it applies to my teaching *The Tempest's* relation to post-colonial and New World-specific problems include first of all the introductions to various

versions of the play that often give the premise away. Secondly, students from my previous classes who have heard me speak about specific textual or thematic issues in the past tend to anticipate my teaching strategy. Thirdly, as I assign readings like William Strachey's account of 1609—which describes a tempestuous scene taking place near the Bermudas—or Montaigne's essay on the cannibals (published in English in 1605), the intertextual links more than hint away the New World-topical issue. Finally, some of my students then make an early educated and by all means “correct” guess in class that the play has indeed a relevance to the discourse of the New World or to the subaltern, perhaps also based on previous conversations about Otherness in earlier plays like *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Titus Andronicus*, et cetera.

All these significant problems aside, I suggest that an “Adamic” learning approach can provide a fruitful *ground zero* that can be an auspicious starting point when approaching a densely layered text like *The Tempest*. Less is necessarily more in this sense, for when the students have learnt to master and make sense of the primary-textual strategies that make the character Caliban so compelling, one can then move on to assess the myriad competing *inter-textual* and political-symbolic claims to Third World *Calibanismo* and post-colonial *Tempest-dom*. In this order, then, students may not only come to appreciate Caliban's considerably rich symbolic resonance outside of the text but might also begin to reflect introspectively and meta-pedagogically upon the implications of their previous (limited, strictly text-specific) responses that managed to

make no such link. In other words, it is *later* rather than sooner we ought to ask ourselves why Caliban is such a potent symbol for previously colonized people in the Third World, why scholars rather than students generally appreciate the political significance of this popularity, and what prevents students in our own situation from immediately apprehending this angle.

In this central respect, my syntax is the diametric opposite of much recent criticism, especially the methods and overtly political purposes set out by Lisa McNee, who, “in order to address the issues relevant to the text,” urges “instructors [to] share their own emotional responses” whilst at the same time managing to “avoid the hostile atmosphere that leads students to claim that instructors are trying to indoctrinate them” (199). Since “students easily see through the instructors supposedly 'neutral' stance,” she encourages “the instructor of postcolonial literatures [to] ... use an explicit discussion of students' goals in coming to the university” (200), an “honesty” which must nevertheless be “tempered by courtesy and tact” (200).

Instead, I argue in favour of an approach inspired by Lev Vygotsky's idea of student-centred mastery, one that relies upon the professor's sense of self-discipline and restraint, the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the level between those problems that can be solved with the help of an authority and those “assignments ... which can be solved independently” (61).^[1] The key balance is

found in the zone between the sphere of contact with the pedagogue and cooperation with other learners, for, what the student can do today with the help of an authority, he “will supposedly accomplish independently tomorrow” (Danielsen 62). Problematically for my own purposes, though, Vygotsky also “warns about how easy it is to underestimate the abilities of children and teachers, when studied in isolation” (Danielsen 62). To assume, therefore, as I do in this paper, that students' responses are relatively unmediated or “Adamic” is a seeming contradiction yet one that owes more to the democratic impulses of reader-response criticism than to arrogance. For my initial hypothesis was precisely that such democratic and “Adamic” responses would yield dramatically different responses than those predictable post-colonial readings that result from classes where the professor insists on critical controversy from the get-go.

Another sign of the critical times is that some works that deal with teaching the play are stingy with their reflection over pedagogical strategies. Maurice Hunt's *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's The Tempest and Other Later Romances*, an edited collection of essays from 1992, is a case in point. Few contributors make a whole-hearted attempt to tie in their own critical insights with practical-pedagogical concerns. For all of Donna Hamilton's paper's strengths, for instance, one finds scant reflection on the enormous pedagogical challenges associated with teaching new historicism in addition to the play itself. Whilst it is supposedly the plural-organic classroom “we” who “examine the Parliament of 1610” and other “power relations” (66) and absolutist

theories as a way to understand the play (67), it could be interesting to know how long Hamilton's students are allowed independently to ponder and digest the political significance of Caliban's rebellion and Prospero's magic before the professor assigns a relevant historical passage to read or how many class sessions the students are given to appreciate fully the absolutist political angles Hamilton herself discusses with such seemingly effortless erudition.

Other scholars are not so much critically focused as ideologically (and therefore also pedagogically) bound by the moral and ethical dilemmas into which *Tempest* criticism these last fifty or sixty years have managed to navigate interpretations of the play itself. This tendency is clearly seen in Virginia La Grand and Craig E. Mattson's work, which is concerned with ethics as a supplement to aesthetic value in a pedagogical setting. This ethical focus is one that follows and refines George Lamming's fierce assertion that the practice of making post-colonial "parallels" that are "deeply felt" constitute "a *value you must learn*" (Lamming 95, italics mine). The problem with such readings is their tendency to move the play's purported colonialist discourse into a rhetorical space where considerations of ethics become predictably binary: Caliban is the Victim poised against Prospero the Dictator.

But whilst my own students' responses often show a (certainly to me) rather surprising degree of understanding for Prospero's callous conduct vis-à-vis his slave, La

Grand and Mattson suggest that an emotional “discovery” of Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s post-colonial sampling and reference use is necessary since “the literature....and other institutions of British culture operate as an Ideological State Apparatus that enforce a colonial domination no longer legally in force” (La Grand and Mattson 478). Their article’s conclusion about adding “virtue” to “virtuosity” laments the “elitism” it claims to find in “rationalist and ironist pedagogies” that are preoccupied with “factual mastery” (491)—presumably one to be understood as an unhealthy attention to “the text itself.” And one is led to believe that the text of the play—hardly mentioned at all in a 20-page article—cannot explicate itself, but La Grand and Mattson could have given “the text itself” more than a superficial analysis of the play so as to avoid the oft-repeated red herring that Caliban lives on a “Caribbean island” (479). The still commonly heard claim is that Caliban (because of his name) is a historically accurate native Caribbean islander (or Indian) is a brief but illustrative case in point, for significant problems of consistency arise to account for this native’s *blue-eyed* African mother (I.ii.269), his father the *Judaeo-Christian* Devil himself (I.ii.319), and Caliban’s “freckled” skin (I.ii.283). In fact, a close reading of the text’s island setting also reveals a hyper-ludic geography that undercuts its own epistemological status, thus de-situating the island in any meaningful cartographic sense (Brevik 182). La Grand and Mattson also fail to defend properly, outside of appeals to pathos and ethics, why it is important to understand *The Tempest* primarily via *other* works but especially what

“virtuous” and “ethical” responses and interpretations might look like—or whether such vaguely multicultural intertextual exercises are an undertaking that undergraduate student readers are equipped to assess with a sense of meta-critical distance.

By far the best reflections on the pedagogy of Shakespeare and *The Tempest* can be found in Gerald Graff and James Phelan's book from 2000, which acknowledges that “Learning by controversy” (92) “is a good thing” (107) and that exposure to literary criticism is a necessity (103) since “all responses are mediated...[for]...it is not possible...to read Shakespeare today without the mediating filter of his reputation as the greatest writer” (102); hence, a “diversity of teaching theories and styles” are central in their attempt to “empower” students, whose privilege and responsibility it will be to “take control ... over [their] own learning” (107). For all its honesty and considerable pedagogical strengths, though, also Graff and Phelan's book fails to reflect over just *how much* their students have read in their lives and *when* one should introduce whatever extratextual material recent scholarship deems relevant.

Instead, they illustrate a rather conventional syntax for teaching the play when they sketch out a debate where the students are told about, persuaded into accepting, or even berated for entertaining the post-colonial link—seemingly *before* one has started talking about the play at all (93-97). The representations of post-colonialist and

traditionalist professors that follow are entertaining yet seem somewhat caricatured,^[2] but Graff and Phelan assure us that

Our premise is not that literary value and interpretive truth are merely arbitrary matters of opinion or that matters of debates should proliferate without ever reaching resolution. Our premise is that it is only through the process of reasoned and passionate debate about questions of value and truth that we can ever hope to resolve such questions. Controversy for us is not the opposite of reaching resolution but a *precondition* of doing so. (101, my italics)

But, again, when should this controversy be introduced? My own experience has taught me that discussions about post-colonial political issues *before* the primary text has been read and properly digested—the very precondition in Graff and Phelan's imaginary case above—tend to be depressingly one-way traffic, hence rendering “passionate debate” a bit of a misnomer, given its inevitably monologic form. It also seems a relevant question to ask of a book that celebrates critical controversy as a pedagogical boon how much time one can reasonably spend on this play and its enormous debate in *any* classroom (in my own case maximum two weeks, plus one week for screening a film version)—especially in such cases when students' lack of contextual grounding and general preparedness render such debate unrealistic.

Furthermore, if students are challenged to take one (or none or both) of only two sides in this debate, one runs the overwhelming risk of simplifying first and foremost the play itself but also the complex nature of the critical controversy. My own challenge has often been to validate a neutral position or indeed a *non*-position that students can comfortably assume before or even after such extra-textual issues have been properly researched or digested. Rather than the precondition Graff and Phelan's book calls for, which my own experience tells me is extremely difficult to elicit, it is perhaps a better and more realistic pedagogical goal to encourage fruitful exchange of ideas without expecting students to align their interpretation with one side of this important but by all means over-simplified schismatic divide.

Graff and Phelan in many ways anticipate such concerns, however, in their discussion over teachers' responses to the critical debate—some professors may feel that it is “counter-productive” and barring students' “direct and unmediated” responses... (102). They “respectfully disagree” with such claims, though, since a “distinction between a direct and mediated response does not hold up” (102). Furthermore, “It is not possible for any class approaching *The Tempest* to escape the mediation established by the context of the whole course and by the instructor's particular approach to the material. The choice is not between direct and unmediated reading but between different *kinds* of mediation” (102-103, emphasis mine). Whilst this seems like a solid point, my paper's central disagreement with Graff and Phelan is that such facile

rhetorical sweeps cloak a real pedagogical problem, for some responses are clearly *more* mediated than others, especially given the professor's training and level of specialization. To me, students' responses are extremely interesting precisely for their *relative* innocence, for their barometric indicator of a culture which, instead of an as-yet-to-be-acquired critical savvy, students carry with them as their most important resource in the negotiation over meaning. Ironically, it is such cultural and historical insights that enable my student Jessica White's term paper to anticipate much of the new historicist criticism of *The Tempest* before she has read it.

Students' cultural-political and therefore critical preferences are the focus of Christy Desmet and Roger Bailey's "The Shakespeare Dialogues: (Re)producing *The Tempest* in Secondary and University Education," which discusses frankly their own students' tendency to privilege traditional methods of textual analysis over textual-political post-colonial concerns:

A similar nostalgia for tradition emerged briefly during the final interview. Students expressed more skepticism about the utility of sociological approaches to art. During the debriefing, one student commented that he preferred to think of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage. Such a view, which goes back at least to Edward Dowden's nineteenth-century reading of Shakespeare's imaginary biography, is perfectly designed to drive a scholar wild. But if looked at in the context of the entire

Shakespeare Dialogues, this comment shows that the students, instead of resting content on the Olympian heights of postcolonial theory, were still worrying the questions with which they had begun, *bringing back into court evidence that had been suppressed by the class anthology...* (130, my emphasis)

The real strength of Desmet and Bailey's work is their democratic acceptance of and respect for the students' sometimes reactionary modes of interpretation. As such, it is an enormously worthwhile study for displaying typical attitudes of students, especially as they themselves recognize that Graff and Phelan's selections tend to privilege the hegemonic readings of *The Tempest* as knee-deep in colonial discourse and post-colonial pathos. As experience has bitterly taught me, though, the emotional rawness and sense of profound injustice that often underlie post-colonial criticism is extremely seldom entirely shared or fully understood by American undergraduate Shakespeare students in general—which makes intelligent student responses that appreciate and synthesize both such genuinely interesting and worthwhile cases.

Part Two:

My own case study is Jessica L. White's senior-level Shakespeare term paper "*The Tempest: A Warning Against Colonization,*" which forms not only the basis for a

pedagogical reevaluation of my own practices as well as a barometric gauge that illustrates the pitfalls as well as the potentially rich readings *The Tempest* can produce in a senior-level Shakespeare class but also—fortunately, one must say—complicates my own hypothesis and prejudices, to say the least. Jessica's mature and (to me) surprisingly sophisticated grasp on both the co-texts of literary criticism and history problematizes my initial belief that few students manage to apprise the demanding New World-intertextual angle without having read Montaigne, Strachey, Robert Browning, W.H. Auden, George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, N'gugi wã Thiong'o, or Lemuel Johnson beforehand. This has certainly been the case in previous courses—not even my students from Haiti or Kenya managed to make such a leap, despite the fact that their own post-colonial backgrounds would (or so I presumed at the time) have given them an upper hand on their fellow students with regard to Caliban's similar plight to dispossessed natives.

But in her essay, Jessica points out that “To a [post-1865] American, the images [of Caliban] invoked are reminiscent of slavery in the United States” (3). This is an extremely useful if, despite its careful wording, ultimately anachronistic parallel, yet Jessica's paper is here negotiating a presentist interpretation, namely that it is well-nigh impossible for informed American students *not* to read it in exactly this way, the same way it is virtually impossible not to touch on the anti-Semitic voices so explicit, post-1945, in *The Merchant of Venice*. Hence, we can see here that a purely “Adamic” reading

in this instance is almost impossible, as our history of slavery is a “co-text” we carry with us, a text we imprint upon the palimpsest that *The Tempest* necessarily becomes.

I have good reasons to believe that Jessica's reading is not influenced by my own. For, in a previous article written on Caliban's origins, I have argued a very different case, namely that there is a real danger that precisely this sense of flexibility and fluidity of meaning run the risk of uprooting the character from the very text that brought him to life:

New Historicists and Cultural Materialists have done well to stress that, by holding the text at arm's length, as it were, we can better understand its significance as a product of a larger society, as only one voice within a broader culture and discourse ... But the final result of the emotion-centred fusion of the most subjective excesses of reader-response criticism and cultural studies is that *The Tempest* has undergone an interpretative odyssey ... from text to self. ... Many post-colonials now see themselves *in* Caliban or themselves *as* huddled masses of Calibans anonymous. But we get a profound sense of how ubiquitous—and, one feels tempted to add, subsequently meaningless in any Shakespearean sense—the adjectives “Calibanic,” “Calibanismo,” and “Calibanesque” have become, perhaps especially to the peoples of the New World they are often meant to address. (Brevik 197-198)

Bearing that fairly explicit conclusion in mind as a potential “noise” factor in the classroom (and the prejudice of privileging traditionally understood “text” whence it is admittedly derived), I take much satisfaction from the fact that Jessica has felt no compulsion whilst writing her paper to parrot my own article on the play but has instead taken her paper in the diametrically opposite direction from what I have argued on paper but, again, had tried, as an experiment, to keep silent about as best as I could

during class discussions—even when such angles were brought up towards the end. It is nevertheless difficult to assess whether Jessica's paper neatly illustrates the point about the *relatively* Adamic readings for which I speak in favour, because, as her afterword alludes to, she may very well have been influenced by my own methods and bias. That is to say, the class discussions might have convinced her to eschew any moral condemnations or railings against imperialism, an attitude I have reason to hope was fostered by an organic and student-centred learning environment. Nevertheless, Jessica's paper achieves a sense of moral and textual balance that is her paper's strength, I think, in the face of any professor's caprice and unarticulated bias.

But her paper then shows the sort of sophisticated understanding of both text and co-texts that is indeed rare in these classes when she remarks that

Shakespeare also brings into question the fruitfulness of such attempts of colonization by relating the island to the reader in a paradoxical form. At the time of his writing, much literature was propaganda in favor of the settlement and excursions to the New World, so it held an extremely biased view and often depicted an idyllic picture. Luckily, Shakespeare was subject to firsthand accounts that could negate these claims. (7)

Her paper bolsters its argument by carefully discussing “the [disputed] intended location of the island,” which she deems “irrelevant in a colonial sense” because, “whether the play takes place in the Virginia colony, Patagonia, or Africa, the subject matter remains the same....[namely that] Caliban represents ... 'otherness' and Prospero ... sovereignty and power exercised by European colonizers” (7).

Jessica's paper further registers the linguistic and political struggles that Caliban has lost to Prospero and Miranda, that Caliban "can possibly be viewed as a victim," that he is "stripped of his land and his language, which are the same results that the Indians of the New World and other victims of colonization suffered," linking these parallels both to politics and ethics (8), *pace* George Lamming and others. Yet the equally fascinating and frustrating thing is that my students generally tend to be entirely unaware of the play's position as a site of such political and ideological conflict so enormously popular with post-colonial scholars. In fact, in a 1991 opinion article in *Newsweek* (of all places) George Will, very briefly, almost in passing, challenged the hegemonic interpretations of *The Tempest* that read the play politically "against the grain" as part of the Culture Wars. Stephen Greenblatt's passionate response a couple of months later touches on pedagogy in a way that interesting to say the least, for, as Greenblatt proclaims, "Also at stake is the *transmission* of that culture to *passive students*" (115, my italics). If one reads Greenblatt "correctly," one might say that he expresses a wish to challenge a "tame and orderly canon" or perhaps ask further questions of a "shared and stable culture" that such "passive students" have been discouraged from challenging in the past.

But it is also possible to read Greenblatt's response against the grain as wishing to redefine the canon and our culture and historicity and modes of reading, a Herculean undertaking whose success might rely in some concerted measure upon the unfortunate

possibility that even Socratically querulous students interpret like Milton's "new presbyters," too zealous to stomach thoughts of "liberation from liberation," as Harold Bloom puts it (16). In fairness, though, Greenblatt specifically urges students and professors alike "to ask the most difficult questions about the past" (115), about our Western culture and history, our colonialism and our cruelty, about the savageness on which much of our material comfort rests. Yet there is perhaps also a sense in which new historicists find themselves uncomfortable being in a position of Prosperian power, the ones subject to questions, the ones whose hegemony is challenged—for such a critical hegemony Greenblatt and other new historicists and post-colonial scholars at all interested in *The Tempest* must acknowledge theirs in 2011.

Jessica's paper instead focuses its attention on a markedly text-centred interpretation when it drily points out that the island setting itself is presented in a manner that is anything but hard and fast:

The differing views are first encountered when Adrian claims "The air breathes upon us here most / sweetly" (2.1.49-50), to which Sebastian replies, "As if it had lungs, and rotten ones" (2.1.51). Antonio then adds, "Or as 'twere perfumed by a fen" (2.1.52). Later, Gonzalo makes a statement on the vegetation of the island saying "How lush and lusty the grass looks! / How green!" (2.1.56-57). Antonio replies with "The ground is indeed tawny" (2.1.59). Though these men are on the same island, their interpretations of the land are extremely different. (White 8)

Rather than placing full faith in an "often ... idyllic picture" painted by intertextually relevant New World propaganda literature, "these contrasting statements can be a

comment on the differing views that surrounded the ideas of expansion" (8). In other words, Jessica's paper warns that the play registers an ambiguous attitude to colonialism and surprises in its conclusion, where it reminds us that

One must also remember that Prospero eventually leaves the island. If the land had proven to be fruitful and worth cultivating, then he may have stayed and continued to rule over it in preparation for new settlers and additional profit. The fact that he leaves the island causes one to question if he does not see potential for the land or if it is worth the hard work of cultivating. (9)

Thus, the paper seemingly eschews the (for many) tempting conclusion that the play is a snapshot of incipient Anglo-American colonialism for a more nuanced position: "We are left with the idea that Shakespeare may have been against the expansion of European settlements and the effects on the natives who inhabit[ed] the lands before" (White 9). Jessica's interpretation is thus anomalously mature at this level insofar as it goes a long way in both acknowledging as well as challenging the predominant critical orthodoxy.

One of the most annoying/fascinating/pleasing experiences I have gained as a European teacher in America is to observe how college students over here arrive at extremely different, sometimes outright eccentric or even exotic interpretations that from the outside seem to be peculiarly culturally governed. Too many of my late

evenings have been ruined by freshman student papers that seem hell-bent on testing my patience with their ill-founded claims that America is the *only* democracy in the world. Other student papers, I darkly suspect, are trying to drive me mad with their bold-faced assertions that people living in Western Europe or Canada or Australia have no right to choose their own religion, that Africa has no middle class, that India has no rich people, that British people do not include the Welsh and the Scots but are nevertheless much smarter and more educated than Americans...and, perhaps most galling of all, that Christianity began in America, brought over here by the brave men and women on the Mayflower. To put it charitably, it is at times like these that my faith in the eventual success of the American educational system quickly dwindles to the level of estimation in which I hold the media culture that does its very utmost to retard our best efforts. Under such woeful circumstances, then, it hardly seems reasonable to expect students to know the rich intertextual woof or tapestry against which Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* or the historico-contextual matrix against which we read the play today. Yet the other side of the double-edged sword that forms the sad reality of such ill-informed assumptions paradoxically constitutes a specific cultural *competency* that (often equally challenged) European students naturally lack. Hence my own prejudice of the relative Adamicness of my American students, it happily turns out, is at the same time quite accurate but also far too pessimistic.

For the following example exhibits precisely the sort of American-specific knowledge that informs and governs Jessica's paper's particularly insightful angle:

If we continue to view the relationship between Prospero and Caliban similar to that of the Colonizer and the native then it is possible to make likely connections to historical events. Wylie points out that "Initially the relationship between Prospero and Caliban was amicable" (47). Caliban assisted Prospero in learning about the island and its resources. He reminds Prospero that he "showed thee all the qualities o'th' isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile" (1.2.339-340). One cannot help but note the likeness of the aforementioned situation to that of the English settlers who were shown by the Native Americans how to grow crops such as maize and were also given useful information to aid them in their survival in the New World. (White 9)

Even though she draws on John Wylie's recent work, and even though her argument illustrates knowledge and competency that, unlike that of George Lamming's, is learnt and instructed rather than lived, it still serves well to illustrate a distinctly American cultural insight that my European students, understandably, would have a hard time generating. Hence, the above wisdom serves as an apt example of the sort of interweaving of previously acquired culturally-contingent competency that American students carry and apply to the text as a side-text without the professor's interference.

Teachers of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* have long been challenged by myriad historical readings since Octave Mannoni's seminal 1950 essay *La psychologie de la colonisation*. Post-colonial and new historicist scholars have since managed firmly to historicize Caliban (and Prospero, Miranda, and other characters) in a way that has broadened our understanding of the cultural and political impact texts can wield even

(or perhaps *especially*) centuries after their composition. In the case of *The Tempest*, however, historical and political readings have been done with considerable violence to the genre of the text as a play and to the metaphorical and dizzying un-literalness of Shakespeare's language. Whereas new-critical obsessions with an artificially simplistic view of "the text itself" might have privileged certain forms of texts or knowledge at the cost of other equally valid texts, it is my experience that an equally ill-defined set of hierarchies of form popular with many new historicist scholars is even more difficult to transmit to undergraduate students. Significant problems of privileging one form of textuality over others nonetheless arise at the stage when, because of time constraints, one simply must decide, for the limited moment, which semiotic force field best addresses the textual problem at hand, perhaps in this process needlessly annihilating the other interesting angles of approach entirely.

Mea culpa—I admit that I tend to privilege the traditionally understood "text itself" — the purported object of study, after all is said and done—taking precedence over (yet hopefully also *beside*) other relevant information. Thus, *The Tempest*, the text that is "handed down to us" by John Hemmings and Henry Condell in their First Folio version of 1623—open-ended and imperfect as it is in its elliptical, indeed nearly apocryphal nature—is nevertheless a perfectly fine place to start. For *The Tempest* is often read as politically engaging *despite* the confines of its own formalistic boundaries as a purportedly dramatic text. This political reading itself—and certainly our own

recent tendency to privilege it over other interesting angles—could well be said to be a highly subjective lens or attendant “text” particular to readers after 1950, but to study the interaction between the primary text which is *The Tempest* and its myriad contexts, intertexts, sources, co-texts, subtexts, paratexts—and ultimately ourselves—is to *distinguish* between the nature of these different “texts” and to understand better both *The Tempest*, ourselves, and the critical controversy in the process.

I have hoped to argue briefly here that a sense of syntax is central to appreciate with regard to teaching the various stages of “literary and historical matters” imbricated in the play (Brown 48-71), in the order of their descending levels of priority, an order that hinges on acknowledgement of text, form, and genre as its first and most important premise. There are significant benefits to this approach: firstly, students' own mastery and independence is paramount. Secondly, students' responses can be said to be the cultural canary in the coal mine, a set of articulated and unarticulated opinions about text and discourse which, finally, becomes a meta-pedagogical point of introspective interest that raises the question of how our culture's understanding *The Tempest's* multicultural appeal is a space continually negotiated in the interacting spheres of semiotic contact that happens between text, student, professor, and culture. It is perhaps as healthy as it is humbling that many of my own brave impressions of such a tidy syntax are challenged and contradicted in Jessica White's afterword which follows.

Afterword/assessment/metareflection, by Jessica White:

I was first introduced to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the fall of 2009 in a senior-level course that was dedicated to the author. Prior to this introduction, I had only read the plays that are included within the normal high school curriculum: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and a handful of sonnets. We spent time in those classes breaking down iambic pentameter and trying to decipher metaphors and heightened language that was unfamiliar to us. We would either listen to the play being read aloud by the teacher or have to suffer while listening to the drone of a monotone 15-year-old classmate who had been asked to read a part. The process was at times somewhat tedious for a teenager in high school who was more concerned with volleyball and maintaining a social life, but I found Shakespeare's work enjoyable and I looked forward to reading more in the future. Honestly, I'm not even that sure that I enjoyed Shakespeare at that time. I just remember always hearing that the man was a genius which caused me to believe that I should like him.

When I was offered the Shakespeare course at LaGrange College, I was excited and hoped to read some of the classics that I had not had a chance to study, such as *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*. Much to my surprise, the syllabus contained many titles that I had never even heard of, like *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *The Winter's Tale*. Among these titles was *The Tempest*, also a work that I

was unfamiliar with. It was evident to me that this was a favorite of my professor's and turned out to be a play on which he had written scholarly articles and his dissertation. Knowing that this had been a play that he had researched very thoroughly allowed me to put full faith in whatever he said about the work. Oddly enough, my professor did not push any one interpretation of the play on us. Instead we were asked to interpret the work for ourselves. This was interesting to me because I never really saw any of the previous Shakespeare plays as ones that required as much interpreting. It was evident to me that *Romeo and Juliet* was about young lovers who were kept apart and tragically die in an attempt to be together. *Othello* was a story about jealousy and sprinkled with questionable racial comments and animalistic descriptions. *Macbeth* was about greed and the supernatural, but *The Tempest* was not quite as clear to me. I found myself with more questions when reading this play than with the others. Where is this island? Who or what is Caliban? Why is Miranda the only female? What is Shakespeare really saying? It has been my impression that Shakespeare tends to comment on the human condition in most of his more serious plays, so what was he saying here? The answers to these questions are still unclear to me, and the more research that I do the more differing views I find. To be honest, some of these questions never even crossed my mind until they were addressed to me by my professor. I only assumed such things as the location of Prospero's island. It made sense, for me, to believe that the island was somewhere in the Mediterranean Sea since Prospero's home was originally Milan and

the tempest that carries Alonso and his crew to the island as they are returning to Naples from Tunisia. Until I was asked to examine the text further and take into account the magical elements associated with the play I would not have second guessed such assumptions as this.

In my opinion, the most helpful aids in deciphering *The Tempest* are additional texts that the author would have been subjected to at the time of composing the play. Some teachers disagree with this method, such as one who states that “At the undergraduate level, I insist on two or three *full* careful readings of the play rather than secondary critical sources. Don’t let people find substitutes for their responses and values” (Hunt 8). I understand what this teacher is saying in regards to critical sources shaping students' views rather than forming an opinion for themselves, but I think historical sources are different. These types of sources can only inspire additional ideas in the student instead of forcing a specific idea about what the authors intentions are.

In my Shakespeare course, we were assigned an excerpt from Michel de Montaigne’s “Of the Cannibals.” We read the essay in conjunction with the last act of *The Tempest*, so the idea of the “noble savage” resonated with me during my interpretations, and I attempted to view Caliban with this idea in mind as he is referred to as “savage” and is the only native of the island. The concept of “the noble savage” returned to me as I examined the text further and found areas that echoed the ideas that

are expressed in Montaigne's essay—more specifically the idea that though the natives are savages and cannibals, they are more humane than the common more “civilized” man when it comes to the treatment of others. I was reminded of this idea during the banquet scene in the play when Gonzalo sees the spirits that he assumes are native islanders. He says, “though they are of monstrous shape, yet note / Their manners are more gentle-kind than of / Our human generation you shall find / Many, nay, almost any” (3.3.31-34). Gonzalo, much like Montaigne, could see that the natives possess something that, as civilized people, we lack. Had I not been introduced to “Of the Cannibals,” then I never would have made such a connection.

Montaigne's essay also caused me to view Caliban differently. I'm not sure if this was partially due to the fact that my instructor asked me to think about the character in terms of “the noble savage” or if it came naturally. I think I automatically sympathized with the character as he is abused both verbally and physically throughout the play, and his place as ruler of the island is taken unfairly by Prospero, who acts as a tyrannical power, but the word “noble” never really crossed my mind. My instructor did in fact ask us if Caliban may be smarter than the average reader gives him credit for. Since this question was even posed to me I assumed the answer was yes. I just had to figure out how Caliban could exemplify a noble creature. During my research I came upon a few potential answers. More recent interpretations of Caliban stress his “implicit virtues—his innate sensitivity, rough dignity, articulateness, and his intelligence...”

(Vaughan and Vaughan 145). Not only is he capable of learning a new language and servitude, but he also displays a love for beauty.

Another instance that causes us to question Caliban's intelligence is during the scenes where he is supposedly drunk. It is now my understanding that Caliban is not really drunk but is attempting to manipulate Stephano and Trinculo. This was definitely not my initial understanding of the situation, but my professor impressed upon me the idea that Caliban could actually be in control and simply using Stephano and Trinculo as a means of getting what he wants.

Another source that I found to be helpful, and that I would use in a classroom setting if I taught *The Tempest* myself, is William Strachey's "True Repertory of the Wrack." Although this letter was not published until 1625, it is an account of a shipwreck that occurred in 1609—a couple of years before *The Tempest* was written. Many people believe that this letter was an inspiration to Shakespeare for his play as it is the account of a ship called the *Sea Venture* that was wrecked in the Bermudas.

By reading additional sources, such as the Montaigne's "Of the Cannibals" and Strachey's "True Reportory," I think students are able to formulate ideas about the text that may not have been as easily formulated without the supplemental help. If I were teaching this play, I would definitely share these things with my students to see if they would develop as similar understanding as I have, or if they would come to a new and

completely different conclusion. Although I tend to believe that Shakespeare is making reference to the New World—maybe more specifically the Virginia Colonies—I do not think it is possible to say that my interpretation triumphs over another. I think it's important for a teacher to be open and receptive to their students' opinions when it comes to interpreting literature; however, it is still important for an instructor to keep students on track when they may veer off into an interpretation that has no clout and nothing to back it. That is one thing that I greatly appreciated during my Shakespeare course. I felt that I was able to express my own ideas without fear of being shut down immediately after with a harsh reply. I've been in classes in the past where this was the common situation. Most students eventually became either too scared to speak in class or just didn't want to because they knew that whatever they had to say would be severely judged by the instructor or shrugged off as insignificant.

I have always found that an open classroom that allows discussion is the most helpful for my learning. In this type of setting I am forced to process information and think about it more critically than had I been given a load of facts that I would only memorize. It also allows a student to hear questions and opinions from other students that may or may not be in line with what he/she is thinking but still prove to be helpful in his/her understanding of the text.

In addition to secondary sources and open group discussions, I believe that additional media such as film adaptations and artist renderings of the play are helpful to the student in understanding *The Tempest*. In my most recent course that taught this play, we watched Derek Jarman's film adaptation of the work. The film was not something I would be particularly interested in watching during my free time, but I must admit that it caused me to think about the actual text of the play even more. I asked myself if the characters were being portrayed as I saw them and, if not, how Jarman differed from my own interpretation. (The same applies for the many versions of Caliban that can be found in drawings, paintings, and other stage adaptations.) I also found myself trying to determine how closely the director followed the play in dialogue and action. By comparing the two works, I believe my understanding and knowledge of the text was increased as I was forced to think about it. I think this is an effective tool in the classroom while teaching a play like *The Tempest*. Films can especially be helpful to students in a high school course, as they show the action and give better understanding of dialogue.

If teaching this play to a group of students, I would also try to stress the important themes that are found throughout *The Tempest* such as magic, the quest for power, leadership and service, the illusion of justice and also symbols found within the play such as water and Prospero's books. I would first allow my students to identify these themes and motifs and ask them to explain how they came to their conclusion by

way of specific examples from the text. If they were to find it difficult to answer this question then I think it would be helpful to give my own example from the text and ask them if they could interpret it in order to develop their own idea about the themes.

If in the future I were given the opportunity to teach this play to a group of students, I believe I would do it similarly to how it was taught to me as it proved to be effective in my own understanding. I would introduce additional sources that may be helpful in understanding what the author may have encountered as he was writing the play and may help in the student's understanding of the play. I would encourage group work and class discussions and try to incorporate some form of media adaptations. I think it is also a good idea to assign individual research assignments such as papers and presentations as they encourage the student to dig deeper and find new and interesting views regarding the play that may not have crossed their mind in their own reading of the play. They would also be forced to identify some of the themes within the play to write a well developed essay. I find writing papers a very tedious process for myself, but I also find that I have to do more critical thinking and deeper research in order to support a thesis rather than sitting in a classroom and having everything pointed out for me. I look forward to one day maybe having the opportunity to teach this play and I would do so in the manner outlined above.

Endnotes:

[1] Translation from Danish is mine.

[2] Graff and Phelan do not openly declare an affiliation with new historians or with post-colonialism but somewhat densely hint that readers should easily find out where they stand. A splenetic male “traditionalist” professor of a certain age not wanting to engage in an open discussion at all with the students about post-colonial issues he has no time for himself hints that position away, however. An interesting side question to this humorous portrayal is whether it is an acceptable premise that those professors who espouse post-colonial theories are somehow less absolutist, more musically attuned to the students' youthful and open sensibilities. Graff and Phelan's contribution nevertheless feels post-political and post-partisan—although it remains an open question how *un*-political a work can be that fails to challenge or even question the hegemonic paradigms. For all that, their book remains the pre-eminent source for those interested in Tempestian pedagogy.

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