

WOMEN TAKE THE ISLAND:
NATION, PROFESSION, PLACE

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The Tempest has been one of Shakespeare's most adapted plays. Its stage history is concomitantly a history of the British theatre, from regularized comedy to semi-opera to pantomime to opera.¹ It has had other lives, too, from its position in romantic ideas of Shakespeare's biography and his so-called farewell to the stage, to a supporting role as witness for the nineteenth-century Darwinians' idea of the missing link, to a veritable efflorescence of walk-on parts, cameos, and star vehicles in twentieth-century psychoanalytic and social arguments about European expansion.² The play has given us individual poems and paintings, not to speak of screen-plays for several film adaptations. I have written elsewhere about its centrality as an inspiration for writers of science fiction.³ One might argue that this lineage resonates—because of its setting on a desert, that is, deserted, uncivilized, isle—with its counterpoint between magic and materialism, even as far, or as thin, as to brush in passing Defoe's castaway in *Robinson Crusoe* and Hawthorne's outcast in *The Scarlet Letter*. Among the advantages of a historically-orientated critical approach is the retrieval or reconstitution of context, including tacit reference within the new text and the

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recuperation of intermediate or intermediary textual layers. For descent lines must include the changes of direction or interpretation introduced by subsequent adaptations, even if, or, perhaps, especially when, the branch of the family sired by the desert island may suggest only a faint family resemblance between Prospero and Dr Moreau. From Afro-Caribbean authors aghast at Francophone psychoanalytic appropriations of a posited colonial relationship, to “old” settler-colony triumphalism over their brave new worlds, *The Tempest* has served as an icon in arguments over coming, seeing, and conquering. This is as true for Lusolberian America as for the Anglo- and Franco-phone north, for the first-contact theme in science fiction to the revolt of the oppressed.⁴ These have often, like the psychoanalytic return of the repressed, manifested precisely (but, of course, in reverse) the terms and conditions set by the Masters of the Universe. Revolutionary manifestoes, in literature as elsewhere, address current arguments, and can come, with hindsight, to look more reactionary, and thus more similar, to their targets than they seemed at the time.

In the course of the late twentieth century, *The Tempest* inspired a number of women writers in a series of novels which have returned to the nameless island in search of more meanings and possibilities, some of which—like earlier interpretations by male authors—turn out to be familiar stories of poetic inspiration and the authority to speak, which may nonetheless have a satisfying obliquity, and originality, in their use of Shakespeare’s play. Just as seventeenth-century adaptations turned from serious political rebellion to focus on legitimate marriages, multiplying partners until everyone (except the old, a point to which I shall return in my coda below) was provided for, so certain constants can be discerned across the dozens of interpretations which followed the nineteenth-century idea of Prospero as Shakespeare, Mage and Poet, male guardian of the English word.⁵

In what follows, I have selected for attention two outstanding authors whose intelligent engagement with period concerns are of high literary quality—for there is a great deal of chaff which uses Shakespeare as a ladder, a catalogue, or an expedient, without adding

anything of its own. Let me be quite clear about my distinctions: I have excluded the kinds of intertextual creations which have, as it were, listed the contents of *The Tempest* and imitated the list; I concentrate rather on two works which rethink what they take to be problems intrinsic to the play. It is, however, an irony of literary fashion, that one of the books I am going to praise is currently winnowed out of its own native tradition, as representing too closely that which it most thought it was questioning. I assume that the quality of my authors' readings should bring us back to the play fresh, but that their readings also provide a test for how much we attribute to the changed world, and how much to their individual points of view. What Margaret Laurence and Gloria Naylor have in common, in their transformations of *The Tempest*, is a shared exploration of power, poetry, and balance which is true to our experience of the play, as well as true to other recent and traditional interpretations of it. Unlike some literary critics, they do not focus on Shakespeare's alleged racism or misogyny, or his influence upon or implication in ideologies of conquest and dominance. They both write "in period", and voice concerns characteristic of their countries in their day, in their own writing, as part of their own work and their own concerns, they are engaged in that intertextuality which absorbs and reorients the past. Reading them reading Shakespeare will, I hope, help us read them all better. They are not sticks—or staffs—with which to beat the bard.

Let me delineate my discussion by giving some examples of authors making use of what is a cultural convenience, the extraction of a character (or event) which I call the "catalogue" approach. This is far from new, and is associated with short-hand references to a kind of secular repertoire familiar from comparative European literature and criticism, including psychoanalytic morphologies of character types. Authors have neither to have read the play nor to have any historical sense of Shakespeare in his times. The concentration upon and elevation of Caliban is a case in point. Novels such as *O Master Caliban* or *Caliban Landing* seize upon the idea of the subjection of Caliban to create a free radical from the ideas that there may be other forms of being, or that

our robot-servants may rebel, but these extractions use their Shakespearean allusion almost decoratively. Although they mark the trajectory of cultural icons freeing themselves from their original orbits, *they* neither change the emphasis in our understanding of Shakespeare nor in themselves.

We may notice in passing that these second-order interpretative stereotypes are part of larger issues of reading, and that, for example, one of the forces behind the shift which is to be perceived between the editions of the play by Kermode and Orgel is precisely the question of the play and the New World aboriginals which is so excitingly, if ahistorically, explored by creative writers from Césaire to Lamming to Warner.⁶ It would be a categorical error to take a fashionable interpretation, however ahistorical, as a sign of lack, even failure, when a modern writer emphatically helps him- or her-self to one piece of the whole design without engaging with the whole or attempting to understand the context. Scholars sometimes condemn creative extraction as misjudgement about, or apparent misuse of, its intertext, almost as one more offence to be taken into consideration, as if novelists were subject to critical responsibility. There is no need to call out the interpretation police.

It is, therefore, even more urgent than usual to get one's categories of critical assessment clear. Otherwise one is prone not only to project one's own ideas of a "correct" interpretation onto a relatively new fiction, but also to find it in Shakespeare's. Political arguments are then reinforced by the degree of correctness of their analysis of Shakespeare. The Green Bard who has recently emerged is a fine example of present-mindedness legitimated by reference to a new reading, who may give rise to creative interpretations (or creative misinterpretations) such as those of the Colonialist Bard of the last fifty years which can be traced in production styles as well as critical debate.⁷ Treating the natural world (what we may no longer think of as "creation") with respect because it is expedient for one's descendents, even for the planet as a whole, is a universe away from the decorum of respecting someone else's creation, and, as I shall argue, finding a substitute for a traditional,

patriarchal Creator is an issue my novelists address, each within the different arguments current in her day. The nexus of these arguments is complex, not because they refer to possible interpretations of Renaissance texts, which a new creative artist is unlikely to know much about, but because the way a play such as *The Tempest* is read—and read is the right verb—locates it, implicates it, in responsibility for certain historical social injustices which are themselves understood in their own cultural context. In what follows I shall broach some of these issues by analyzing the intertextuality of two late-twentieth-century novels which explicitly use *The Tempest*.

I have already referred to questions of power and balance, the irreconcilable demands of private and public life. Throughout Shakespeare's work rulers find it impossible to keep in balance their desires as ordinary men and their public responsibilities. We might argue that the end of *Henry V* closes on a happy moment, but not that what we have seen of the king suggests that he has found a solution to the difficulties of balance, of moderation, of ordinary human friendship. Macbeth, in a play which reverses many conventions, laments his isolation from friendship as he distances himself from trust and love. Friendship was traditionally a male privilege which depended upon both similarity and equality, not just good will: the prince can have no equal, except among princes, but their rivalrous states make amity parlous. Even in love, the prince is sovereign, as, indeed, was true in any marriage. It is usually on the threshold of marriage that the comedies leave us, with Shakespeare's sparkling heroines poised for the great obeisance. Yet Shakespeare's Macbeth, like his historical endings do not seem to be poised on the brink of tyranny: young men find, as was an accepted political tenet, that to control others, one must first control oneself, not as a desert island, but as part of the continent of humanity, as at five hundred years' distance Auden's Antonio in *The Sea and the Mirror* of 1944 so aptly illustrates by his denial. Disruption is cheap, and easily available. Balance is seldom, and then neither easily, nor for long, achieved, as play after play tells us, yet it is what characters seek—or execrate. In this, if not in a more narrowly autobiographical

sense, the artist as *maker* participates in the mystery of creation: the action, in this sense, imitated and praised Great Creating Nature.

There is a trivial sense in which getting everything in the right place is not much more than George Herbert's tidying a room. Yet there are parallelisms between one's surroundings, one's self, and one's nearest and dearest which make the proper running of a household an allegory not only for human government, but for the immanence of the Divine on earth. This insight is at the heart of the compliment which Milton pays to the Duke of Bridgewater in *Comus* (whose eponymous character owes something to Caliban, as Caliban does to Spenser's Wild Men), because government of the household, including the right upbringing of one's children, is a sign or token of godliness which radiates out to underwrite other masteries. These relations had been part of Western philosophical poetry since well before Boethius, but the *De Consolatione*, translated by Chaucer as by Queen Elizabeth, provided a *locus classicus* of reference. Love, radiating from the spheres, did literally make the world go around.

Shakespeare did not have to spell any of this out. He had no need to draw parallels between ordered dancing and good government. He could use ideas of consistency between a commitment to beauty or creation or love and a goodness which distances participants from evil, even if he was questioning it. In his world, on the public stage, he could assume the perception of wrong-doing as *perversion* of the creative power. To do ill, to summon up darker powers to wreak havoc, to assist the destruction of other people which comes with seducing them from their own search for just proportion, betrays the trust which is love's gift. White magic or medicine, which help the Creator along, are thus far from that dabbling in the demonic which damned Faust, or rolled Sycorax into a hoop. When Prospero resigns his revenge for reconciliation, when he puts his house in order, he escapes, among other things, the consequences of moral, artistic, and human ugliness which otherwise brought him too close for comfort to the witch of Argiers, or she of Colchis. *The Tempest* is informed by questions of power, love, balance, good government, domination, betrayal, which

are explored in terms of self, family, household, kingdom. The point is that the young King Henry, like the old Duke Prospero, is not bad because he has to behave like a king; he is a good prince, at a high human cost. From the sailor's profound "What cares these roarers for the name of king?" to Miranda's discovery, at chess, that Prince Ferdinand will cheat her, the play repeats and varies the heart of the matter.

Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*

It is perhaps inevitable that when we look at adaptations, we concentrate on the long diachronic thread, rather than looking at the place of the adaptation in the tissue, the whole work, of the adaptor. Laurence, like J. G. Ballard (whose reuses similarly evolved as he grew older), was deeply attached to *The Tempest*, a book which she had already used in her African fiction. In *This Side Jordan* (1964) Miranda Kestoe's naiveté wreaks a certain amount of havoc, but, more generally, and just at the moment of Independence Laurence asserts an optimism about a brave new Gold Coast which—as she, and others, subsequently recognized—was to be severely disappointed in the succeeding history of Ghana. In that early novel one finds a recycling of "incidents"—names, details, lines from the play—which is part of what I am calling the catalogue-approach to intertextuality. This is not for a moment to say that making lists of equivalences is trivial, but that in a certain sense lists can be a way of attending to the accidents of a book rather than to its substance. *The Diviners* of 1974 was Margaret Laurence's fifth and final novel in the series set in Manawaka, the fictional Canadian town invented on the pattern of her own Neepawa, in Manitoba, where she was born in 1926.⁸ It was also her last book for adults. In the thirty years since its publication it has first assumed a celebrated centrality and importance in Canadian literature, then suffered the eclipse which appears to be part of the normal generational literary stock market. For while, on the personal level, it reads as a *bildungsroman* which is also a *kunstlerroman*, its standing as a political allegory for Canada itself has plummeted as different ideas of what

Canada might or ought to be have superseded what Laurence appeared to propose.⁹ I shall begin with Laurence's transmutation of one substantial problem suggested by her reading of *The Tempest*, then use *The Diviners* to refocus attention to Shakespeare.

The Diviners is one of those novels which takes its narrator up to the point in middle age at which she is ready to begin the novel we have just read; in the course of it Morag Gunn writes a number of other novels, based on her own life, or on the lives of the people she has known, which has included one which reinterpreted *The Tempest*. She describes the project of the novel in a letter to a friend:

It's done in semi-allegorical form, and also it has certain parallels with *The Tempest*. Maybe I'm an idiot to try this, but it's the form the thing seems to demand, so I've quit fighting it. I've got the first draft nearly done now, so don't mind saying a bit about it, although it'll take a lot of rewriting. It's called *Prospero's Child*, she being the young woman who marries His Excellency, the Governor of some island in some ocean very far south, and who virtually worships him and then who has to go to the opposite extreme and reject nearly everything about him, at least for a time, in order to become her own person. It's as much the story of H.E. I've always wondered if Prospero really would be able to give up his magical advantages once and for all, as he intends to do at the end of *The Tempest*. That incredibly moving statement—"What strength I have's mine own, Which is most faint—" [sic] If only he can hang onto that knowledge, that would be true strength. And the recognition that his real enemy is despair within, and that he stands in need of grace, like everyone else—Shakespeare did know just about everything. I know it's presumptuous of me to try to put this into some different and contemporary framework and relevance, but I can't help it. Well, hell, maybe it's not so presumptuous as that.' (Chapter 8 Memorybank movie: Chas)

Presumptuous, perhaps, for Morag Gunn, the narrating author of *The Diviners*, who seems to think she is writing about marriage, but not for Laurence. Morag says 'semi-allegorical', which must mean more than semi-autobiographical, that is, about her escape from the dominance of her husband. She does not, after all, become his opposite; Morag vainly seeks balance between work and life, including not only the desire for companionate marriage, but also the unresolvable claims of parenthood. Laurence's work is suffused with questions of authority, legitimacy, and exemplarity. Like Whitman or Faulkner before her, Laurence's (not her characters') autobiographical or self-referential writing is the egotism which claims the self as allegory, as type, and as nation. She is a woman asking who has the word, the right to write and be heard, and in what language; concerned about power and love; recreating history as a series of stories all of which may be true; hoping against experience for an undefined reconciliation in a future generation—these are the themes Laurence has located in *The Tempest*, which had concerned her own work for over a decade, and which here become also questions about Canada's past and future through its relations to the British Isles and English literature. For Laurence, "Caliban" represents the problem of poetry, of ownership of the past and future, and the way the problem is defined constitutes who "Caliban" is.

Because *The Diviners* is the complex novel it is, identification of one theme involves the others, though one must equally be aware that to use the name Caliban to represent a theme may occlude as well. Laurence's Calibanic theme is among other things a complicated vision of male power, particularly male control of the word. The *plot* reveals aspects of character, and character reveals the problem in all its variety, not once but repeatedly. Each of the novel's important male characters aspires to some kind of artistic representation, from folklore stories to poetry to song to painting, and each of them is limited by his failure to connect. Two of them have learned to curse. But in order to follow the abstract question one must take cognizance of the synchronicity of Morag's own generation at the same time as her place—and Canada's—in history keeps diachronicity before us.

At the heart of *The Diviners* lies a problem of double legitimacy which is articulated as a two-suitors plot, embedded in the problem of inheritance and the pre-post-modern question of choosing one's father. One may choose one's lover, but one's father is a different issue, especially when the lovers represent a choice of ancestry. Not only are Morag's "suitors" both right, and both wrong, so are her fathers. Morag's natural father is dead, and she is raised by Christie Logan, a Scotsman who has emigrated to Canada, who fought beside her father in the Flanders trenches, and who returns to Manawaka to become the town scavenger. Both Morag's parents died in a polio epidemic. Christie has a wife who, unlike Mrs. Prospero, is not completely erased. Better, perhaps, if she had been, as this benign step-mother is a nightmare of monstrous female impotence: obese, unintelligent, passive, and without hope. Morag's fierce identification with fathers, of one's choosing or not, and the concomitant erasure or denigration of one's mothers, is historically typical of a certain kind of aspiration, less sympathetic to the matrilineal than feminism later enabled women to be; Laurence's ugly women seem politically incorrect now, but they are grotesques who capture important negatives of the female experience of poverty and lack of education or opportunity (not pretty, not autonomous, not articulate, not interesting).

And Morag, at least, feels remorse for her injustices. In the male progenitors and lovers we see the problem of who speaks, and who, in speaking, owns the past. "*Oh what a piece of work is man. Who said that? Some brain,*" Christie says at one point (Chapter 3 Memorybank movie: Christie's presence and presents). This quotation is followed by the narrative of Bourlon wood, the Great War battle in which Morag's father saved Christie's life. It is the uneducated, story-telling Christie who identifies the difficulty of writing their past, in a refrain: "Although that's not the truth of it, neither. It's all true and not true. Isn't that a bugger, now?" and "Well, d'you see, it was like the book says, but it wasn't like that, also. That is the strangeness" (same section). There is a point here about common people and inarticulateness, a paradox about

the eloquence of the ineloquent. The larger point, about the truth/falseness of writing is more obvious, but not more important:

Morag had once tried divining with the willow wand. Nothing at all had happened. Royland had said she didn't have the gift. She wasn't surprised. Her area was elsewhere. He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for? You couldn't doubt the value of water. (Chapter 4 after "Scene at the Traill Homestead")

Morag marries her English, but India-born, professor of English, who helps her educate herself, but who insists upon keeping her as his innocent Miranda, a child-bride to whom he denies autonomy as well as children. That Brooke Skelton, with his allegorical name of water and bones, is also a reminder of Empire, is obvious, and his role as the nurturing but stifling inheritance is almost too much so. He saves Morag from a number of decisions, such as earning a living, or returning to her own original place and social class, and supports her while she secretly becomes a writer and puts herself into the position of assuming independence. Her first lover, he is also her third father, representing England, high culture, legitimacy, and the failure to live and change. As she becomes more dissatisfied with their marriage the references to Prospero's power become explicit:

Now, and somewhat oddly, considering the awfulness of the house on Hill Street, the apartment in Toronto seems more than ever like a desert island, or perhaps a cave, as a well-lighted and beautifully appointed cave, but a cave just the same. (Chapter 7 Memorybank movie: The Tower)

The other wrong "right lover" is Jules Tonnerre, a *métis* from Manawaka with whom Morag could never live (and who would not wish to live permanently with her), but who provides her with the child she so much desires. If there are aspects of Prospero in Brooke, Jules

invites us to think of Caliban, not in himself as a character, but in his own historical-familial relationship to his own inarticulate father, the allegorically-named Lazarus. The English/Scottish settlers (Morag's natural father, Christie, Brooke) seized the land from the *métis* (and Brooke, of course, was expelled from the land of his first language, India); in some way salvation depends upon a recuperation of that inheritance, a righting of an ancient wrong through a betrothal between Milan and Naples. Shakespeare's romances, too, long for recuperation in a subsequent generation. It is in such multi-dimensional complexities that we see what lifts the novel beyond catalogue or simple questions; Laurence reimagines the *problématique* inherent in Shakespeare's characters: articulateness, tradition, and poetry. It is as if we saw Miranda take Prospero's place on an island of her own choosing, and Miranda's child emerge from both Caliban and Ariel. Yet we must also recognize this long-exercised desire that the next generation, an interbred generation, mixity, métissage, hybrid, shall solve the problems of competing descent groups by combining them in a new nation.

Prospero taught Caliban to speak. It is common to say that before Milan arrived, the island had no language, although we never hear of anyone teaching Ariel. Morag's men are haunted not by finding a voice, as Morag is, but by losing one. Jules, who is a singer-songwriter, and therefore a poet, has nonetheless lost not one but two languages, both the French and the Cree which are the imagined birthright of his mixed blood—that world-wide romantic fantasy of folk aristocracy; Christie has lost the Gaelic and is emphatically inarticulate in English, except when he is telling stories of Scotland's and Canada's Indian wars. Morag's journey to her own voice, to finding precarious independence, to accepting the solitude she needs but does not want, is, in the fashion of its day, a story of finding herself through her lovers. Without schematizing overmuch, it is fair to say that each of them gives her something, or reveals something, but that each of them is inadequate, unreliable, or unavailable. Morag, in the course of her sojourn in London, discusses the problem with her Scottish artist lover:

Morag went to the record player and put on a song, turning the sound very low.. It was in Gaelic and the name of it was "Morag of Dunvegin". She could not understand the words, nor even distinguish between them, make any kind of pattern of them. Just a lot of garbled sounds to her. Yet she played the record often, as though if she listened to it enough, she would finally pierce the barrier of that ancient speech and have its meaning revealed to her. Dan McRaith had laughed at her that time, when she had said, naïvely that she wished she knew Gaelic. He didn't have a word of the Gaelic himself, or perhaps a few words here and there, but nothing to speak of, nothing to speak with. Why not take lessons, then, he had said. She hadn't, of course. Too lazy. She would have liked to gain the speech by magical means, no doubt. Yet it seemed a bad thing to have lost a language. Talking to one or two old fishermen in Crombruach, those years ago, she'd realized that. They spoke a mellifluous English, carefully, as though translating into it in their heads, and some of their remarks were obscure to her, but they would never explain, or could not.

Christie, telling the old tales in his only speech, English, with hardly any trace of a Scots accent, and yet with echoes in his voice that went back and back. Christie, summoning up the ghosts of those who had never been and yet would always be.

The lost languages, forever lurking somewhere inside the ventricles of the hearts of those who had lost them. Jules, with two languages lost, retaining only broken fragments of both French and Cree, and yet speaking English as though forever it must be a foreign tongue to him. (Chapter 7 first section)

The use of the article "the", "the Gaelic", may distract us from noticing that she also writes "the speech". It is "the speech" for which she wants

magical initiation, a way of penetrating ancient secrets. Lest this seem impossibly romantic, the recent world-wide success of such nonsense as *The Da Vinci Code* should remind us how long-lived is this desire. Laurence's men are all doomed, although the skeletal Brooke Skelton is a successful university teacher. Alcohol and ill-health, class-thwarted ambition, personal obstinacy, and historical bad luck inhibit the men from genuinely attaching themselves to other human beings. They all depend upon the dependency of their women. If this, too, now looks dated, we may just have to wait until time does its own contextualizing magic. Morag's non-conformity was less easy in the novel's period than it comes to seem in retrospect; the class, gender, and national rigidities more unbending.

If there is a male character who appears to combine the serene assurance, even the magic of *The Tempest*, it is Morag's friend Royland, the Water Diviner, who makes the most explicit reference to the book's title—but even he turns out to have abused his power and, in an earlier part of his life, to have driven his wife to suicide. Royland's sensitivity with a willow wand is one of the accidents which create an equivalent for Prospero's magic, but his gift at finding water is no more, if no less, magical than the song-, novel-, or poetry-writing of the other characters. Humility and one's own strength appear to include the strength to live single, with one's child, and for one's art, in the mess one has made. It also includes knowing the limits of one's power. Balance is always precarious, and knowing what is right never guarantees one's ability to do it, to say it. Royland is old, and alone, as Morag seems set to be. Each has, however, assumed a place in a community for which friendship is not too strong a word.

I began by saying that *The Diviners* was a central novel for Canadians. Morag's personal odyssey could also be read as a national history, which finds, in its descriptions of one woman's experience, a way of recapitulating history. England and Scotland, French and Indian, combine, *per impossibile*, in Laurence's idea of what it is to be Canada. These miscegenation fantasies are venerable ideas about reconciliation through exogamy, and one has to remember that they have always

been daring in their day.¹⁰ Despite Morag's need for identification with fathers to legitimate her ambition to be a writer, from her earliest stories of Christie's ancestor, Piper Gunn, she concentrates on his wife and her daughter, so the idea of woman as subject is central to Morag's (as to Laurence's) from the start. Tests of ethnic reversal for Morag, with Scots against English, always suggest for Laurence the possibility that the real aristocrats are the *métis*, the men to whom the land belonged because they attempted to give themselves to it through intermarriage, and who have been dispossessed of both land and language. In a different climate, this looks like insensitivity to the Cree, because *métissage* has in effect superseded them. From Laurence's experience, just after the great period of decolonisation, Canada's odyssey is to move, more peacefully than elsewhere, from being a colony to being a country, by virtue of finding a voice. In this sense Morag Gunn herself becomes a kind of Prospero, making her house an island in which she finds her balance, but from which in the next generation her own daughter moves out to struggle with the same choices, the same impossibilities. Given recent denigration of Prospero, the perception that Morag might take his place, supersede him, mistakes, injustices, egotisms, and all, may not seem an attractive conclusion. As Gayle Greene has put it, in a volume dedicated to Laurence,

The "use" of memory, then, is liberation. So also is the use of the literary tradition, "for liberation". On the simplest level, Laurence gives her female protagonist the male part, allowing her to act as epic hero who founds a new order and assumes the powers of Prospero—artist, magician and Shakespeare's figure for himself. Actor, writer and director of her "plot", she attains an authority and authorship which enables her to transmit something of value to the future. But the power of the artist is a resignation to the *limits* of power, a relinquishing of characteristically "masculine" attributes of rationality and control and an attainment of a difficult humility that comes from involvement with others. Laurence reworks the idea of

the artist and paradise to a contemporary feminist perspective: and it is a reworking as significant as Milton's adaptation of classical epic of Christian values, Wordsworth's adaptation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* to his autobiographical *Prelude*, or Joyce's adaptation of *The Odyssey* to his epic of modern life, *Ulysses*. Unfortunately, however, the parallels with *The Tempest* also suggest the sense of finality which Laurence expressed elsewhere, a "second sight" which turned out to be all too true, since this was her last novel.¹¹

The descent-line of the artist is patriarchal; it claims that she can write, speak, and be, as a man, with her divining rod, the pen. But she will write of women, moving their subjectivity towards a new expression. But then, like Prospero, Morag finishes alone. Not yet as different, but—in the same year as Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*—as man's equal; *The Diviners* is neither an assertion of matrilineality nor a marital happily-ever-after. If all Laurence's men are wounded, a woman who succeeds in resembling them resembles them in that, too. Laurence, the female artist, assumes the right to the word by ousting from her island the very men who made her.

Like so many other authors in colonies of European expansion, Laurence defers the solution to the racial or ethnic injustices of history in the construction of potentially integrated progeny in a succeeding generation. In Laurence, the Canadian, the claim that the *métis* are ancestors introduces a *tertium quid*, neither Caliban nor Ariel, in which Morag's child is Canada's future, unifying all its pasts. This physical *métissage* now appears a period piece, not because it was optimistic, but because of what it could not see. But the novel is honest enough to show that Morag's daughter appears to be having the same problem her mother had in balancing the claims of love against those of art. The two-city problem was never solved by a marriage.

If we take this reading of Laurence back to Shakespeare, we are encouraged to reread the characters of the play as allegorical directions. To possess the word, to possess the past, depends upon the artist's

self-possession, but also upon the artist's willingness to let go, and to let my people, and my children, go. The problem of possession of the island makes one's idea of Caliban replicate one's idea of Prospero, and since Prospero and Miranda have done something very like that, that is, to try to make Caliban more like Prospero, one can see why Caliban himself might internalize the aspiration to being like Prospero, as children begin in imitation. That is, when Caliban visualizes freedom not as something new, but as something which repeats the old, he misses Freudian succession, and sees only the replacement of Prospero with another master. The return of the oppressed is not even a reversal, but a repetition.

Subsequent misinterpretations of *The Tempest* have seen Caliban as king of his island, but within the play Caliban has plotted to place Stephano on Prospero's throne. If we imagine him left behind on the island, he is a king with no subjects, not even a new Adam because no Eve. This is not a question, *per se*, of "colonialism", since none of the Italians actually want the island, and Caliban largely wants revenge, rather than governing power over the Italians. It might equally be that question of the possession of one's self; to be self-possessed, in the most literal sense. Prospero, after all, never possesses himself more than when he has sacrificed, as he thinks of it, his revenge, his right to revenge, for the forgiveness from which, in some sense, comes a revenge greater (because magnanimous) than mere punishment can be. We cannot imagine Caliban foregoing anything, let alone forgiving; yet he sees himself as seeking grace. Prospero shows himself, in his forgiving gift of his already-self-given daughter to Alonso's son, the conqueror who out-manoeuvres his ostensibly stronger opponent. For two kingdoms he has, like his son-in-law to be, and as his daughter acknowledges over the chess board, played false.

Gloria Naylor, *Mama Day*

The fourteen years which separate my two novels are a generational gulf. Gloria Naylor was born in New York City in 1950.

She won the American Book Award for first fiction in 1983 with *The Women of Brewster Place*, and is the author of a series of interconnected novels.¹² *Mama Day* appeared in 1988.¹³ Like so many other American authors of the last decade, Naylor turns from public political action, and from the pursuit of social and economic success, to look at the private sphere, and particularly family life. From her first book hers was a confident voice, black, American, female, and ready to take from the inheritance of European literature whatever her ambition required. There is nothing like a battle won to become a battle forgotten. *Linden Hills* used Dante's *bolgias* to describe a neighbourhood of houses sited on descending crescents of misapplied values down to a hell of empty striving for status at the cost of love.¹⁴ Naylor had and has a message for her black American contemporaries, men and women, about losing their sense of proportion in the pursuit of golden calves.

If successful adaptation is finding the new in the old, *Mama Day* succeeds beyond anything that could have been predicted from Naylor's earlier novels. It is an obvious point that plays have no narrators, and can thus present a multivalency which novels struggle to create. Naylor's solution is to multiply her narrators, so that she is able to write from three points of view, and to escape being boxed in by the first person. *Mama Day* is an exceptional blend of what we have come to call magic realism, where magic can be faith in an unnamed spirit or the ability of a crowd of football supporters to lift its team to achievement, it can assist nature or murder, in a story of the power of love and hate in which the magic is to be taken as seriously as it is in, say, Malory, who also knows how to preserve mystery by refraining from telling all, who knows when not to explain. Naylor has learned to create a fictional world by the accretion of what appear at first to be, but are not, arbitrary details, so that the reader is lulled into apparent recognition, and is not surprised when something reappears with a new meaning, from hens to broken hearts. The incidents and accidents which Naylor repeats from Shakespeare include an island, dragging characters through the mire and swamp (twice), two only children, love at first sight, the strength of hands alone, the book and staff, and, above

all, the tempest. There is also a mage; indeed, there may be three, all women. Absences count for something, too: for the first time in fifty years Caliban is silent, and the arguments of colonialism have been left behind except in the resistance to real estate developers.

"Willow Springs" is a village on an island which is not to be found on any map; it is, in some sense, legally nowhere, because not claimed by a state. But it is somewhere: off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, its pastoral opposes the city of cities, New York. Unlike many other treatments of *The Tempest*, it takes Gonzalo's commonwealth seriously, although it is matrilineal, matriarchal, and matriloal. It also takes advantage of certain aspects of inherited African belief, such as whether new-born babies are staying or going, and the importance of giving them a series of names, which helps situate part of the culture of the book. This aspect of the book marks a change which seems to me altogether to the good: an opening out to areas of the world outside traditional Anglo-Saxon, as opposed to anglophone, traditions of reference. T. S. Eliot was, in this sense, right beyond his wildest dreams—or desires—since new authors have indeed modified the literatures in which they participate.

The character called Miranda is the eponymous Mama Day, ninety when the book's main action takes place, at least a mid-wife, at most something more, although one who has never done more than help Nature along. Miranda is unmarried, and one might be forgiven for thinking that one old familiar question is the cost of a great gift, whether it be healing or another art. Miss Miranda has a widowed sister, Abigail, whose grand-daughter, Cocoa, or Ophelia, is the sisters', and the book's, centre. Its themes are love, hate, and jealousy, not in this generation only, in which Cocoa/Ophelia loves, marries, and struggles to live well with George Andrews. There is a richly evoked depth to questions about inheritance, and about what might happen between men and women in any generation. There is nothing particularly articulate about Ophelia, despite her Shakespearean name which, in the book's poetic economy, ties her to water. She is no poet, no intellectual, no artist. When she refers to Shakespeare it is to write him off: "Just proves that

Shakespeare didn't have a bit of soul—I don't care if he did write about Othello, Cleopatra, and some slave on a Caribbean island" (64).

It would be a mistake to look for simple correspondences. *Mama Day* is not about freedom, but about learning to live with love, and all the giving, and giving up, which that implies. Some of the struggles still ahead of Margaret Laurence are well behind Gloria Naylor: her women are economically independent, and interdependent in their community. They are hymn-singing syncretists who believe many things which are inexplicit, but which they label love or hate. Dr Buzzard, gambler, distiller, and retailer of charms and potions, may suggest a parody of the salvage and deformed Caliban. But when one knows that his real name is "Rainbow Simpson" his bedrock goodness is clear. Storms inform many of the characters. And, on a metaphorical level, *all* that Dr Buzzard does is make "moonshine", which is also known as "white lightning". He is a renowned poker player, but he is renowned not because of his magic, but because he cheats.

George is not Ferdinand. Nevertheless, his love and the strength of his bare hands are one of the transformations of the play, compressing and rearranging Prospero's farewell. George loves Shakespeare, and is particularly fond of *Lear* because it features a bastard—which suggests that he is no more a good reader than is Ophelia. He is an ordinary meat and potatoes man, a successful engineer who is partner in a small firm of designers. He cannot believe in the island's strange noises. Characters not there speak; if unseen voices constitute an Ariel, then there is an equivalence, but it is not a necessary one. Ruby, the villain of the piece, is not Sycorax. Yet she has grown so fat as hardly to be able to move, so jealous of her much younger husband that no younger woman is safe from her. Miranda acknowledges more than once that nothing is so powerful as hate. One might say that Ruby had grown into a hoop, so unable to move is she; she is certainly already a tyrant when we meet her. Self-distortion in search of sexual content threatens other women, too, as Ophelia reveals in another context:

I couldn't forget how quickly we'd gotten married. It's as if we didn't dare to stop and think. But I was thinking now. And I wanted us to work so badly that I would be tempted to try and squeeze myself up into whatever shape you had calculated would fit into your plans. How long could I do it? The answer scared the hell out of me: I could have done it forever. You start out feeling a little uncomfortable, but then when you look around that's the shape you've grown into. (146)

Shakespeare's play begins with a tempest in which we believe at least for one scene, before Prospero assures Miranda that it is not real. Naylor's tempest is a hurricane which cuts the island off from the mainland. As a consequence Mama Day finds a book and a staff, but it is not she who uses them. It would be wrong of me to reveal all, and that is not the point of my exposition. Normally one would smile at the arbitrary recycling of these incidents and accidents, hints and allegations towards the older work, but in the case of such a successful reinterpretation one might be forgiven for not realizing that props which are completely integrated in the action are also allusions. I suspect that many of the book's enthusiastic readers have been ignorant of their breadth and depth, although the teaching material now available on the Web could certainly provide them with a lot of it.

Does it matter? Yes, it does, because if, once more, we take Naylor's interpretation back to Shakespeare, we can see that she has emphasized life beyond the celebration of legitimate marriage, and that the question of offspring and inheritance returns throughout this, as through her other books. She has moved beyond the traditional reading of Prospero as Shakespeare's autobiographical meditation on his art, which has been so important to the legitimacy of self-styled marginal writers, and ignored the current critical arguments over Shakespeare's colonialism. One is tempted to categorize her emphasis on such universals as the measure of human emotion as a reassertion of a conservative Shakespeare. It is, nonetheless, undeniable that hers is an original reading which does a great deal more than simply reverse

Shakespeare's perceived categories. And, if I may be permitted a personal anecdote, *Mama Day* has kept more of my students up all night than anything else I have ever taught.

The generation which separates Margaret Laurence, the white Canadian, from Gloria Naylor, the black American, suggests more differences than race and nationality. One is prone to forget just how great were the social changes after the last war, from which Naylor's generation benefited, for all her reservations about what happens when women allow ambition to over-ride the values of love, home, and family. Laurence had a strong personal pessimism about the possibility of reconciling work, high expectations about companionate marriage, and child-rearing. Naylor, who conceptualizes a vibrant matriarchal tradition, and thus a society rather different from Laurence's, nevertheless shares Laurence's fear, but sees possibilities of mutual respect. Cocoa/Ophelia wants to devote herself to home and family; there is nothing of the gifted artist about her. Naylor's pessimism, if one may call it that, belongs to America of the 1980s, with its extraordinary retreat from political action into a degree of social conservatism by which the literature and films of the last decade have been strongly marked. Her book is a reminder that magic realism is a style, one which can as easily be used for apolitical as for committed writing.

One has to ask, when dealing with intertextuality, what the old text has been used for, and how the new text would be impoverished without it. A reader innocent of colonialist interpretations of *The Tempest*, or of the central traditions of Caliban and language, Prospero and artistic power, would read Laurence less allegorically, certainly. But it is also part of the strength of a new interpretation that stands on its own that the themes of *The Diviners* are clear from the novel alone. True as that seems, when one looks at Naylor's delight in rewriting some of Shakespeare's arbitrary events, one is tempted to contradict that assertion, for part of the pleasure of *her* book depends upon our appreciation of her allusions. What little the ignorant reader would lose would be very precious. In both cases the very existence of the

conversation between the authors is an assertion of integration as well as staking a claim.

If the "happy wrack" poses questions about finding oneself, about righting wrongs, about possession and possessions, about letting go, it has also posed questions about power and poetry which have brought the play centrally into question for writers and artists of many different kinds. This has been so since the seventeenth century, and since the Purcell year we are more than ever aware of the strange yet familiar familial balance first created in the Dryden/Davenant/Shadwell semi-opera. The self one possesses is not one's own self only, and both Laurence and Naylor emphasize their protagonists as inheritors and progenitors. The creative writer who proceeds by binary opposition, by parallel and variation, by juxtaposition and paradox, works in ways that expository criticism cannot equal. One might say she holds the mirror up to Culture, and gives us also an imitation of Art.

Coda: this Tunis once was Carthage

The hardest thing to write about is the absent, the missing. Adaptations of Shakespeare's *Tempest* consistently avoid focussing on the King of Naples' other child, except, recently, to insist upon Italian colonial ambitions. Yet Claribel's reluctant marriage contributes to the thematic structures of the play: she governs herself by fulfilling her duty, against her inclination, and marries out of her world into Tunis, the land of Dido, near that Argiers from which Sycorax was banished. From the point of view of the old, the king and the duke, their children's marriages are part of their foreign policy. Prospero is more successful than Alonso in human terms, as his daughter has the impression that duty combines with inclination, making the onset of obedience at least easier. He is also a better ruler, as he has not had to compel, as has Alonso, and his daughter's marriage will combine two principalities are reverse his initial defeat. These questions of marriage and inclination recur throughout the history of creative interpretations of *The Tempest*. They take sides, but they never solve what is at issue,

any more than did Shakespeare, even in the temporary happy ending of *Henry V*. Nothing in Laurence's fiction ever suggests the possible success, even the illusion of successfully combining, duty (or artistic gift) and inclination; by contrast, Naylor's heroines, like Vikram Seth's, come to find inclination following duty, with an eye to "my child's father", as Rosalind has it. This acknowledgement of, this settling for, less than the postwar period's insistence upon individual happiness is both curiously Shakespearean and characteristic of changes in fiction in the later twentieth century: it is remarkably private, apolitical, and socially quietist. Laurence desired everything and accepted defeat; she went down all guns firing. Naylor, who perhaps thinks of herself as more progressive than the previous generation of feminists, has, as so often in periods subsequent to revolutionary ardour, turned toward the preaching of private virtue, for black women and, perhaps, men, resisting, in the course of a series of novels, American failures of moral value by withdrawing from America's public discourses of free-market wealth. Like Hemingway in *A Farewell to Arms*, she kills off Ophelia's great love and denies it progeny, thus accepting another kind of defeat, a retrograde return to lowered personal expectations and the safety of private life. Her Miranda reflects upon the personal cost to her of her healing gift—but Naylor shows her having sacrificed her youth to her mother's need for full-time care. In this Naylor is at one with her place and period. Women have taken the island, but perhaps they have not yet sufficiently counted the cost.

Notes

1. Studied in detail by Mary Margaret Nilan, *The Stage History of The Tempest: A Question of Theatricality* (Northwestern Uni. unpubl. Ph.D., 1967; University Microfilms 1980). The imitations in the Fletcher/Massinger *Double Marriage* (1619-23) or Sir John Suckling, *The Goblins* (1637-41) would also repay study.
2. I refer to the arguments not only of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin in their groundbreaking *The Empire Writes Back* (London, Routledge, New Accents, 1989), but to those of Edward Said in, above all, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). I have discussed some of the problems raised in this work in my "Orientalism: Edward Said's

Imperialism as Culture", *The Cambridge Review* (October, 1993), pp. 115-19, and see also Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993). The most recent of the "post-" approaches is Chantal Zabus, *Tempests After Shakespeare* (London, Routledge, 2002), which overlaps in stimulating ways with my own work.

3. See my "Monsters, Magicians, Movies: *The Tempest* and the Final Frontier" *Shakespeare Survey* 53 (2000) 164-174, which, like the present article, is part of a long-contemplated book-project on the history of *The Tempest*; an earlier version was presented to the Société française Shakespeare in 1996.
4. E.g. the Hispanic tradition of assigning strong allegorical interpretations to different figures in a text, from *Don Quixote* to the present, in which the integrity of the source text, or its historical position, are relatively unimportant. Hence the shift, in Hispanic cultural debate, from the idea of South America as an Ariel to an insistent Calibanic liberation. José Enrique Rodó and Fernandez Retamar had a strong initiating influence, but Aimé Césaire (in French) belongs here, too.
5. As Stephen Orgel puts it, the play is supremely concerned with "the nature of authority and power; the conflicting claims of vengeance and forgiveness, of justice and mercy; the realities of reconciliation and the possibility of regeneration", quoted from the Introduction to his edition (Oxford, 1987). Further citations from the play will be from this text.
6. Orgel's pessimism about Shakespeare's attitudes to women, already hinted at in "Prospero's Wife" in *Representations* 8 (1984), pp. 1-13, at moments amounts to misogyny, and is something I should wish to deal with in the future. Scholarship has followed suit, in the work of the Vaughans or Zabus.
7. Jonathan Bate, "Caliban and Ariel Write Back", *Shakespeare Survey* 48 (1995): 155-62.
8. Originally published in New York by Knopf and now republished by Virago Modern Classics in the UK (1993 [1989]) and McClelland and Stewart in Canada, as part of The New Canadian Library (1995 [1988]). Given this variety, I have identified quotations in the text by chapter number and subsection. I am not aware of clear uses of the play in the short stories—now out of print—, although I wonder about Mr Archipelago in "The Perfume Sea".
9. Laurence is currently in eclipse. She is simply absent from recent Canadian criticism, such as *Shakespeare in Canada: 'a world elsewhere'?*, eds. Diana Brydon and Irena

Makaryk (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2002), although Brydon has discussed her in "Rewriting *The Tempest*", *World Literature Written in English* 23 (1984) 75-88. She is not mentioned in Julie Sanders' *Novel Shakespeares: Twentieth-Century Women Novelists and Appropriation* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2001), nor does she figure in the collections listed below.

10. On this subject see my "Impossible Dreams: Miscegenation and the Building of Nations" (*Southerly*, 48, 1988) 80-96, and 'Not Beating but Joining: the traditions of mixed marriages in anglophone fiction' *Unions Mixtes et Métissages dans le monde anglophone*, ed. E. Hanquart-Turner (Paris, C.E.R.E.C., 1998), 9-18, which treat *The Missionary* (Ireland), *Ivanhoe* (England), *Ourika* (France), *The Last of the Mohicans* (U.S.), *Bowhani Junction* (India), and *Coonardo* (Australia).
11. See the excellent article by Gayle Greene, "Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*: The Uses of the Past", in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Margaret Laurence*, ed. Colin Nicholson (London, Macmillan, 1990), pp. 162-76, quotation pp. 200-1. Laurence did continue to write children's fiction, and published her short stories in good journals.
12. *Linden Hills* (1985) and *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998). As I write, she is working on a fifth panel, *Saphira Wade*.
13. Originally published by Ticknor and Fields, a "quality" division of Houghton Mifflin, the book is now published by Random House's Vintage paperbacks, and it is from the Vintage Contemporaries reprint of 1993 that I quote.
14. Part of Naylor's epic ambition, like Laurence's for Manawaka, is to tie the novels together by cross-reference. Unfortunately, these references sometimes contradict, when she has changed her mind. "And she remembered being so ashamed of her great-aunt, Miranda Day, when she pulled up in that cab each summer, calling from the curb at the top of her voice, 'Y'all better be home. Mama Day done come to visit a spell with her Northern folks.'" Coming with her cardboard suitcases, loose-fitting shoes, and sticky jars of canned whatever. Toothless, but ready with a broad grin; almost illiterate but determined to give her very loud opinion regardless of the subject or the company. "Child, y'all sittin' there complainin' 'bout them wayward boys. Ain't never seen an onery man yet who didn't come round if you get yo'self a little shame-weed and bake it up in somethin' sweet." And perhaps if she hadn't been so eager to quiet the old woman, to move her out of the room away from the amused and contemptuous eyes of her teenaged friends, she would have also heard about ivory-toot, white pepper, and sassafras" (*Linden Hills*, pp. 147-

8). This stereotypical mammy has nothing of Mama Day's dignity and fire. *Mama Day* mentions Bailey's Cafe, and *Bailey's Cafe* attaches George of *Mama Day* to its own mysterious final story.

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