

AS/Advanced English Literature

Unit 6

Broken Communication

The following sample answer has been written by Anthony, a current Advanced English Literature student, and we are grateful for his permission to use his work here. The Chief Examiner has added comments at the end of the essay.

Recent critical views of *The Tempest* have focused on the treatment of Caliban, seeing him as mistreated and abused.

In Act I, scene ii, lines 350-61, Prospero addresses Caliban (quotation)

Taking this speech as your starting point, compare and contrast the role and dramatic significance of Caliban with another character, in your second text, who might be seen as marginalised or ill-treated.

In *The Tempest*, Caliban represents the effects of colonialism upon society and/or the original inhabitants. *Translations* is entirely based upon this subject and therefore, in a sense, all the Irish people represent these effects; none more so than Manus. Caliban's role is to highlight a matter which was very evident at the time of writing, slavery and colonialism – seeking to 'civilise' the original inhabitants. This "civilisation" is shown through Prospero teaching this best to talk;

*..I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other.*

Another circumstance at this time was the importance of power. Prospero, with all his magic, clearly is the master of the relationship - and at the time power also dominated relationships between people and even countries. Manus also adheres to this "master-slave" relationship, to some extent.

His deference to his father, Hugh, is easily mistaken to be a lack of ambition on his part, and is something which Maire bemoans;

*You talk to me about getting married – with neither a roof over
Your head nor a sod of ground under your foot. I suggest you go for
the new school : but no – "My father's in for that". Well now he's
got it and now this is finished and now you've nothing.*

This is merely the beginnings of woe for Manus. The English invasion represents how colonisation can entirely ruin someone's life – namely the natives. These events clearly represent the difficulties at the time, which the invading English forced, via huge-scale change, upon the Irish at the time.

In himself, Caliban is very reliant upon following someone – this in turn leads to his ill-treatment and him being taken for granted. This is also shown by Manus, whose father takes him very much for granted and pushes him into the background upon the return of the prodigal Owen.

It is in fact, Caliban's animal instincts which set him apart from the colonisers of the island. Upon first landing, friendships were being built between the two parties as Caliban revealed the island's secrets to Prospero; but, an attempted rape upon Miranda

saw this disintegrate very quickly and be replaced with the domination and ill-treatment which is so apparent, this appears to be (justifiably) retribution on the part of Prospero. Despite this characterisation as a "vile race", Shakespeare gives Caliban the most eloquent lines of the play to speak:

*...and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked,
I cried to dream again*

This intelligence is replicated in *Translations* by Manus, who can speak in many languages.

The ill-treatment (or rather marginalisation) of Manus only becomes apparent following Owen's arrival – with the English. Upon the return of Owen, Manus is pushed aside and forgotten about by Hugh, who celebrates the return of his successful offspring. This also signals the end of his relationship with Maire, who is disgruntled at Manus's lack of ambition and prefers the possibility of a relationship with one of the invaders, namely Lieutenant Yolland.

This treatment of Manus has the most drastic consequences as he is forced to leave Baile Beag, due to his emotional fragility, by the end of the play. He has been literally pushed away by this colonialism;

*I saw him standing there at the side of
the road – smiling- and her face buried in his
shoulder – I couldn't even go close to them.*

The treatment of Caliban, or rather mistreatment, is much more explicit. As the only one of his kind upon the island, without any family or friends, he is an obvious candidate to be ill-treated. This is confirmed in Prospero's speech as his hatred of Caliban is firmly outlined by a series of insults;

Abhored slave...

.....
thy vile race,

This intense hatred seems to be born out of the rape attempt on Miranda, for which Prospero holds deep resentment towards Caliban. The idea of "them and us" is also presented through Prospero's language towards Caliban, while he is singled out as an animal;

A thing most brutish,

The most evident matter in this is that, in Prospero's eyes, this treatment of Caliban is only minimal, that he "hadst deserved more than prison". This view is largely debatable, dependent upon whether you believe his actions were due to his animal instincts or not.

Overall, both characters play important roles in helping to show the effects of colonisation upon the natives; despite this, they are shown in different ways. Caliban is more representative of slaves and oppression while Manus shows the aftermath of these actions. Communication breakdown plays a huge part in the difference between these two parties and other characters; Caliban, in fact, is enabled by his eloquence after replacing "his own voice" with that of the coloniser. In both cases, the effects of the coloniser are clearly shown through these two characters.

Chief Examiner's comment:

This answer does address comparison and context, attempting to use them to form his interpretation of the two texts. The argument does tend to move abruptly from one point to another, with not all points developed, but the conclusion is clear although some comments here could usefully have been addressed earlier in the answer. The student is aware of the significance of context, although at times prone to make assertions. Nonetheless, he does more than compare or contrast for its own sake; rather he uses it in order to throw light on his own reading of the texts.