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“This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine”: Jungian analysis of The Tempest (Prospero and Caliban)

"Tumult and peace, the darkness and light - Were all the workings of one mind".

- Wordsworth.

This analysis will argue that Shakespeare's "The Tempest" functions on many levels:

1) the tempest as an allegory 2) that the play can be understood, persuasively, by applying a model of Jungian psychology to it 3) in this context Caliban is a projection of Prospero's unconscious and, finally 4) that Prospero's achieves "individualization" by accepting his "darkness".

"(by individualisation I mean) becoming a single homogenous being.....Becoming one's own self.....Coming into selfhood".

- Jung .

Firstly, the backdrop to the drama is conflict: a storm rages. The idea of a tempest is embedded in the Western cultural tradition which emanates, to an extent, from the

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Judeo- Christian perspective of which Shakespeare would have been aware. This is manifest in the Old Testament where a storm is perceived as the consequence of repression of natural forces or a birth trauma:

"or who shut up the sea with doors, when

it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb".

- The Bible.

However Shakespeare enhances the traditional image to give it an egalitarian orientation:

"What cares these roarers for the name of King?"

- Shakespeare.

This storm is a symptom of inner conflict within Prospero and is therefore, in turn, his allegorical reality:

"(The Tempest) is an example of allegory the leading characters are not merely typical but symbolic".

- Lowell.

The world of symbols is significant in psychology; Freud believed that they existed in the "unconscious" and were repressed material expelled from the "ego" .However Jung developed this concept to embrace a "collective unconscious"; a world of primal images which occur consistently in humanity's mythology and religions. These recurring or primal symbols he called "archetypes." The philosophical dimension of Jung's

psychology can be located in Plato's „Theory of Forms“ ,here the "Idea" exists in a pure "Form" beyond the material world in the same way that Jung's symbols exist beyond consciousness. But Jung expanded his theory of symbols to describe a more precise element of the unconscious:

"a symbol was a particular manifestation of something unknown".

- McLynn.

One of these "particular" symbols, for this analysis, is the island where the drama is enacted which is a "projection" (Jung) of inner worlds:

".....the isle is full of noises

"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine":

Jungian analysis of The Tempest (Prospero and Caliban)

..... Sometimes a thousand twanging instruments

Will hang about my ears ".

- Shakespeare.

The onomatopoeia of "twanging" enforces this sense.

On the island the relationship between Prospero and Caliban was an exploitative one. Prospero treats Caliban as a slave by day and torments him at night. I would like to examine their relationship in the context of contemporary cultural sources. Firstly, Caliban is an anagram of "cannibal", spelt "canibal" in Shakespeare's era, secondly that Shakespeare would have been aware of, in particular, Montaigne's essay: „Of the Caniballes" in which "primitive" societies are seen as natural until tainted by civilisation:

" Montaigne is saying that the life of the South American Indians proves that mankind

Is capable of living peacefully, happily and humanly without the constraint of law, or the institution of private property".

- J.Middleton Murry. This is reflected by Gonzalo's speech on utopia:

"I" the commonwealth..... I would admit; no name of magistrate ...

..... Riches, poverty service none

No occupation, all men idle "

- Shakespeare.

Hence Caliban can be perceived as a member of a, potentially, utopian community and Prospero as the corrupting force of civilisation. Hence Caliban is perceived as the "primitive" (unconscious) and Prospero as civilisation (conscious).

This idea can be developed by applying Jung's conception of the feminine perspective which he believed to emanate from the „Great Mother" archetype:

"She has always been connected with the moon and the earth.....she was and is the matrix from which all is born".

- Von der Heydt.

This analysis maintains that, following Jung, the feminine is the source of creativity

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{See Graves (1961) for a theory of the feminine as „Lunar Muse“} .Therefore it is possible to argue that Caliban is in tune with his, to use Jung’s term, Anima (the

unconscious feminine) i.e. the creative/primitive (Earth) aspect of his psyche:

" Caliban! Thou (being of the) Earth speak

- Shakespeare.

Caliban can therefore be comprehended as the source of the play’s creativity. This is stressed, by Shakespeare, as Caliban speaks in poetry and Prospero in prose. Caliban’s role as a vehicle for creative energy and of his being, therefore, in tune with nature and poetry is illustrated in the following passage:

.....in dreaming, methought the clouds would open ...

..... Ready to drop on me; when I wak’d,

I cried to dream again.

- Shakespeare.

This passage is beautiful in its poetic innocence. Coleridge elaborated on this aspect of Caliban’s being:

"Caliban.....is a sort of creature of the earth.....He is a man in the sense of imagination."

- Coleridge.

However Prospero’s attitude towards Caliban could have been influenced by the attempted rape, by Caliban, of his daughter Miranda.

"In mine own cell till thou dast seek to violate the honour of my child."

- Shakespeare.

But some Jungian theorists have maintained that this was itself a projection by Prospero of incestuous feelings onto Caliban:

"Incest; the molestation and rape of one’s daughter. Miranda had reached womanhood with herself and her father as the only two humans in their world".

- Beck.

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Why then is Caliban defined as "other" or "dark". in the play? The Jungian concept of „The Shadow“ provides an explanation. Jung explains his concept:

"The shadow personifies everything the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself".

- Jung.

The ideas that are not accepted become repressed into an unconscious complex: the shadow. There are, essentially, two methods which Jung thought people employ to address their "Shadow": 1) projection i.e. projecting your "shadow" onto another

person. or 2) "integration", i.e. the accepting your "shadow" as part of the "Self."
Jung

thought the latter lead to selfhood and "individualization". Prospero has repressed his "shadow", his moon and Earth dimensions, the Anima which is the source of creativity. The consequences of this were 1) becoming introspective and interested in using manipulation (magic):

"And to my state grew stranger, being transported And rapt in secret studies".

- Shakespeare

2) projecting his „shadow“ onto Caliban and using abusive language to describe him:
"Thou most lying slave.....

Filth thou art..... "

- Shakespeare.

This is the generalized "tempest".

Caliban can be seen as a projection of Prospero's "shadow", his unconscious complex which is both creative and destructive.

"Prospero is afraid of Caliban. He is afraid because he knows that his encounter with Caliban is largely his encounter with himself".

- Singh.

Prospero has a choice: either his unconscious will overwhelm him and he will descend into madness or he can integrate his "shadow", Caliban, into himself. Prospero chooses the path of self-integration:

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"This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine".

- Shakespeare .

He accepts the creative force of the "Anima" and says: ".....set me free"

-Shakespeare.

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