

Jacqueline Thomas
 Dr. Todd Barnes
 Ramapo College of New Jersey

Intertextuality and the “Rape” of Miranda: *The Tempest* and *Eastwords*

There is an inherent burden in institutional critique – by deconstructing an already existing text, adding a new voice and perspective to what was hitherto one-sided, the author inadvertently highlights the subjectivity and fallibility of their own, derivative work. We see this conceit exemplified in Kalyan Ray’s re-telling of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* entitled *Eastwords* where the relationship between Caliban and Miranda is redefined through appropriation, based on a postcolonial, 21st century perspective. Within this mold of intertextuality, characters and stories of the past belong to writers of the present; mutability is always possible, no meaning is absolute, and themes are ever-changing based on the narrator’s perception. In order to highlight the extent of variation within two tales of analogous characters, setting, and plot, we will closely follow the excerpt from *The Tempest* in which Prospero accuses Caliban of raping his daughter paired with its counterpart in *Eastwords*.

In Scene I, Act II of *The Tempest* Prospero states, “I have used thee, / Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee / In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate / the honor of my child”.ⁱ Here the reader sees Prospero’s story taking shape as the projected truth of the play – in the same way he speaks for Caliban, he also speaks for Miranda and all others on the island. In this sense, and as J.L. Austin highlights in *How to do things with Words*, he uses narrative to produce truth.ⁱⁱ Prospero portrays himself as the exemplary figure of kindness who invited the foul, bestial Caliban into his home, only to be betrayed. In this version of the story, Prospero is patient and forgiving while Caliban is evil and violent; these are notions we will see combated in Ray’s rendering. However, despite character description, one of the marked differences between *The Tempest* and *Eastwords* is the use of syntax and diction. Being that the first is a product of the early 17th century and the latter a product of the 21st century, there is the obvious shift from poetic drama to prose novel. The first is vastly more formal, despite Shakespeare’s unprecedented use of the vernacular in his time. Kalyan Ray is rarely fully serious; he has an inherently comedic tone which mimics the original *Tempest* and though he uses the form of prose, his words are ripe with poetic undertones. But the most interesting contrast is that, while reading Ray’s work, one can never forget its original – the author literally addresses Shakespeare, or rather “Willyum”, throughout the text, asking him questions and mocking him for his often dubious narration. Perhaps this is intertextuality exemplified: a text that is always self-aware of its predecessor, and thereby its own precarity.

We see this idea extended in scholar James E. Portar’s essay, *Intertextuality and the Discourse Community* in which he states:

Not infrequently books speak of books. Not infrequently, and perhaps ever and always, texts refer to other texts and in fact rely on them for their meaning. All texts are interdependent. We understand them only insofar as we understand its precursors. This the principle we know as intertextuality, the principle that all writing and speech – indeed, all signs – arise from a single network: what

Vygotsky called “the web of meaning”; what poststructuralists label Text or Writing (Barthes); and what a more distant age perhaps knew as logos. Examining texts “intertextuality” means looking for “traces”, the bits and pieces of Text which writers or speakers borrow and sew together to create new discourse.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here Porter takes the notion of intertextuality one step further, by implying the nature of all written work is to be passed down, carried on throughout time. There is no truly autotelic work just as there is no single Caliban or Prospero or Miranda – they are canvases for the writers of the future, rendered anew each time another author takes them as their own. This trope is why the relationship between Caliban and Miranda is utterly changed in *Eastwords*; we see what once had implications of rape, colonialism, and enmity rendered as friendship, sincerity, and romance. Ray’s re-telling of *The Tempest* depicts a chaste, ill-fated love affair between the beautiful Miranda and the kind-hearted Caliban – both are rendered as similar souls, innocent, with a love of nature and simplicity. Thus, Prospero becomes the villain who not only talks for Miranda, but warps her consciousness with magic, annihilating her love for Caliban. This assertion of power is shown metaphorically when Prospero kills the child Miranda and Caliban conceived together and then dismisses the consensual nature of their relations, claiming rape for her; once again, stealing her voice. Ironically, the motif of magic laden in the original *Tempest* is revisited in a markedly different manner, highlighting new perspectives and themes once concealed. The reader now sees, within even the original text, a hidden story – one of suppressed love and tragedy. In Miranda’s reply to her father, “Open your heart, father, open your heart or hate us both” we see Prospero’s obsession with control, dominance, and patriarchal authority reconsidered.^{iv} He becomes the villain Caliban had once been in Prospero’s tale; he stands between not only romance but also the greater ability for others on the island to make their own decisions and live autonomously. Essentially, Ray focuses on themes of the patriarchal milieu and colonialism, but in a more sympathetic light towards the victims of oppression rather than the oppressors.

The reader sees Prospero literally forcing his voice upon Miranda when he works the spell on her. “He tried to ravish you. But I did save you / I saved you, O my virgin child / You love me / Miranda loves Prospero / Miranda / Hates / Caliban”.^v In *The Tempest* it is alluded to but never fully brought forth that Prospero often uses his magic on Miranda; these undertones are what make Ray’s telling of the story so believable but also so tragic. The reader can almost see the untold tale hiding within the original and never again, after reading the derivative, will they be able to believe the original narrative wholeheartedly. But what is most interesting is that, in both *The Tempest* and *Eastwords*, we see the confusion of authorship on multiple levels: Prospero, the author of the story and the island, and Shakespeare, the mythologized man, author of the whole tale. Porter states:

Our anthologies glorify the individual essayists, whose work is valued for its timelessness and creativity. Freshman rhetorics announce as the writer's proper goals personal insight, originality, and personal voice, or tell students that motivations for writing come from "within." Generally, this pedagogy assumes that such a thing as the writer actually exists—an autonomous writer exercising a free, creative will through the writing act—and that the writing process proceeds linearly from writer to text to reader.^{vi}

Therefore Shakespeare should not be studied as one, singular man, but as a voice and metaphor for a time period, in the same way that Prospero is every white man in the colonial period. William Faulkner once said, "If I had not existed, someone else would have written me, Hemingway, Dostoevsky, all of us". This question of originality is the paradox of not only intertextuality, but all written work. And through this break with the much-loved individual, readers can actually grasp diversity and mutability in the text rather than continue the long-sought quest for elusive authorial intention.

In *From Work to Text* Roland Barthes states, "The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage... what [the reader] perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives... the Text is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages".^{vii} Undoubtedly, there are echoes of Shakespeare in Ray's derivative, but more convincing, are the echoes of Ray now latent in Shakespeare. In this sense *The Tempest* and *Eastwards* are not two separate, cleanly confined texts, but a coalesced passage, a single multi-layered story – a sharing of past and present. Perhaps the ultimate beauty of intertextuality is that there is no truth and every narration is subject to change. Within these limits villains can become benevolent, heroes can become flawed, and narrators can always become unreliable. Intertextuality, by its nature, calls for responsible readers who strive to question the classic tale, to look past the accepted meanings and intentions and find something new within the text. Obviously one of the most popular ways to interpret written work will be through appropriation, bringing one's own cultural values to the reading, but intertextuality is not restricted solely to this, and often coexists with cultural relativism – it offers a world of perspectives through the relationship between one text and all else that has ever been written. Also, once we begin to read this way, we begin to realize, as is shown in *The Tempest* and *Eastwards*, that little is truly original; phrases, syntactical decisions, ways of figuring speech, all of these things are learned and passed on through time, belonging to humanity and rarely a single author. The only thing which can perhaps be construed as true individuality is perspective, the way an author chooses to portray truth versus myth; and because perspectives are infinite and stories can be told in limitless ways, it is the author's choice rather than the actual rendering which makes the story unique.

ⁱ Shakespeare, William, and David Hamilton Horne. *The Tempest*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1955. 347. Print.

ⁱⁱ Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975. Print.

ⁱⁱⁱ Porter, James E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review* 5.1 (1986).JSTOR. Web. 3 May 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/466015>>.

^{iv} Ray, Kalyan. "Passages." *Eastwards: a Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004. 186. Print.

^v Ray, Kalyan. "Passages." *Eastwards: a Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2004. 189. Print.

^{vi} Porter, James E. "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." *Rhetoric Review* 5.1 (1986).JSTOR. Web. 3 May 2011. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/466015>>. 42.

^{vii} Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." *WCUPA.EDU*. Web. <<http://courses.wcupa.edu/fletcher/special/barthes.htm>>.