THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor: Michael Scott

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Further titles are in preparation.

THE TEMPEST

David Daniell

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For Andy

General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh, calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross-currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second part the authors provide their own appraisals of

the text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therein hopes to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation as the critics debate.

Michael Scott

Preface

UNIQUELY, *The Tempest* changes shape. Though it is well-printed, with few textual problems, and though its time of writing, and for what kind of audience, are facts now firmly established, what it ‘means’ seems to be continually on the move. It has always been a challenge, and never more than in the last years of the twentieth century.

The *Sea Venture* was wrecked on the Bermudas in a fearful storm in July 1609: accounts of that seem to have given Shakespeare some of the frame of his play. The wreck was discovered in the late 1970s: it lacked the timbers that were used by the castaways to make the smaller boat, the *Deliverance*, in which they continued to Virginia. At the end of Shakespeare’s play, Ariel magically restores the wrecked ship. The Boatswain and crew find it ‘tight and yare and bravely rigged, as when/We first put out to sea’. At the sight of ‘our royal, good, and gallant ship’ so restored, they see ‘our master/Cap’ring to eye her’ – a marvellously expressive phrase [v.i. 224–5. 237–8]. The company, without Ariel or Caliban, then sail on to Naples. Though the modern critic may dance for joy at the sight of the play – and indeed, should, or has no business writing about it – no such firm closure is possible; critically there is nothing so final as a sailing-away, either in a *Deliverance* or King Alonso’s ship, to fix on. Ariel seems still at work, and the best that can be managed is perhaps a brief waking, and the recording of a few notes of the invisible music, as we all follow amazedly.

I have done what I could to give some shape – I hope not illusory – to the forces at work in this particular debate. The strongest voices have spoken in the last few decades, but a larger historical alertness is essential. Little that came later makes sense without knowledge of how the dam burst for the Romantic poets, for whom the play was unusually important:

and how that flooding fertilised our most recent Caliban–Prospero binary system, however remote this is now from ‘the characters of Shakespeare’s plays’. So I have taken time to set out, where it seemed necessary, some critical history. Moreover, as I try to sketch in Part Two, we have a long way to go in understanding the creative, indeed ‘civilising’, quality of *The Tempest*, from the court of James until now.

The play has been particularly blessed in its modern editors (no doubt a further demonstration of Ariel still at work). One edition, the Arden by Frank Kermode, first published in 1954 and continually reissued, is outstanding, and all writers on the play since then have rightly acknowledged it. Anne Barton’s 1968 Penguin and Stephen Orgel’s 1987 Oxford editions are both excellent. Serious students should know all three.

Quotations and references in what follows are from Peter Alexander’s one-volume *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, first published in 1951.