

EXPERIENCING ENGLISH LITERATURE

An Alternative Approach to William Shakespeare

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INTRODUCTION

The following paper is written for the express purpose of offering an alternative approach to the study of classical English literature for university level students in Japan. It is intended to be a supplemental exercise that may be incorporated into both English literature classes as well as conversation classes. It may serve as an interesting variable in furthering the English ability of students as well as a stimulus for students, who have previously not been interested in literature, to look at other classic works in the English language. It will also serve as a refreshing 'new' way of teaching English literature to students who, often times, are not excited about constantly trying to come up with 'perfect' translations of difficult and sometimes stilted prose.

The play selected for this purpose is 'The Tempest', written by William Shakespeare in 1611. It should be noted at the outset, that virtually any other play or author can be utilized in the same manner as presented here. The choice is up to the teacher and the interests of his/her students. 'The Tempest' was chosen primarily because it is a play that offers the audience a great deal as far as imagination is concerned in that it allows a chance for the student to interpret various parts in his/her own way and leaves much to the creative faculty of the brain. It seems that students aspiring to learn English would benefit greatly from a chance to read, think about, interpret, paraphrase, practice and perform a part of this epic play by perhaps the greatest English playwright that ever lived. It is for these reasons that a portion of 'The Tempest' has been selected. It is hoped that the part chosen will stimulate the imaginations of the students such that they feel inclined to continue with further sections of this play and perhaps even look to other works of Shakespeare for further learning and satisfaction.

APPROACH

There are certain problems involved with using a drama from the early modern English period. First and foremost is the fact that the English language used is not exactly the same as

that of the present day. Certainly, native speakers of English can handle the bulk of meaning inherent in plays from this period. However, non-native speakers of English may experience not a few problems with some grammar constructions and vocabulary items. For this reason, the more mystifying and uncommon words, phrases and meanings have been listed out in the pages that follow. This paper is intended to be used with an original copy of the text in the students' hands. Using this paper in conjunction with such a representation, a large number of potential problems can more easily be circumvented.

In order to insure that the students understand the play as well as possible before trying to perform it, a portion of the first act—from the beginning of the play until Prospero begins to talk about his brother's treachery—has been taken and accompanying notes for the purpose of explanation have been written. The reasons for selecting this part of the play are as follows: First of all, it would seem more appropriate to start from the beginning of a play (if only doing a portion) for reasons of avoiding confusion. That is, should one start in the middle, it would be much more difficult to explain the intricacies of what is happening and indeed, the teacher would most probably end up going through the first parts of the play anyway in order to explain the story up until the exercise begins. Starting from the beginning allows the chance to see where the play started and where it goes from there. In addition, in the case of 'The Tempest', the characters in the beginning are speaking more prose and less poetic verse. Thus, it is certainly easier for the students to start with such speech. As we get into the second scene of act 1, we shall see Prospero and Miranda begin to speak in much harder to understand poetic verse, which is unquestionably more difficult for the students to handle.

This approach is intended to be used as follows. First of all, the teacher would begin the class with a little discussion of Shakespeare's life and plays he has written. Then, 'The Tempest' should be discussed—giving a general outline of the story and what the students should expect to look for. This is a first call for imagination use on the part of the students. Next the original text should be passed out to the students. Time should be spent trying to read it in order to give the students a look at the original language that they are going to be paraphrasing. This may discourage them at first as they will most likely not understand at all in many cases. It is recommended that the New Penguin Edition, edited by Anne Richter, be used in class. The reason this edition is recommended is because modern spelling conventions have been used and these will certainly be more beneficial to the students than using a text that preserves the actual printing styles of the period in which it was written. Certainly, however, an edition like the New Variorum, edited by Horace Howard Furness, Dover Publications 1964, should be recommended as a reference because the notes are excellent although perhaps it is too difficult to be

used as a main text by the students.

The students should then be given the notes contained in this paper and divided into groups in order to try and write a paraphrase in modern English of each line spoken in the section selected here. The size of the groups in dependant upon the class size, however, it is recommended that the groups be of no more than four or five students in order to insure that everyone has the chance to actively participate. Of course, regular dictionaries should also be utilized. The paraphrasing done by the students will be difficult for them. However, with the notes, dictionaries, discussion amongst themselves and the teacher's help, it is certain that they will be able to come up with paraphrases for the first part of the play selected (that is, act 1.1). The notes herein continue into act 1.2 but they are more complete as they offer a literal summary of some of the more difficult parts. After the paraphrases are completed-over the course of several class periods, with homework included-the teacher should ask each group if there are any questions that they have about parts they don't understand. After these have been dealt with, the play will be ready for rehearsal with each group taking one (or more) character's part(s). In this way, they can help and encourage each other and this also allows a chance for everyone to take a part in the play. Since this is an introduction, the students should not be expected to memorize their lines but should be allowed to read them.

Through the process of carefully going over a play like this-written in Early Modern English (after first rendering it into modern English) the students will be in a very good position to understand a piece of work written by a great English playwright. Such an endeavor will certainly prove to be very enjoyable, enlightening and educational. As noted above, after the completion of this exercise, some of the students may feel inclined to either do the rest of this play or perhaps try the same thing with some other works by other English playwrights. Of course, this will require some preparation on the part of the teacher. The reader is asked to note that some of the dialog explanations that follow have not been provided in the notes. The reason for this is that it is considered by this writer that those parts are close enough to modern English that the students should not have any real trouble in understanding them. However, some teachers may wish to include their own explanations in places where they are missing and, certainly, they should always be prepared to explain any and all parts that cause confusion.

COMMENTARY/NOTES

TEMPEST	A violent storm.
TEMPESTUOUS	(Adj. form of Tempest).
MASTER(SHIPMASTER)	"The master and his mate is to direct the course, command all the

sailors, for steering, trimming, and sailing the ship.”(Furness, pg. 10).

BOATSWAIN

“...is to have the charge of all the cordage, tackling, sails, fids, and marling spikes, needles, twine, and sailing cloth, and rigging of the ship.”(Furness, pg. 10).

THE ACTUAL PLAY ITSELF

1.1

Master:

Boatswain:

Here-a greeting from.

What cheer-how is it? how are things?

Master:

Good-Not clear. Some maintian that it relers to “good fellow” and others say “I am glad you are here”. Should perhaps be left to private interpretation.

th’-“the”.

to’t-“fall to it” or start working.

yarely-“readily” or ”nimbly”.

run ourselves aground-“shipwreck ourselves”.

bestir-“To make active. arouse”.

Boatswain:

hiegh-“hey”.

my hearts-“my hearties”. A term used to refer to seamen.

cheerly-“with gusto”. A shout of encouragement.

yare-“ready”.

tend to the master’s whistle-“listen and follow the whistle. Do it at that time”.

(See furness pg. 12 for an explanation of the whistle used by ship masters).

blow till thou burst thy wind-talking to the storm. saying. ”blow until your lungs break”.

if room enough-“if you can”.

Alfonso:

good-“good man”(greeting).

have care-“take care: be careful”

Boatswain:

I pray now-“I’m asking you”.

keep below-“stay below deck”

Antonio:

Boatswain: you mar our labor-“you are in the way”.
keep your cabins-“stay in your rooms”.
you do assist the storm-“you are in the way”.

Gonzolo: nay-“no”.
good-“good man”
be patient-“relax and listen”

Boatswain: when the sea is hence!-“when the sea is like this” i.e. when there is
a storm like this!
what cares-“who cares”
these roarers-“these bullies”
to cabin-“get to your room”
trouble us not-“don’t trouble us”

Gonzolo: good-“ok”
yet remember whom thou hast on board-“but remember who you
have on this ship”

Boatswain: none than I love more than myself-“I love the king more than I
love myself”
councillor-“king’s advisor”
command these elements to silence and work the peace of the
present-“if you can stop this storm and make it calm”
we will not hand a rope-“we will then relax and not worry”
give thanks you have lived so long-“be glad that you are still alive”
make yourself ready in your cabin-“go back to your room and pre-
pare for what might happen”
for the mischance of the hour-“for the fate of the present time”
The sea is raging and people may die.
if it so hap-“if we are shipwrecked” hap-happen.
out of the way-“get out of our way”. “don’t bother us”

Gonzolo:

I have great comfort from this fellow-“I feel at ease with him”
Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon “I don’t think he will drown”
him:
his complexion is perfect gallows-“he has a face for hanging”

stand fast-“keep your promise” “don’t change your mind”

good fate-“friend fate”

to his hanging-“keep your promise that he will hang”

make the rope of his

destiny our cable-“make the rope of his hanging as true as the cable that will save this ship”. If he hangs then we won’t drown this day.

for ours doth little advantage-“because our fate (rope) offers little hope for salvation”

if he be not born to hang-“if his fate isn’t to hang”

our case is miserable-“we’ll die in this storm”

Boatswain: down with the topmast-“take the top (main mast) down”

yare-“do it well and quickly”

lower, lower- “bring it lower”

bring her to try with main course-“see if the ship will take the main course and if that will be enough” (see Furness, pg. 17).

a plague-“curse” “swear words”

howling-“crying” “wailing”

our office-“the commands of the master’s whistle”

yet again-“why do you came here again”

what do you here-“what do you want here”

give o’er-“give up”

have you a mind to-“do you want to”

Sebastian: a pox o’your throat-“a curse on you”

bawling-“crying”

blasphemous-“swearing to god or higher authority”

incharitable-“not kind or charitable”

Boatswain: work you then-“then you should help us”

Sebastian: hang cur-“I hope you hang, you dog”

whoreson-“son of a whore” “bastard”

insolent noisemaker-“rude. loud person”

than thou art-“than you are”

Gonzolo: I’ll warrant him for-“I think he will”

though the ship were no stronger than a nutshell-“even if the ship were just as weak as a nutshell”

as leaky as an unstanched

wench-“just as leaky as a bleeding woman”
 Boatswain: lay her a-hold, a-hold-“keep the ship to the wind”
 set her two courses-“set both of the sails”
 off to sea again-“head towards the sea”
 lay her off-“stay away from land”
 Mariners: all lost-“we’re going to die”
 to prayers-“let’s pray to god”
 Boatswain: What must our mouths be cold-“why must we die”
 (see Furness, pg. 19 for other interpretations)
 Gonzolo: at prayers-“praying”
 let’s assist them-“let’s pray too”
 Sebastian: I’m out of patience-“there is nothing to be done”
 Antonio: merely cheated of our lives-“simply tricked...”
 drunkard-“a person who is drunk”
 wide-chopped-“wide faced” A bad meaning.
 rascal-“untrustworthy person”
 would thou mightest lie drowning-“I wish you lie in the water
 drowning”
 the washing of ten tides-“until the tide has come in over your body
 ten times” (see Furness, pg. 19 concerning the execution of pi-
 rates).
 Gonzolo: he’ll be hanged yet-“I think he will hang”
 though every drop of water swear against it-“although the storm is
 so bad that it sure looks like we’re going to drown and gape at
 widst to glut him-“a wide open and violent sea that looks as if to
 swallow him”
 mercy on us-“god have mercy on us”
 farewell-“goodbye”
 we split-“we’ve hit land and the ship is splitting”
 Antonio: wi’th’king-“with the king”
 Sebastian: take leave of-“to leave”
 Gonzolo: now would I give-“I would give at this time”
 furlong-“a unit of length. 1/8 of a mile”
 acre-“unit of measure. 4.840 square yards”

heath-“heather” a type of plant.
furze-“gorse” European shrub with yellow flowers.
wells above-“god’s will”
but I would fain die-“but I would rather die”
a dry death-“a death on land not at sea”

1.2

Miranda:

If by you art, dearest father you have put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.

-“if by your magic, you have started this storm, then please stop it”

would pour down stinking pitch-“a lot of black and terrible rain is falling”

but that the sea, mounting to-“the sea is as high as the sky”

th’ welkin’s cheek

dashes the fire out-(see Furness pg. 23 for a description of the work of Ariel). It would seem there was a lot of fire in the sky during the storm.

O-“oh”

brave vessel-“a brave ship”

noble creature-“noble person” (but see Furness pg. 24)

dashed-“broken”

perished-“died”

or ere-“ere is added to ‘or’ for emphasis”

fraughting souls-“the people who are on the ship”

Prospero:

be collected-“don’t worry”

no more amazement-“don’t be amazed”

piteous heart-“sad heart”

no harm done-“nothing bad has happened”

Miranda:

woe the day-“the day is sad” (see Furness, pg. 25 as it seems that Miranda has misunderstood her father’s words to mean that even if they have died it is not important).

Prospero:

Nothing bad has happened. I have only taken care of you my daughter. You who do not know where I came from or who I really am. Thinking I am only your common father.

thee-“you”

art-“are”

thou- "you"

whence- "where"

more better- "better"

full poor cell- "a man with a full mind/brain"

greater father- "father"

Miranda:

more to know- "to know more than that"

did never meddle in my thoughts- "I have never thought about it."

Prospero:

'tis time- "it is time"

lend thy hand and pluck my magic garment from me- "help me to take off my garment" garment-
article of clothing.

lie there my art- "it is the source of my power"

wipe thou thine eyes- "wipe your eyes"

direful- "full of fear and foreboding"

spectacle- "scene"

wrack- "shipwreck" mine

art- "my art"

perdition- "to destroy"

an hair- "a hair"

betid- "to happen to befall" you more.

heard'st- "heard"

sawst- "saw"

Miranda:

bootless inquisition- "fruitless questioning". No answers to questions, concluding. stay: not yet-
"always telling me that now isn't the time to answer"

Prospero:

very minute- "now is the
time"

bids- "asks"

ope- "open"

canst- "can you"

cell- "island"

out three years old- "not quite 3 years old."

It is time for me to tell you more. Help me to take off my coat- for
in it lies my power. Dry your tears. The terrible scene of the wreck
that has caused compassion in your heart was so safely ordered by
my power that no one was killed or even hurt- even though you
have seen the sinking and heard the cries. Sit down as I must tell
you more.

The time has come for you to listen- so be attentive. Can you re-
member a time before we came to this island? I don't think you
can because you weren't even three years old then.

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Miranda:

Prospero:

by what-“how” How do you know? By some other house or person? Tell me of
hath-“has” anything you remember.
thy-“your”

Miranda:

’Tis far off-“It was a long time ago”
that my remembrance warrants-“that I remember”
had I not-“didn’t I have”
tended-“attended” like servants.

Prospero:

hadst-“has”
lives in thy mind-“how do you remember this”
what seest thou else-“what else do you remember”
dark backward and abysm of time-“the dark, dim past”
If thou rememb’rest how thou cam’st here, how thou cam’st here thou mayst-“if you remember
how you came here you must tell me”

Literally-You did have 4 or 5 women servants and more. But how do you remember that? What
else do you remember of the past? If you remember how you came here then you must tell
me.”

Miranda:

Prospero:

twelve year since-“twelve years ago”
a prince of power-“a man of power in the sense of being nobility”

Miranda:

are not you-“aren’t you”

Prospero:

piece of virtue-“a virtuous woman” i.e. one who wouldn’t do bad things.
wast-“was”
heir-“the next one to rise to power:the son or daughter of nobility”
no worse issued-“of the same noble rank”

Literally:

Your mother was a virtuous woman who told me that you were my daughter. The daughter of
the Duke of Milan (i.e. me) My only daughter and of noble birth.

Miranda:

foul play-“bad luck or people scheming against one”

thence-“there”

was't-“was it”

Literally:

Oh my goodness! Was it by bad fate or good that we came here from there?

Prospero:

sayst-“said”

heaved thence-“thrust (driven) out”

holp-“helped”

hither-“to here”

Literally:

Both good luck and bad. We were thrust out by bad luck but helped by good luck to get here.

Miranda:

heart bleeds: “I am sad”

to think o'th'teen-“to think of all the trouble”

I have turned you to-“I have exposed you to”

from my remembrance-“can't be remembered”

please you, farther-“please tell me more of this”

Literally:

I am so sad. To think of all the trouble and sorrow. which I can't remember, that you faced alone. Please tell me more!

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