The Role of The Tempest by William Shakespeare in John Fowles’ The Collector

List of Contents

Introduction
Allusion and Intertextuality in Fowles’ Novel The Collector
The Myth of the Beauty and the Beast as an Intertextual Matrix.
Shakespeare’s Myth of the Beauty and the Beast in The Tempest
Fredric Clegg’ Myth Interpretation
Miranda Grey’s Myth Interpretation
Conclusion
References

Introduction

While reading The Collector by John Fowles the reader inevitably notices that the author is greatly influenced by William Shakespeare, namely, by his fairy play The Tempest, as references to it go through the whole of Fowles’ text. Thus, the aim of this essay is to explore why Shakespeare’ The Tempest appears to be of such a significance for Fowles’ The Collector. Another question the essay tries to answer is whether it is possible to achieve the stated aim with the help of the traditional notion of allusion, or if it is needful to use the notion of intertextuality instead. Furthermore, The Collector is an exercise in point of view, that is, the novel revolves around two protagonists with entirely different concepts of right and wrong, with different outlooks and with different ethical, spiritual and cultural positions in the society and on the society. The form of diaries which both main characters in The Collector are keeping allows them to express their points explicitly. The reader therefore has a chance to see one and the same event described in the novel from two points of view. The plot itself is based on the famous archetype of the beauty and the beast, but this archetype is interpreted differently in the case of each character. In addition, the same archetype lies as background of Shakespeare’s The Tempest. However, The Collector does not present the third interpretive variant of the archetype but rather gives re-interpretation to Shakespeare’s vision. Finally, comparing these interpretations should enable a discussion of whether the reader must choose one point of view according to his or her systems of beliefs and moral values or rather understand and consequently accept plurality of opinions without singling out one "right" way of thinking.

Allusion and Intertextuality in Fowles’ Novel The Collector

Readers of John Fowles’ novel, The Collector, regularly meet references to Shakespeare, both explicit and implicit: the main protagonist’s name is Miranda, and her kidnapper, called Frederick Clegg, says that his name is Ferdinand. Miranda and Ferdinand are names of lovers in The Tempest by Shakespeare. However, Miranda prefers to see Clegg not as Ferdinand but rather as Caliban, also one of the characters in The Tempest. Being well-educated, Miranda applies the name of Caliban intentionally, whereas Clegg calls himself Ferdinand because it seems to him that "there’s something foreign and distinguished about it" (Fowles 39). Moreover, Miranda then quotes The Tempest directly, even pointing out the number of acts and scenes. The issue is whether it is possible to treat these references using the notion of allusion or do we need the term of intertextuality.
To answer this question it is important to understand clearly the difference between these two terms: allusion and intertextuality. Allusion is a more traditional notion referring to traces of presence of other works in the text, such as some quotations, echoes, or references. Nevertheless, intertextuality does not oppose the idea of allusion but rather enlarge it, as intertextuality can be seen as a general term encompassing unconscious socially prompted texts (for example, archetypes, popular culture), modes of conception (ideas "in the air"), styles (such as genres) (Clayton 3).

Hence, the problem is to decide whether the mentioned above references are allusions or evidences of intertextuality. To understand them as an allusion planted by Fowles might mean turning to Shakespeare’s ideas and themes of the play. Treating Shakespeare’s presence as an intentional gesture by Fowles to reinforce and enrich his vision, a reader would discover that the theme of the opposition between the worlds of Miranda’s Art and Caliban’s Nature is borrowed directly from Shakespeare’s works, in which Caliban represents "nature without benefit of nurture; to the beauty of the nurtured he opposes a monstrous ugliness; ignorant of gentleness and humanity, he is a savage and capable of all ill" (Kermode xxiv – xxv). Thus, the ideology of allusion restricts the reader’s freedom to one direction, namely, reinforcement of the following reading: Clegg is a Caliban. Vise versa, the notion of intertextuality allows to achieve greater interpretive certainty as, according to Michael Riffaterre, it pays attention to "not only the text, but also its reader and all of the reader’s possible reactions to the text" (Clayton 23).

Intertextuality refers to far more than the mere "influences" of writers on each others. Besides, it has an ability to allow signs to serve simultaneously both as allusions and linkages to intertext. Certainly, the "natural reader," that is, the reader unfamiliar with for instance Shakespeare’s works, may overlook these intertextual links, but in this case they will function automatically; they will help make a novel’s ideology appear without questions taken as granted since the reader share the same complex of social voices that constitutes the text. That is, for example, the reason why Clegg feels that there is something distinguished about the name Ferdinand. Though, the reader, even aware of these intertexts, is not so interested in how Fowles uses Shakespeare in his novel but why Shakespeare appears to be so important for Fowles’ The Collector, since noticing that names of main heroes allude to the names in The Tempest does not reveal the meaning of such allusiveness.

Intertextuality can help to answer this question for once we begin to see the reference to The Tempest as generated by social differences between classes in the contemporary to Fowles society it is not hard to see it as a key to a problem between Miranda and Caliban, between Few and Many, between people who belong to different classes but who are forced to live in one society. And it becomes obvious that unless they do not want to change attitudes to each other, Caliban will inevitably envy Miranda and try to possess her, and consequently Miranda will inevitably die, as her spiritual superiority cannot success in the struggle against a crude physical force.

In line with Julia Kristeva’s definition, intertextuality gives a possibility to see any text as a dynamic structure that involves a particular mental activity, namely, not only identifying texts that participate in the final text but rather understanding the new identity of the text, which due to intertextuality may appear as fragments of character, or fragments of ideology, or fragments of
representation (Becker-Leckrone 95). This understanding of intertextuality explains how and why Fowles creates his structure by appropriating pre-existing materials (in his case Shakespeare’s works) in the cultural and social discourse. Consequently, he takes some Shakespeare’s concept about beauty and bestiality in the basis of which there lies a certain cultural archetype and redevelops it in his own unique way. Michael Riffaterre calls this basis the "matrix"; it is usually ready-to-hand and quite well-known within the cultural discourse (Clayton 23).

Despite of the fact that Shakespeare’s Tempest and Fowles’ Collector share the same matrix, the structure that results from the transformation of this matrix into a play or a novel is unique. What is more, any reading is unique, since even though a reader may share this knowledge of the matrix consciously or unconsciously, he or she inevitably interprets this archetype in a different way, depending on his or her education, experience, personal development and social status. Thus, the novel The Collector is an example of an exercise in how people (in the case of the novel Miranda Grey and Frederick Clegg) may interpret one and the same matrix (in other words, text, myth, archetype), and how these interpretations, subject to their class differences (in the given example), may lead to mutual misunderstandings and as a result to a tragedy.

The Myth of the Beauty and the Beast as an Intertextual Matrix.

Shakespeare’s Myth of the Beauty and the Beast in The Tempest

The meaning of the name Miranda in Latin is a female wonder and a source of admiration. Ferdinand, son to the King of Naples, realizes that at first glance, addressing her as "O you wonder" (Shakespeare I. ii. 429). Later he exclaims: "Admir’d Miranda! Indeed the top of admiration" (Shakespeare III. i. 37 – 8). For him she is "peerless" and "perfect," "the goddess on whom these airs attend," a "maid" and "virgin" who combines the best qualities of all women he has previously known. Hence Ferdinand’s feelings correspond to the conception of Platonic love. Plato develops his notion of love in the Phaedrus where he explains that there exists the world of ideas, much more real than the world ordinary mortals live in. Before birth and after death the soul is in a place where it sees the vision of transcendent Beauty which any human soul cannot remain indifferent to. It is the memory of this Beauty that causes a lover to adore his beloved and makes him "offer sacrifices to his beloved as to a holy image deity" (Srigley 58). Shakespeare’s Miranda is also a mortal beauty who arouses the memory of eternal Beauty. Ferdinand perceives her inner divinity at the first moment he catches sight of her: "Most sure the goddess/ On whom these airs attend" (Shakespeare I. ii. 424 – 5). Ferdinand here recognizes the archetype behind the human form. Miranda does not have to do more than to be a beauty in order to deserve Ferdinand’s love. The very image of her makes "this place Paradise" (Shakespeare IV. i. 124) for Ferdinand. She is perfect, passive and, unquestionably, not a developing character but the ideal by its definition cannot be developed as it is a final stage.

By contrast to Miranda, Shakespeare’s Caliban is also perfect but in his ugliness. There is no hint of an original innocence corrupted by contact with civilization; he is corrupt from the beginning (Srigley 109).

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick; on whom my pains,
Humanely taken, all, all lost, quite lost;
And as with age his body uglier grows,
So his mind cankers.
(Shakespeare IV. i. 188 – 192)

Still, even being a monster, Caliban takes deep delight in the invisible music of the island. He loves passionately the nature around him and he is responsive to the beauty of Miranda though in his own perverted way, that is, in the only way he is capable of:

Prospero. Though most lying slave,
Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have us’d thee,
Filth as thou art, with human care; and lodg’d thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honour of my child.

Caliban. O ho! O ho! would’t ha had been done!
Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else
This isle with Calibans. (Shakespeare I. ii. 346 – 53)

Thus, Caliban in The Tempest is a monster by nature and in spite of some human traits he longs to deprive Miranda of her divinity because of envy and malice. Therefore, Shakespeare in his myth of the beauty and the beast goes from one extreme to the other: Miranda is beautiful as much as Caliban is ugly, she is absolutely good and he is absolutely evil and like in all fairy tales she wins and he loses.

Frederick Clegg’ Myth Interpretation

Frederick Clegg is able to comprehend women perceiving them either as idealized figures, characters from fairy tales, or as fallen, and therefore disgusting creatures (Foster 32). Miranda gets into the first category at the beginning and then moves into the second one. He never sees her as a human being with her own rights. Instead, he constantly ascribes different roles to her: princess, artist, nun, whore, or harpy, by turns. None of these versions is a complete person and as such Miranda never becomes completely real for Clegg. His favourite image of her is a captive beautiful princess in the tower who suffers captivity but does it passively having resigned more or less to her state. Thus, according to Clegg’s view, the princess must wait for her rescuer who boldly enters the tower one day and carts her off, a sort of kidnapping, too. The problem is that Clegg can imagine nobody but himself in the role of rescuer, so he is forced to play two roles simultaneously, the role of a gallant prince and the role of a wicked jailer. His dream, in which he rescues Miranda from an attacker and then finds that he is an attacker himself, reveals this ambiguity and so does his desire to keep her in captivity and see her happy. He buys her everything she wants and at the same time prevents her from escape. However, he manages to fail seeing this inconsistency preferring to blame the world as a source of his troubles. In his reality he is a victim and the world is an aggressor (Foster 22).

Clegg even finally "forgives" Miranda for all the things she did to him, completely failing to realize that nothing would have happened but for him. He sincerely expects Miranda to play her
role of the beauty and therefore is unpleasantly surprised at Miranda’s ceaseless attempts at escape and at the energy and the violence of her efforts. Consequently, by degrees he stops seeing her as a princess as to his mind princesses do not use obscenities, do not switch moods from gaiety to spite in a moment, do not break expensive things, do not strike princes with an axe and, the most important, they do not display sexuality. Miranda does all these things and does them aggressively which bothers him as "decent girls" must be passive in his worldview. It is exactly this presumed passivity that allows him to view his act as an act of collecting, that is, an act that plenty of people understand. Till he sees Miranda as a "Pale Clouded Yellow," or a "Queen of Spain Fritillary," till he uses traditional figurative language attaching to women, for example, a bird, a mermaid, a butterfly, he escapes to observe the horror of his actions, abnormality and inhumanity of what he is doing. This butterfly simile helps him not to recognize madness deeply inside him when he says that watching her is like watching the imago appear but that then it must be killed.

In a conclusion, Clegg’s fairy tale can never come true chiefly because human beings do not fit the fancy, but he will never understand it either (Foster 25). He will do it over and over again every time discovering that he has found the "wrong" princess again.

Miranda Grey’s Myth Interpretation

In her turn Miranda comprehends that Frederick Clegg is driven by the ancient myth of the beauty and the beast. What she does not understand is that his image of this myth differs from hers. She desperately tries to catch the message in order to escape, but her interpretations depend greatly on her education, upbringing, and general outlook. She is not able to go beyond the borders of her class and see the myth as Clegg sees it. Having recollected all folk and literary tales she has heard in her life, she comes to a conclusion that there are two possible ways how to transform the beast into the prince: literary and figurative. The first one is to accept that he is a beast at the present moment and then to change him; the second is to change her vision of him as a beast and perceive him as a prince. That’s why she decides to begin with learning. Miranda calls it "to educate him" (Fowles 150). She makes him read "proper books, real books" (Fowles 148), criticizes his manner of speaking, goes through books of paintings trying to impose on him her opinions and beliefs. But she can also notice that he does not comprehend what she wants from him when "he was sitting still looking at the book with an Art-Is-Wonderful air about him" (Fowles 148) or while listening to music he "sat with the right sort of expression on his face" (Fowles 192). Her very definite one-directed views on art and taste lead her to despise everything Clegg attempts in the way of clothing and decor, going so far as rejecting his only interests in photography and entomology as freezing, or "killing" its subject. And she cannot help expressing her opinions. She acts superior, asserting that her ideas are the only ideas and he must accept them as a fact. She demonstrates her educational privilege at any convenient opportunity. Even this nickname for Clegg, Caliban, shows her attitude and superiority. It is not actually Fowles but Miranda who alludes to Shakespeare’s Tempest. Therefore the purpose of such an allusion is to convince herself that she is perfect, ideal, a representative of the good in their tale, whereas Clegg is a savage, subhuman, devoid of any decent human features.
The result of such a position and "learning" appears to be opposite to what she expects. Clegg claims that for example Aunt Annie "never bossed him about half as much as she (Miranda) does" and that "she's forgetting who is a boss".

Having seen that the first way does not work Miranda begins to carry out her second plan, namely, to find something human in the soul of Clegg, to discover smallest sprouts of virtues in him, in order to make herself if not love but at least like him. Her attempt is partially successful as she persuades herself that "there are times when every man is attractive" (Fowles 97). She tries to seduce him but fails since she does not realize that his vision of the princess does not include sex between her and the beast. Clegg’s fantasies of Miranda are completely free of sex. Only when he loses all respect for her because of this act of seducing he does begin to see her as a sexual object, still in his own way, that is, in the form of pornography. In the end Miranda becomes sick with Clegg’s cold, literally as well as metaphorically, and dies.

Conclusion

Shakespeare’s The Tempest may be said to be intetextual for The Collector as these two works share one archetype, or one intertextual matrix. They also share the theme of opposition between beauty and bestiality. Besides, they are both lessons about how to live in the world where there is such an enormous variety of intelligence and culture. However, the direct quotations from The Tempest can be called allusions as Miranda being the author herself wants to give readers a hint how she interprets her myth of the beauty and the beast. Nevertheless, these interpretations do not help their creators as they do not build the bridge between them but rather take away them from each other. It happens mostly due to the fact that Miranda and Clegg do not want to see that there is always another side to the story. They are limited by their systems of values and moral codes and do not want to cross boundaries of these systems. It leads to a tragedy in the novel and will always lead in the real non-fictional life till people recognize and admit that equally with their own beliefs another opinion has a similar right to exist as the world cannot be defined in the categories of right/wrong by force of versatility of the world.

List of References


Secondary Sources: