

Annotation of Bill Ashcroft's *Caliban's Voice: The Transformation of English in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009).

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Bill Ashcroft's *Caliban's Voice* offers a thought-provoking re-examination of the issue of language in post-colonial literatures. As the title of the book indicates, the study takes as its point of departure the figure of Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a character that has repeatedly been construed as the "colonised Other" in post-colonial readings of the play. Ashcroft skilfully exploits passages from the Shakespearean text to develop his central argument, whereby the power of the coloniser's language in the former British Empire does not result from an inherent superiority of English, but rather stems from the *way* in which this linguistic medium has been employed in (neo)colonial contexts. Thus, even if English has often been used as a means of imperial oppression, its transformation by post-colonial writers can potentially turn it into a tool of resistance.

To specialised critics, this thesis doubtlessly evokes familiar territory; however, the interest of Ashcroft's approach lies, on the one hand, in its unravelling of the many confluences and confusions that have riddled debates on the use of English in post-colonial literatures and, on the other, in the author's ability to offer overviews that cover a broad range of subjects and geographical areas. These multiple themes and locations inform the structure of the book.

After outlining his main argument and redefining some of the theoretical concepts crucial to his purpose, Ashcroft provides an informative survey on the role of English in colonial education systems, analyses how race is constructed through language and expounds on the linguistic mechanisms involved in the coloniser's appropriation of place. Still in line

with his principal thesis, the critic then proceeds to demonstrate how one's identity is performed through – rather than embodied in – language. This claim also lies at the heart of the remaining chapters, respectively devoted to the influence of the Creole continuum on Anglophone Caribbean literature, to the different conceptions of the subject–object relationship in oral and written cultures, to the centrality of what the author calls the "discursive event" in writing and to the overlapping processes of translation and transformation occurring in post-colonial literatures in English.

Even though Ashcroft occasionally falls prey to the conceptual shortcuts he himself denounces in the early pages of the study, the arguments he puts forward are largely convincing. Therefore, despite some weaknesses in editing which, unfortunately, affect the overall cohesion of the book, *Caliban's Voice* deserves to be praised for offering a valuable presentation of some elaborate theoretical notions in an accessible style.