

Explore shakespeare's presentation of the themes of forgiveness and reconciliatio...

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

It can be argued that William Shakespeare's "The Tempest" is a play about forgiveness and reconciliation. The title, The Tempest is both literal and metaphorical. Shakespeare begins the play with a fierce storm which wrecks the courtier's ship. I think this storm symbolises "the tempest of life" (i. e. the struggle of life) around which the play is based. Throughout the play, the aristocratic party is torn by conspiracy and betrayal between many different characters. In their attempts to gain power, they are constantly either at each other's throats, or conspiring against one another, and "stirring like a storm. The tempestuous imagery stays throughout the play until reconciliation occurs with the unity of the new generation, represented by Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage. This is linked to the end of the play where all the characters are reunited and either reconciled or forgiven by one another. It is a fact that these elements are at "the heart" of the play, but it can be questioned as to what extent the forgiveness and reconciliation are genuine. Prospero is a good example of this.

During Shakespeare's time people were predominately Christian and believed in the "Bless them that curse you" morality. Prospero's actions from the beginning of the play seem contradictory to this belief. He has the opportunity to take revenge on and potentially kill those who have wronged him when he wrecks their ship on the island. On one hand it is true that he does not intend to harm any of the men on the ship: we know this because he asks Ariel "But are they, Ariel, safe?" This demonstrates how he does have concern for the courtier's well being.

However, on the other hand, he puts Alonso through the sorrow and misery of believing that his son, Ferdinand, was killed in the wreck. Also he puts <https://assignbuster.com/explore-shakespeares-presentation-of-the-themes-of-forgiveness-and-reconciliation-in-the-tempest-assignment/>

innocent, noble men through the suffering on the island to get his point across to the rest of the courtiers. Later in the play, in act 5, scene 1, Ariel convinces Prospero to feel remorse for what he has done to Gonzalo: " Him that you termed, sir, the good old lord Gonzalo. / His tears run down his beard like winter's drops/ From eaves of reeds. Your charm so strongly works 'em/ That if you now beheld them, your affections/ Would become tender. Shakespeare uses the simile and imagery, " His tears run down his beard like winter's drops" to make Gonzalo appear old and withered from the experience, which then makes Prospero, and the audience, pity him. Shakespeare, through Ariel, also uses the phrase " That if you now beheld them, your affections/ Would become tender. " This uses very soft, emotive language such as " affections" and " tender" whereby Ariel attempts to convince Prospero that if he reveals himself to the courtiers now, then they might see him as somewhat of a hero.

This is a turning point where Prospero could gain reconciliation with the party of courtiers. Prospero's statement a few lines later; " The rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance", as well as being a juxtaposition, means that it is better to forgive rather than hate one's enemies, and gives the opportunity to reunite everyone in the final scene and to be able to form a reconciliation with them all. It can be argued, however, whether or not Prospero would have forgiven them if he had not seen how he was making them all suffer and whether he would have just let the charade go on for even longer.

But this can be put aside by the fact that he brought them all to the island in the first place, instead of killing them in the tempest, for the audience knows

that his magic is powerful enough to have killed them. The relationship between Prospero and Caliban is also an important aspect of forgiveness and reconciliation. Caliban is the son of the evil witch, Sycorax. When Prospero and Miranda first arrived on the island, Caliban welcomed Prospero and loved the civility they offered him: " When thou cam'st first/ Thou strok'st me, and made much of me; wouldst give me/ Water with berries in't, and teach me how/ To name the bigger light".

In return, Caliban showed them all the corners of the island and taught them how to survive there " And then I loved thee/ And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle". Shakespeare uses apostrophes in this play as there is a considerable amount of information to convey, and this compacts the speech. However, this positive relationship ended when Caliban attempted to rape Miranda. Prospero then made Caliban his slave and now punishes him using his magic, often in the form of sprites which torment Caliban. Caliban has spent all of his life on this island and is a being who is uncontaminated by the effects of civilization and class.

Yet, he easily is tempted by the worst that ' civilisation' can offer to the island, alcohol. When he meets Stefano and Trinculo, Caliban gets drunk with them and, in return, coaxes them to help plan to murder Prospero and Miranda and take over the Island. Some people suggest that Caliban's plotting to kill Prospero is justified. However, Shakespeare does not ratify this vengeance. Prospero has made Caliban his slave, but he had just cause to, and he does not threaten Caliban with death at all. Prospero shows little or no forgiveness towards Caliban.

The only slight hint of forgiveness is hidden in an order, " Go, sirrah, to my cell;/ Take with you your companions; as you look/ To have my pardon, trim it handsomely. " Prospero also announces to Caliban: " This thing of darkness, I/ Acknowledge as mine. " Prospero's referral to Caliban as " This thing of darkness" demonstrates how Prospero sees Caliban as a mere " thing" which makes Caliban seem inhuman and animal-like or as some hideous creature, however, it can also be argued that when Prospero refers to Caliban as a " thing", it is comparing him to an petty tool which Prospero uses at his will.

Prospero does, however, say " I/ Acknowledge as mine" which acts a step towards reconciliation as his acceptance of Caliban as his own; other critics however, may see this phrase as not a step towards reconciliation, but a demonstration of Prospero's absolute indifference to Caliban in his status as a slave and an object that he can use and abuse as he desires and therefore not worthy of any respect. Here Shakespeare shows how little respect Prospero has for Caliban as he probably will never forgive him for what he attempted to do to Miranda.

However, Caliban finally rises above his drunken companions and is willing to admit his wrong-doings in plotting against Prospero. In admitting his fault, I think it can be interpreted that Caliban is truly more noble than those who are socially of a higher status, such as, Antonio and Sebastian. Prospero's intention in the wrecking the ship and the stranding of the courtiers was to regain his rightful place as Duke of Milan, and to get genuine apologies from the courtiers for wronging him.

However, Alonso's initial reaction is not regret for helping Antonio usurp him and sending him and his daughter out to sea, but relief that there is somebody else on the island. " Whether thou beest he or no,/ Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me,/ As late as I have been, I not know. Thy pulse/ Beats as of flesh and blood;". This shows how Alonso is just relieved that they are not the only inhabitants on the island. Shakespeare allows Alonso to say: " Or some enchanted trifle to abuse me," to demonstrate to the audience that he is feeling haunted by the fact that he betrayed Prospero.

Alonso does ask Prospero to pardon him, but it does not seem as though he genuinely wants forgiveness from Prospero, rather, that he regrets losing his son to the tempest, "...who three hours since/ were wracked upon this shore; where I have lost-/ How sharp the point of remembrance is-/ My dear son Ferdinand. " Shakespeare writes " three hours" to remind the audience how long the courtiers have been on the island. In the rest of this conversation between Alonso and Prospero the word " lost" is brought up many times: " Irreparable is the loss"; " of whose soft grace/ For the like loss," " To make the dear loss have I means much weaker".

Shakespeare uses this to emphasise the dramatic irony of the fact that Alonso believes he has lost his son, where in fact he has not and Prospero is about to reveal that to him. He is just as upset, as he has just given his daughter, Claribel, away in marriage. The audience knows that Ferdinand has not been killed by the tempest, but is going to marry Miranda, Prospero is just about to reveal to Alonso the truth about Ferdinand and here

Shakespeare adds to the dramatic irony. However, this brief apology is good enough for Prospero who then embraces him as a friend.

Alonso resigns his dukedom back to Prospero: " Thy dukedom I resign,".

Prospero later reveals to Alonso that his son is not dead and this reconciles them as Alonso has been forgiven by Prospero and Prospero has returned his son to Alonso. Prospero also reveals to Alonso that Ferdinand is going to marry Miranda; this will reconcile the two men, Alonso and Prospero, and their home states, Milan and Naples. Prospero holds a masque for the young couple (Ferdinand and Miranda) to celebrate their new found love.

The Masque consists of calming and graceful music followed by a party of grotesque characters who serve as a juxtaposition to the music. The masque is also an important factor for reconciliation as this is where Prospero knows for certain that Ferdinand and Miranda are really going to get married. This will then unite realms of Naples and Milan once and for all. The three goddesses Juno, Ceres and Iris, who are at the masque, bless the marriage: " Juno sings her blessing on you", " Ceres sings her blessing on you". The marriage now has a blessing from the gods and Prospero is sure that reconciliation between Milan and Naples will happen.

It is also Prospero's way of reconciling himself with Ferdinand for making him perform hard labour to prove himself to Prospero. I think Shakespeare uses this masque in the play as a gift to the King of England, as the King's daughter had just got married and the play was performed at her wedding.

Prospero's attitude towards his brother Antonio shows very little forgiveness:

" For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother/ Would even infect my

<https://assignbuster.com/explore-shakespeares-presentation-of-the-themes-of-forgiveness-and-reconciliation-in-the-tempest-assignment/>

mouth, I do forgive/ Thy rankest fault, - all of them - and require/ My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,/ Thou must restore. He says that he forgives him, but there is very little sincerity in the way he says it. Prospero's comment directed toward his brother "whom to call brother/ Would infect my mouth" makes Antonio seem like a disease. Antonio does not even acknowledge Prospero, let alone speak to him. Prospero also calls Antonio "most wicked sir" which demonstrates how he is considered as an evil wicked character. So Antonio shows very little reconciliation throughout the play, and the audience would probably see a silent and resentful portrayal of this character.

Gonzalo is the one of the courtiers who does not need to ask for forgiveness from Prospero as he helped him and Miranda. Yet he is important, for it is he who observes that all the disputes have been resolved: Prospero and his Dukedom; Alonso and his son Ferdinand being reunited; all the social states are restored - Alonso is of the highest status once more; and a return to general order throughout. Before reconciliation in the final act begins, Shakespeare signals to the audience that all will be reconciled in this scene.

Prospero promises to Ariel that he will give up his magic by disposing of his books and destroying his staff which give him his powers. "I'll drown my book." The way he says this personifies his powers and gives the impression that he is going to kill them; this makes it seem more of an emotional act for Prospero to have to do. He only uses his powers to allow the characters in the play to realise the errors of their ways and to make them suffer

temporarily, not to kill them or to physically harm them, although he does make Caliban suffer physically from time to time.

In the final scene, Prospero has those who wronged him under his power, so he can give up his magic and regain his dukedom. Although "The Tempest" has the traditional happy ending with the marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda, it can be argued that true forgiveness and reconciliation have not been achieved and that it is a rather hollow ending to the play; some of the characters do not get their comeuppance, such as Caliban, Trinculo, Stephano, Antonio and Sebastian.

Some critics may argue that Shakespeare is suggesting that there never was any real threat to Prospero's plan from these characters, and that Antonio and Sebastian never were really going to have a chance to murder Alonso as they are mere fools to even plot to kill the king. The audience do not find out whether the party of aristocrats get back to Italy or not, and this also adds to the apparent hollowness of the ending. On the other hand, it can also be argued that true forgiveness and reconciliation have been achieved as Prospero's Dukedom is restored and Milan and Naples have been reunited.

Just before the epilogue, Prospero invites the audience to listen to what he is saying when all the other characters have left the stage: "Please you, draw near." This draws the audience and the actors closer together, creating a more personal atmosphere. Prospero includes the audience by sharing his act of forgiveness: "As you from crimes would pardoned be,/ Let your indulgence set me free." This is sometimes compared to Shakespeare's personal experience in the theatre, as "The Tempest" was his last major

<https://assignbuster.com/explore-shakespeares-presentation-of-the-themes-of-forgiveness-and-reconciliation-in-the-tempest-assignment/>

play, and it is suggested that Shakespeare is asking for forgiveness from his audience for the conclusion of his playwriting.

The entire epilogue is in verse; I think this is because, again, this speech must be relate closely to the audience as it is as if Shakespeare is talking directly. The fact that it in verse, combined with the splendour of the words, makes the whole speech fluent and beautiful to read. Some people say that this is how Shakespeare wanted us to remember him, as a powerful writer, expressing ordinary human emotions.