

The tempest



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William Shakespeare incorporated the underlying themes and symbols of magic and supernatural elements throughout his popular play *The Tempest*. There are many arguments that critics have made as to why he chose to include these recurring themes as well as where the ideas originated. When one thinks of magic, you might immediately associate this term with adolescence, juvenile fantasies or the imagination. The Merriam- Webster dictionary defines magic as “ the use of means (as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces”.

Although Shakespeare’s perception of magic is not too far off from the contemporary definition, he uses it to present a different message. However there is much more substance and reason behind this element than someone may actually envision. During Shakespearean times, we closely connect magic and manipulation. Manipulation is a substantial component of *The Tempest* and is exemplified strongly through Shakespeare’s magic elements.

William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* not only encompasses the themes of magic and supernatural forces throughout, but has also influenced a vast number of novelists to create their own interpretation and versions of the play. It has been said that *The Tempest* is one of the most magical pieces of Shakespeare’s literary career. Using magic as a theme can be argued to have an ulterior motive. As it appears in the play, the way in which magic is used, as a manipulation mechanism by the protagonist and it can also be used in the same manner for the relationship between the author and the audience or the reader.

This became apparent when analyzing the definition of magic and how it was projected in *The Tempest*. Shakespeare used magic to control circumstances and the reactions of the reader. Magic is a skill, which could be also viewed as a literary technique. You could say that literary technique is analogous to the way that the central character in *The Tempest*, Prospero, manipulated various characters throughout the play. *The Tempest* represents the premise of magic in various ways throughout Shakespeare's text.

The earliest illustration of this is in the very opening of the play when "A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightening is heard"(Phelan, 11). These are some of the initial noises and sounds heard in *The Tempest* that give the first impression of its magical elements. For example later on in the play the spirit Ariel's music is what drew Ferdinand to Miranda. However there are many other sounds and noises throughout the play that are mentioned that contribute to the magical illusions. At the outset of the play there is a ship that has wrecked along with the thunder, and the storm makes everything a total disaster.

Soon after the shipwreck, our attention is directed to an island where Prospero and his daughter currently reside. His confused daughter inquires whether this was his fault: "If by your art, my dearest father, you have/ put the wild waters in this roar, allay them/ The sky, it seems, would pour down sinking pitch/ ... Had I been any God of power, I would/ Have sunk the sea within the earth "(Phelan, 14). She is curious as to had her father created this catastrophic occurrence. He assures her that everything is fine and it was he who was the cause. This implies that her father Prospero had magical powers of some sort.

Prospero had described this power to his daughter Miranda as art: “ Lie there, my art—Wipe thou thine eyes. Have comfort”(14). He tells her that he has done this for her best interest and that she will gain from it. He also mentions that he caused the disaster because some of his old enemies from his past were passengers on the ship. Prospero’s magical abilities could possibly have a negative impact on others that are soon to be on the island. He uses his magic heavily throughout the play for various reasons. The main motive of his magic is strictly for power.

Prospero likes to use it as a tool for manipulating several characters on the island including his daughter Miranda. His controlling behavior is very palpable in *The Tempest*. One of the most disturbing factors is his control of his daughter. He is the sole male in her life and has a strong impact on her, not just in a fatherly way. He uses manipulation to filter her education as well as arrange her marriage. This can be blamed on the patriarchal society of the time period. Men were thought to be superior to women, who were expected to comply and act accordingly.

Men were educated more than women because of the gender constraints that were in place as well. The arrangement of her marriage and finding her a husband of importance was one of the many ways that Prospero was controlling. Prospero wanted to gift her to someone else and pass on his power over her to the new man in her life. Prospero’s magic was also exhibited through various symbols throughout the play. Some of these symbols are his books, robe and his wand. Prospero’s book was a symbol of his power as well. In this case it was representative of the knowledge that he had gained through them.

However, he had previously been so heavily involved with his studies of magic, that he willingly allowed his brother Antonio in a sense to take his power away from him along with his title. His robe is supposed to signify that his appearance is like that of a magician, another explicit reference to his magical powers. The Tempest presents magic in two different lights, black magic and white magic. The black magic is representative of evil and devious aspects while white magic is supposed to be a more knowledgeable and productive use of power.

Prospero in my opinion is representative of both in a sense, but more so white magic. The knowledge he gained through the books would be white magic. While his use of his powers to get revenge or to manipulate enemies is an example of the dark magic. Another magical or supernatural element in The Tempest is Ariel. Ariel is a spirit in the play, meaning that he is not an actual human character. He is a servant of Prospero and assists him with all his magical needs. Ariel is the spirit that makes all the magical things happen within the island. He is supernatural and seems very angelic.

Throughout the years, in other versions, Ariel has been seen and portrayed sometimes as male at others female. However this character was able to transform because of how the times had changed. The patriarchal society has eventually subsided and women were given more roles and were able to be presented on stage, which they had not always been possible. Allowing Ariel to be able to be a female character meant a lot. Giving a female credit and supernatural abilities within a play or production gave her a worth that was not always appreciated or explicitly known.

Without Ariel being presented the text, *The Tempest* would have lost a huge portion of its magic on the island. Prospero's magic is more powerful and relevant because of Ariel and his contributions. Prospero would be controlling and manipulative without any assistance whatsoever but the magical and supernatural elements would not be as believable in my opinion. Although Prospero is manipulative, which may come off as barbaric, he is ultimately an honest and fair character overall. He does not use his powers to hurt any of his enemies physically.

However, in contrast to Prospero's white magic, Sycorax's magic should be considered as black magic. Sycorax's magic is completely different than that of Prospero. Sycorax used her magic for evil. Known to be an evil witch on the island, she goes unseen in the play. Although there are references to her, nobody actually seen her. We know that she is the mother of Caliban and we hear of all the wrong that she has done. We are reminded throughout the text of the cruel things she has done to Ariel. Ariel had originally been a servant of Sycorax as we find out.

But she trapped Ariel in a tree for disobedience. Even though she is known and classified as another powerful force on the island, it is in a completely different manner. Her magic is more negative and vengeful than Prospero's; this is why they are conflicting figures in the play. Caliban is the son of the evil witch Sycorax. He is the inhuman monster like creature in the text. Caliban is the slave of Prospero and is treated as such. Prospero uses him as a servant to be at his beck and call. Caliban is representative of his mother and the black magic that she uses.

He is an evil character and is a product of his environment. He evil and seeks revenge on Prospero. However could be assumed that he actually is not so bad at heart and really does not know any better. He is a naturally a child and not as educated as many, so his ignorance is justified in a sense. These magical and supernatural allusions are not only present within Shakespeare's version, but in several other versions of the play as well. The version that was most interesting was that of J. G. Ballard entitled, *Dream Cargoes*.

Ballard's short story deviates radically from the original play. Nevertheless this short story had many elements that made it seem as if it had some relationship or basis that could have come from *The Tempest*. Some of the allusions presented are viewed more easily than others. The island in this short story is mentioned as a botanical garden in " *Dream Cargoes*" and Dr. Christine tells him how he is experiencing a biological experiment, and he is intrigued by that idea. J. G. Ballard's *Dream Cargoes* can be seen as and referenced to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* because of this feature.

" By now, four months after his arrival on the Prospero, the one time garbage had now become a unique botanical garden, generating new species of tree, vines, plants every day. A powerful life-engine was driving the island" (42). This could be compared to the idea of the magic in *The Tempest*. The islands in both stories are told to be magical and have magical elements present in them. It can be assumed that Ballard got the idea and inspiration from *The Tempest* however this idea is not explicitly stated. Some wonder where William Shakespeare even got his original inspiration for *The Tempest*.

“ A number of critics have commented on the conceptions of magic evinced in Shakespeare's works and in those of his fellow playwrights, and it has more than once been suggested that in writing *The Tempest* Shakespeare might have been in some measure influenced by Jonson as well as by Marlowe”(Lucking, 297). According to Lucking, since Shakespeare's piece was one of the last magic pieces and indeed the most magical writing that he had done that he must have been influenced by earlier writers that used the technique that came before him.

However, Brian Pearce in another article suggested that inspiration could have been discovered elsewhere. He insinuates that it could be attributed to African culture or customs in some way. This article wanted to” explore the relationship between Prospero's magic, based in a tradition of European alchemical thought, and the magic of African tradition. Hence, Prospero was clothed in a way that resembled an inyanga and his magic staff was a kind of whip, modeled on the authentic item. There are several different assumptions that are in the air as to where the ideals and allusions in *The Tempest* came from.

But who is to be the true source. Since it is not realistically possible to go back to the original source, all we can do is speculate and assume to our best ability. Pearce's article also gives insight on how other versions can be interpreted differently. In the Pearce article, a stage version of *The Tempest* was reenacted. It walked us through a large portion of the casting a production process. It was then explained how difficult it was to cast some characters and how it took away from the way that they were suppose to be portrayed.

Gender and race were also a huge part of this production. The director was not sure how to properly cast the actors and actresses. “ The theme of colonialism was drawn into relief by the casting, by a deliberate attempt to invert stereotypical views, by having the colonial figure in the play, Prospero, played by a black actor, and the colonized figure, Caliban, played by a white actor”(Pearce, 44). These decisions were important because of the time period in which it was created, which was not accepting of people of African decent.

Something as simple as what race Caliban was changes the whole idea of the play. It makes it more realistic that Caliban is seen and treated as a servant or better yet a slave for that matter. This is how Africans were treated and dealt with during Shakespearean times. “ In directing The Tempest, I quickly found that the major challenge facing the director is the one of " manifesting the invisible", of dealing with those moments in the text in which characters (and the audience) are subject to illusions of various kinds”(Pearce, 41).

Many of the illusions are ruined that are trying to be presented, simply because they can not be acted out through a staged version. For instance, Ariel and Prospero are sometimes suppose to be disguised to the other characters in the play, while this is not the case because they are forced to be on stage for the scene to actually make sense. The whole idea of magic is not used to its full potential because of the circumstances. It is nearly impossible to create illusions and spirits and other mystical elements when its reality and not written dialogue.