

Imaginative journeys in 'the tempest'



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Imaginative Journeys in The Tempest by William Shakespeare

The Tempest by William Shakespeare develops the notions of power, control, authority and moral order through the representation of imaginative journeys. Responders must suspend their disbeliefs in order to proceed on this speculative journey. An imaginative journey that provokes exploration, challenges our thinking and advances our understanding of ourselves.

In the first scene of the play responders learned from Miranda of Prospero's magical powers and embarked on an imaginative journey to a place of wonder and magic. Ariel and Prospero's great Art and magic is first seen in the opening scenes, when they create a storm; a theatrical coup, in which he seeks vengeance on those who usurped him from his dukedom. He shipwrecks them, placing them on a distinctly sensory journey. It is a dramatic device used by Shakespeare to illustrate Prospero's deceptive nature and evil intent as well as his powers of manipulation and perceived ability to control the events around him. Prospero's magic books and cape are a symbol of his obsession to power, but also a symbol of his dangerous desire to seek revenge. However, the mock banquet scene makes it evident that Prospero only wanted them to repent and acknowledge their wrong doings. His good powers were to work on the audience and the sinner's mind, leading them towards personal virtue. It is also to restore the corrupted society through the use of his authority; " the ordination of civility, the control of appetite, the transformation of nature and the means of Grace."

In contrast to good powers, Antonio and Alonzo are considered villains for their past treachery and bad powers. Prospero was exiles from Milan and Antonio seized his great power through underhanded acquisitions and unnatural means. However, this undesirable exercise of power is viewed as dark because of its disruption to social and moral order. Thus both characters' enactment of powers in order to gain authority was wrong and malevolent. The notion of bad power is also reflected when Sebastian becomes enticed by the power of Antonio's words in convincing him of the plot to kill Alonzo and becoming King of Naples. The power of his persuasive language in causing a bad outcome to social and moral order, it reinforces Antonio's deceitful character.

A parody of stupidity towards power exists within Stephano and Trinculo, as they have such absurd ambitions of being king of the island. However, with the "celestial liquor" they bear and their state of drunkenness, they do go on an imaginative journey thinking they were the rulers. This is also similar to Gonzalo, who is the loyal and optimistic mediator; the thoughtful male who dreams of a utopia where all are equal, harmonious and order exist. The power of the imagination gives them the opportunity to believe they were of a higher power and status, able to control nature.

Lastly, the Ariel's creation of the mock-banquet and his appearance as an avenging harpy, exemplifies Prospero's power and that he is the controller of the island; this also reminding the audience the sorts of power he conjures. Ariel is clearly showing a reflection of God, confronting sinners with their misdeeds and convicting them. Although, he is able to implement such powers, both Ariel and Prospero have no control over their true repentance.

Alonso does show signs of regret and sorrow but Antonio and Sebastian are still ignorant and believe they are right.

Control and authority is another apparent notion that is evident with the powers Prospero attains. Prospero's power is not as justly attained as he keeps Ariel in unwilling bondage, like Sycorax did. Ariel is under Prospero's absolute rule and he has full authority over him. He must beg for liberty and freedom, but it doesn't succeed as Prospero continuously repeats Ariel's past and embedding it in their mutual history; "Dost thou forget/ From what a torment I did free thee". As a result, Ariel feels indebted to Prospero even though he deserves the freedom. Prospero even threatens him, "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak/ and peg thee in his knotty entrails, till/ Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters." Thus, Prospero uses Ariel's memory/history and induces guilt and fear of physical torment to manipulate and have authority/control over the spirit.

Although, Ariel and Caliban are both subjected to Prospero's servitude, they are different. Ariel calls him "noble master" out of fear and loyalty, Caliban curses Prospero, saying, "All the infections that the sun sucks up/ From bogs, fens, flats, on Prospero fall." Prospero respected and treated him favourably, to gain his loyalty. But once Caliban tried to rape Miranda, Prospero took tyrannical methods of punishment; threatened his authority on the island and imprisoned him. Even though, condemned to a life of slavery and misery, he is able to disobey his orders and challenge his authority with the history of his life. He is able to attest his own story and curse Prospero to be the tyrannical oppressor like his mother, Sycorax.

Nevertheless, Caliban and Ariel are clearly inferior to Prospero but ironically both their histories are similar to Prospero's. Ariel was captured by Sycorax who then was freed by Prospero, but only to become enslaved again. Caliban was an offspring of Sycorax, and was the rightful ruler of the island. He lost his realm by Prospero, who was also ironically overthrown by Antonio.

Shakespeare has used a system of mirrors to parody the same themes/situation.

Prospero through his powers has Ferdinand and Miranda under his control. Using them as commodities, in order to attain and solidify his position. Ferdinand's servitude to Prospero was like "wooden slavery", but for Miranda's sake he is this "patient log-man." Miranda and Ferdinand believe each other were destined to meet, when in fact Prospero orchestrated their falling in love from the start. Prospero catalyses a rebellion against himself with the purpose of bringing the couple together, and in the end being able to gain his position back as King of Milan.

The conflict between moral order and chaos is an important notion that shows the social hierarchy and civilisation. In the opening scene with the chaos of the storm, it foreshadows upheaval and chaos. It also reinforces the idea of corruption of moral/social order, with which it must be inverted to harmony, peace, restitution and forgiveness.

The shipwreck in Act 1 shows how the Boatswain rejects the social authority order and commands the King and Noblemen, as if of higher power/status. This change of power foreshadows trouble yet it also shows the control he has over the ship. It is a time whereby, social rank does not exist and that

despite their rank they are still subjected to nature. This also brings up the themes of Art versus Nature and the transitions of two different worlds.

Trinculo and Stephano may be constructed as fools but they are still constantly endeavouring to change their fate, wishing to take over the island and initiating actions that will bring this about. But as Caliban sought to retain his individuality and freedom he again falls into the same mistake and reorients himself into this new hierarchy. Stephano and Trinculo seem to grow in power and authority by reducing Caliban to their state of drunkenness. His mock-kingship is a shadow of his former sovereignty on the island, and it proves Prospero's view of him correct; a natural servant. This inversion of moral order seems places Stephano and Trinculo on the top of the social hierarchy, being "king o'th'isle".

Throughout *The Tempest*, notions and themes are presented through Shakespeare's representation of imaginative journeys. It shows the true nature of humanity and Art; the need for control and authority in order to maintain peace and harmony; and the social and political hierarchy.

Ultimately, it is true that Prospero is all-powerful, having the authority to control all events on the island with the purpose of restoration and order.