

Free essay on prosperos utilization of sound and silence in william shakespeares ...

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is considered one of his most artistic plays, offering visions of magic and illusion on an enchanted island far, far away, with a tinge of fairy-tale like quality, resulting in a spectacle no reader stays immune to. By utilizing different sounds, natural or unnatural noises and music, Shakespeare created a haunting, hypnotic atmosphere where nothing is as it seems, where the events unfold in a dream-like haze in an effort to truthfully portray the magical reality of Prospero's enchanted island. He utilizes sound and silence as tools for controlling those around him, such as his magical servant Ariel, his devilish servant Caliban and even Miranda, his own flesh and blood, in this magical place where he is the tyrannical ruler, demanding complete subservience and concordance to his wishes. He does not take no for an answer and readily reverts to silencing his subjects, as well as strong words in order to establish himself as the one and only ruler.

The first of a large sequence of noises the readers experience is the initial storm, which as it is later revealed is not a natural phenomenon, but was created by Ariel, a magical creature, at the request of Prospero, " a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard" (Shakespeare I. i. 1, stage directions). It is symbolic of Prospero's magical powers, with which he endeavors to make his enemies suffer the way he has suffered.

Next scene offers another revelation: the fact that Prospero uses exceptionally meticulous methods to control those around him through his magic. The sailors' cries that they are " All Lost! To prayers! To prayers! All lost!" means little to him, even though he is responsible for their near-deaths (Shakespeare I. i. 52). It appears that throughout the play, it is he who uses

loud noises and unpleasant sounds as a threat to those he is trying to control, like Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano, his servant Ariel, even his own daughter Miranda, over whom he has most power.

In the times of Prospero's doubt as to the loyalty and respectfulness of his magical servant Ariel, Prospero cruelly retells the story of Ariel's entrapment in a tree, how he freed him from his torment and how at the moment, Ariel is at his will. By retelling this story, Prospero exudes his power over Ariel and threatens him with more time in the pine tree, during which Ariel's "groans/ Did make the wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts/ Of ever-angry bears" (Shakespeare I. ii. 289-291). Prospero threatens to take away Ariel's freedom yet again, though Ariel's current liberty is rather questionable, seeing he is a mere servant in the power of Prospero, and says to Ariel "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,/ And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till/ Thou'st howl'd away twelve winters" (Shakespeare I. ii. 296-298). In utilizing terminology such as howling, groans and murmuring, Shakespeare is exemplifying the pain Ariel was in during the time of his confinement in the tree and it is exactly because this experience was so excruciating and difficult, does Prospero use it to control the magic creature.

In addition to threatening Ariel with another confinement, Prospero demands his subjects to be not only loyal and obedient, but silent as well, not wishing to hear a murmur out of him, reinforcing his portrayal as a tyrant who punishes anyone who opposes him, tolerating nothing but utter obedience and concordance to his wishes. He controls those around him through reminiscing about stories, adorned with his highly objective view and numerous sounds, strengthening the image he is trying to convey. This way,

he proves his power not only physically, through a persuasive display of magic at the first sign of disobedience and opportunity to have revenge, but also psychologically. By ordering those he controls to be silent or voiced at his own request, he exemplifies utter control over them.

This is also the case with his daughter Miranda, whose obedience to him is implied in their utterly patriarchal relationship. He stipulates her attention: "Open thine ear" and "Dost thou hear?" (Shakespeare I. ii. 37-106). Her reply is hopelessly acquiescent: "Your tale, sir, would cure deafness"

(Shakespeare I. ii. 106). This implies how tyrannically Prospero demands audience for his stories and actions; an audience not merely to see and listen, but revere him and praise his name in awe. He wants them to be spectators of his magic, to be "No tongue! All eyes!" (Shakespeare IV. i. 125). He claims no sound from them, but mute praise and effervescent worship, and in this regard, he seems to be a symbol of a colonizer who wants to receive gratitude and reward for all he has done to help his subjects.

Throughout the play, Prospero continues to use the imagery of different, potent noises when explaining his actions and seems to focus solely on sounds which best exemplify his need to be the sole power holder on his enchanted island: "to the dread-rattling thunder/ Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak/ With his own bolt: the strong-based premonitory/ Have I made shake" (Shakespeare V. i. 44-47). He uses grand words, such as "bolt," reminiscent of a lightning bolt, which was Zeus' weapon, the overlord god in Greek mythology, and thunder, which were indicators of Zeus' power and dissatisfaction, having deadly strength and accuracy. He presents

himself as an almost god-like entity, whose own sense of justice, he “ freed” Ariel and in a certain way, enslaved Caliban, the original owner of the island who now refuses to be a slave to him, redeems him from any act of selfishness. He uses his magic solely to his own, egotistical purposes and it appears that Shakespeare offers his readers Prospero as a hero, despite the fact that Prospero lies, manipulates, curses and uses his magic to egocentric purposes.

Later on in the play, Caliban presents his own speech on the sounds and noises surrounding him on the island, and this speech highly contrasts that of Prospero: “ Be not afeared. The isle is full of noises,/ Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not./ Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments/ Will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices/That, if I then had waked after long sleep./ Will make me sleep again” (Shakespeare III. ii. 137-42). According to Prospero, Caliban is a “ devil, a born devil, on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick” (Shakespeare IV. i. 188-189). He is always portrayed as brutish and wild, and that no amount of human care can help him overcome his devilish side. Despite this fact, Caliban gives a very eloquent speech about the noises that surround him on the island, proving the fact that he is not a mere monster, who has no emotions. He portrays an unusual sensitivity to the world around him, he senses its beauty and furthermore, appreciates it, unlike Prospero, who sees the island only as a tool to put his plans into action.

The Tempest offers an astonishing textual and symbolic complexity, despite the obvious simplicity of its plot, where sounds convey ideas and symbolism, and enforce the ethereal atmosphere of this magical island, where its

protagonist bends the notions of sound and silence to his will, using them as tools to control those around him into doing his bidding.

References:

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.
Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996.