

# The role of the supernatural in the tempest

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Throughout the entire play, magic is used to make a variety of things happen. Magic is the heart of "The Tempest" and controls things in the play.

Shakespeare uses magic to create Prospero who seems a divine character. He is the main character and Shakespeare gives him power to interfere in things around him. Shakespeare wanted a happy ending and in order for this to happen the characters and events must be manipulated through magic.

Prospero was the most powerful character due to magic and he led the relationship of Miranda and Ferdinand. Shakespearean use of magic was felt throughout the island, but also throughout "The Tempest".

The supernatural aspects of "The Tempest" are very different from some of his other plays that involve magic like "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with the fairies, and "Macbeth" with the weird sisters and witches. The magic in "The Tempest" is more natural, not evil, and less whimsical. Because the magic is so much more natural, it follows the laws of nature in its entirety. Prospero's magic is white in nature and restricted by the nature of the island itself and the people who live there. "The Tempest" is not about dark evil magic, but instead a natural supernaturalism analyzed through allegory.

It has been agreed by many that Shakespeare was taking a big risk with writing "The Tempest". It was well known at the time that King James I loathed any type of witchcraft or magic. He despised it so badly that there were actually laws made to punish people who might even be thought to be into the supernatural. "Hatred of witchcraft became an obsession with James and those who mentioned magic in their writing treated it as unmitigated evil. \_The Tempest\_ was the exception, for in it we see that there can be good as well as bad magic" (Evans, 115). John S.

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Mbabane has a different take on magic during that same time period. Mbabane said that magic was actually a symbol for the way of people thought of and wrote about human nature. People were discovering during this time that they had their own power over their environment and magic was a symbol of that belief. " Those who explored " natural magic" often asserted that the quest for truth should not be limited by traditional religious, political or intellectual authorities" (Mbabane, 3). However, this is not completely the case in " The Tempest".

The magic is not restricted by religious or political authority, but it is restricted by the motives and desires of the same. While it cannot be claimed for sure to know what Shakespearean intentions were with regard to the magic in " The Tempest", magic in general during that time period had the attraction of the forbidden and unknown. Because it was a play, it had much more exposure to more people and great drama (Mbabane, 6). Throughout Europe there was a widespread belief in demons, witches and spirits during that time period and Shakespeare capitalized on this Monsoon, 7).

He seems to be using the magic to make people think about the idea that there may be spirits, who may be good or bad and for reasons no one knows, like to join in the daily lives of people. Characters like Ariel and Caliban are examples of this, who some believe represent air and earth. These characters have absolutely no reason to do what Prospero wants, but they appear to have to because Prospero somehow has power over the elements of

the island. Prosper was definitely the character most powerful in "The Tempest", mostly due to his magical ability.

When Prosper was Duke he was pretty absent and that allowed his brother to take him over. Having learned from this, he is able to manipulate characters around him, mostly through Ariel. It was not Prosper who broke the boat or put people to sleep, it was Ariel. The cloak, staff, and book are what gave Prosper his magic. Prosper is a somewhat sympathetic character because his brother wronged him, but then the way he throws his power around and lords over the other characters makes him unlikable. He comes off as self-important and pretentious.

No matter how beneficial his magic could be the way he uses it makes it hard to be sympathetic to his plight. The way he punishes Clinical is vindictive. He is unpleasant with Ferdinand and his daughter. Using his magical powers to make his daughter fall in love with a man she has never seen is deplorable. The character of Prosper was thrown right away into a very strange situation immediately on arriving to the island. Clinical, on the one side, is an element of earth and all that is savage about mankind. Ariel, on the other hand, is an element of air and all that is spiritual about mankind.

Prosper appears to be caught in the middle between the two. Neither element can understand each other's perspective and Prosper appears to be the go-between. Prosper could pick only side, but because he understands that the two would be better working together instead of against each other, he is the one who rises as the leader of both. Clinical, who represents the

savage aspects of man, cannot comprehend the niceties of society no matter how much Prosper attempts to rehabilitate him. Clinical is loaded with original sin and was supposedly the offspring of a witch and Satan.

It is this Tamil tree which also makes Clinical supernatural. These things are why Prosper rejects him at first. Prosper does not like being reminded of his baser side, that all humans have, and that is why he pursues the goodness of Ariel instead. Prosper appreciates the lack of limitations that Ariel has, being purely spiritual and supernatural, therefore, does not have to deal with human emotions or bodily functions (Cornfield 32). When discussing magic, the topic of good and evil comes into play as well. There was the witch, Accords, whose specialty was black magic that caused, " mischief manifold and sorceries terrible" (1. : 265). Prosper uses the mention of Accords to remind Ariel that Prosper was the one who saved him from what Accords did to him. By ringing this up, Prosper is also putting a point to the fact that his own magic must be good since he went against Accords. It does seem that Prosperous magic is the good kind. Evidence of Prosperous white magic is shown throughout the play. Sometimes he does bad things, he does not appear to them malevolently. He brings on The Tempest, not because he wants to kill them, but because he wants to entice them.

He does not really want them hurt and so he makes sure that does not happen, " But are they, Ariel, safe? " (1. 2: 217). His goal during the play is reform his enemies, but not force them to submit. The magic in the play is creative magic, not malicious magic, and not dark magic. Prosper is never malicious with his magic and uses it for good. When he puts Miranda to sleep

his intentions seem unclear. It may seem a little impish, but he seems to be wanting to protect her from his enemies who might hurt her. He tells her that whatever he has done with regards to the storm, he has done for her benefit.

His goal is to rectify the bad things done to him by the people on board the ship and that is why he brings them before him in order to get justice. He wants to give Miranda a real life somewhere else, instead of the island. It has been said that Prospero shows nothing of "secret, black, and midnight art; here there are no squeaking ghosts, no foul witches, no Satanic revels or fairy intrigues; all Prosperous works are performed in the full light of the sun, with the harmonious cooperation of the forces of nature, and they are the works not of devils and fays but of a benevolent philosopher, a man" (Bushnell, 689).

It would have been even more risky for Shakespeare if he had written a play that had Prospero fully embracing crazy black magic and he also does not even attempt to write about magical spells or incantations. Prospero, therefore, is not interested in the kind of magic that requires spells and casting. That kind of blacker magic is something that Accords deals in. This again shows Prosperous magic is more of a natural kind, in asking the spirits to follow his directions.

Prospero is simply a human man who happens to have a rare power that "in its sources, its methods, its qualities, and its effects, depends primarily on the observance rather than the violation of the laws of nature" (Bushnell, 690). It is not to be asked though why Prospero did not use his magic to get back to Milan. The best answer is that Prosperous magic is tied to the island;

can only happen there. The magic belongs to the island and nature not in Milan. It also seems likely that Prosperous magic would not even work in Milan, where there is less nature and more industrial, not pure nature like on the island.

It seems obvious that Prosper knows all this and also that the magic had a purpose of teaching his enemies a lesson and it is no longer needed. This is why he disavows his magic at the end of the play. It could also be that Prosper sees the misuse of his powers for personal gain. Also his magic is not the appropriate thing to use to teach people because of its supernaturalism. His magic may only be appropriate for supernatural beings. The island and its inhabitants are wild, not a civilized place like Milan. Shakespeare also shows the limitations of Prosperous magic when he is reminded about people trying to kill him.

It distracts Prosper and makes his magic fail. Shakespeare adds this to show Prosperous humanity and human limitations. Prosper has to choose between magic and his Dukedom. He knows he cannot be a magician and a Duke because the magic belongs to the island and the elements. Prosper can only control Ariel and Caliban because they have aspects of elements in them and Prosper has control over the elements because of his staff and books. His staff is made from wood and minerals and paper from wood which comes from the earth. He disposes of them to return them to the elements from which they came.

Ariel plays a large role in helping Prosper understand that he is only human and has to embrace it. Ariel appeals to Prosperous human emotions. Ariel

discusses the sorry state of Prosperous enemies and admits that if he could have emotion, he would feel sorry for them. Prosper is surprised to find out that this being of pure spirit would want to possess emotions. He shows his surprise by stating, "Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling of their afflictions, and shall not myself, one of their kind, that relish all as sharply passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art? His words make Ariel unhappy, perhaps because he is Prosperous slave or the fact he lacks human emotions. But, mainly, it has to do with Ariel wanting to be free and Prosper wants that also. His magic has enslaved Ariel and himself. By renouncing the magic, Ariel goes free and Prosper is allowed to return home and make things right. Also, Prosper recognizes Clinical which in turn makes him recognize his own humanity and limits. Prosper utters one important phrase about this "this thing of darkness I acknowledge mine" (l. 278 - 279). Prosper is recognizing his own savage side.

Prosper has is forced to concede he is not a perfect human being and that perfection is not possible (Cornfield). Prosperous humanness is why his magic fails. It is not the magic being rough, but instead the magician himself. Prosperous "rough magic" is a touchy subject. As stated previously, Prosperous renunciation of his magic is due to several reasons: the magic is on for the island, magic is not made for human needs, and it made him forget his humanness. This brings up the subject of duality of humanity: "Prosper breaks his staff and drowns I book, that en may rejoin common humanity Witt all its aesthetic atlas.



Prosper teaches us to remember with him that man occupies an uneasy middle ground" (Forcer, 48). Prosper must tread carefully between evil and good, savage and divine, Clinical, and Ariel and Prosper and humanity has to find a way to make hem come together. A lot of " The Tempest" is a big grand debate over whether humans are savage or divine, Clinical or Ariel. The answer seems to be both and that humanity must discipline itself to not be over run by one or the other. One hugely symbolic part of the play is the masque of Iris, Ceres, and Junco.

It shows that the heavenly power enhances creativity and holds nature were it should be. Symbolically, heaven and earth coming together shows that the savage and divine can also come together harmoniously (Mbabane 186). Shakespeare was not writing about whether magic is real or not, but instead he was eying that the natural and supernatural aspects must work together. " There are two reasons for combining naturalism and supernaturalism: not only to make the miraculous seem commonplace, but also to make the commonplace seem miraculous" (Bushnell, 684).

By taking apart these two sides of the world, and of mankind, the audience can see how these two have to work together. The idea of magic in that time period was a power that mimicked the power of God. Since humans cannot by completely magical, they can never be up to God's level. Prosper attaches himself to Ariel because he feels like he is closer to Riel's magical Puritanism. The claim has been made that " The Tempest" has no religious overtones, but that claim is unfounded. Themes and ideas of a religious nature are flagrant and crystal clear throughout the play.

Just the fact that magic is involved in any way at all was plenty of excuse for severe punishment under the throne of King James I (Evans, 1 15). The most spiritual character of the play, Ariel, has a name that comes directly from the Christian Bible. The name Ariel means " the lion of God" and is used several times in the first seven verses of Isaiah 29. Another word used in the play several times is grace", most importantly when Clinical uses it in saying he will seek for grace on line 299 of act five scene one. The fact that Clinical is searching it out is hopeful to him.

Also, Clinical was given the gift of a god from his mother. There is even mention of Roman and Greek gods and goddesses. Just these few examples show that " The Tempest" is most definitely not free of religion. There are numerous supernatural aspects of " The Tempest". From the island inhabitants, to Prosper, the religious symbolism, the supernatural is depicted in almost every form that is possible. The idea that both sides of mankind must work in tandem comes across very clearly through use of supernatural elements and exploration of human nature.