

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SHAKESPEAR'S "THE TEMPEST"

آفاق جديدة على وليم شكسبير العاصفة

Abdul Jalil Fadel Jameel

Abstract

This paper is mainly concerned with the study of the moral aspects that prompts William Shakespeare to attempt a romance in which he has embedded the epitome of his thought, experience, and philosophy concerning certain significant aspects of human life whose absence or negligence may threaten human existence, peace, and stability. From the beginning of history man realizes the importance of prosperity on the many and various levels that touch and address his needs and desires—natural, material, and spiritual. *The Tempest*, due to the dramatist's awareness of the aforementioned values, reflects the dramatist's duty as to projecting and unfolding these important aspects, reconciliation and forgiveness, that promote prosperity which is the most significant factor that is to preserve human life in this universe.

The Tempest is considered one of William Shakespeare's successful plays. This is an attempt to analyze in details the background of the play with a view to relating it to the times during which it was written and to the main motives that prompted Shakespeare to write it. It has been pointed out that the play was written as a masque whose main aim was to present in an honourable way the concept of marriage in a celebration to a refined society. *The Tempest* is a short play written for a court performance to be acted before King James II on Hollowness night, 1st November 1611 and it was presented once more in the late 1612 or the early 1613, in connection of the marriage of Princess Elizabeth with the Prince Palatine Elector. The significance of the performance of this play in particular on such an occasion as the marriage lies in the fact that that marriage is symbolic of the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda, two major characters in the play, which is regarded as a sound and very important social institution which does not only contribute to the construction of society, but also results in all signs of prosperity and happiness.

Before going deep into the moral implications contained in the play it must be noted that a brief account of the play will be helpful for the comprehensive understanding of the play: Duke of Milan, Prospero, has trusted his brother Antonio to complete his duties as a ruler because he appears to be so occupied in his profound studies. But Antonio then makes an alliance with the King of Naples, Alonso, in an attempt to remove Prospero from his position of authority and banish him to an uninhabited island in the Mediterranean. Thus, Prospero and his daughter Miranda, his only child who was three years old at that time, are dismissed. It happens that the island where Prospero and his daughter begin to live is held by a witch called Cycorax and her son Caliban, a monster creature who was begotten by the devil. On the island, there is the god of the air that is called Ariel who has been imprisoned by the witch in a tree and who is set by Prospero after the death of the witch Sycorax. From the start Prospero is shown to be very interested in studying magic. Therefore, he sets Ariel free on the condition that the latter will help him in his study of magic and at the same time

bring about whatever orders he may receive from his master. Besides, he employs Caliban to do some hard service for him.

King Alonso of Naples, his brother Sebastian, and his son Ferdinand happen to be making a journey to Tunis where Alonso's daughter has to be wedded. This event occurs twelve years later after the banishment of Prospero and his daughter, which indicates that Miranda is by now fifteen years old. On their return from Tunis, Prospero, by means of employing magic and the supernatural powers which he gains throughout studying magic, manages to make their ship wrecked on the very island where all the passengers of it are scattered here and there on the island in isolated groups. At the same time, Prospero, with the aid of magic succeeds in making his daughter and Ferdinand meet on the island and love each other. Again, with the aid of Ariel, Prospero makes the two treacherous governors, Alonso, King of Naples and Antonio, Duke of Milan, the two guilty rulers who once harmed and dismissed Prospero from his position, greatly suffer because of their treason. The rest of the play involves quarrels, tricks and plots by all the characters but the principal ones, Prospero, Miranda, and Ferdinand. At the end of the play, all the characters are united together by the power of Prospero who manages to make the guilty characters repent their evil deeds and have the consent of Alonso to marry his son to Miranda.

It is worth mentioning that one of the major themes in the play is the theme of justice, which, contrary to what has been shown in other Shakespeare's tragedies in which justice has been achieved by means of demises, this time is fulfilled by means of reconciliation and forgiveness and not by means of war and revenge as is the case with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear*, four plays that address the Elizabethan thought and emotions as to the concept and tendency of revenge. On the contrary, *The Tempest* addresses the Elizabethans in a new manner, for it displays for the this time subjects matters and themes relevant to ideas other than the idea of revenge and retaliation, which is a way so delicate and so magnificent that results in no more deaths and bloodshed but in prosperity, peace, and propagation:

The Tempest does seem to be Shakespeare's Attempt to delineate perfect (if not ultimate) justice within the terms of his world. After a number of plays suggesting what justice is *not*, he tries to envision what it is. In keeping with his lifelong belief in the organic nature of human forms, he demonstrates the best possible arrangement of values and elements within a society by depicting that same arrangement within one man, the governor of that society.⁷

Shakespeare examines the idea of justice in the world in which he lives. It must be noted that in his revenge tragedies already mentioned he has portrayed "what justice is not"⁸ as indicated in the behaviour of Othello, Macbeth, Shylock, and King Lear. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare finds himself responsible for the moral issue to be displayed in

one of his plays that is very significant to the prosperity of human life and experience: hence the name prospero—a significant dramatic achievement which should by no means be overlooked. Therefore, Shakespeare tries to portray what justice is according to what he himself envisions of human values and aspirations and of his own unique and comprehensive understanding of human nature.

The Tempest moves from hatred to friendship, from intentions of inequity and wrath to intentions of goodness on the part of all the characters in the play. The theme of justice permeates through the entire play to the extent that some critics may consider the notion that Shakespeare aims at presenting a utopian world. According to Marilyn French, Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* is "an attempt to envision a utopia without utopianism."⁹

It is Prospero who tries to create out of his wisdom and experience in both life and mankind justice in a world that is unjust, a world where the law of the jungle prevails. As a wise man having a mind thinking within the line of moral values and just behaviour, Prospero finds it necessary yet profitable to abandon all sorts of revenge. At the same time he has got the power and means to tear up all those who once harmed him and caused him to suffer day and night on the deserted island.

One of the moral principles to be followed by Prospero when applying his power for the good of both himself and those people who surround him is to employ power with the uttermost sovereignty, so that those who feel that their conscience is guilty may try to redeem themselves. Here power is used as a scourge for the sake of correction, and not for the sake of destruction. Some critics may regard Prospero as a sort of deity in this connection:

If the play concerns the creation of justice within an unjust world, prospero must represent deity, and he is variously admired or deprecated as a god who scourges, a celestial stage manager lacking in human sympathy; as a harsh ruler whose severity is a necessity because life is always ending in chaos.

Here is not the kind of justice that has been viewed by Othello as divine justice or by Shylock as fulfilling a savage bond necessitating the bloodshed of an innocent man; they insist on the notion that what they do is supposed to be just at the time that they try persistently to achieve unjust actions. It is pointed out by French that Shylock, Othello, and King Lear have confused justice with power, and that Angelo in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* thinks that justice is merely a power whereby he can fulfil his mean desires; he wars fornication in the name of justice at the time he has seemingly raped Isabela. French proceeds to show that none of these characters already mentioned is just in the real sense of the word in that they just reflect only one part among many of the truth of justice, for it is not just and fair that one calls for justice at the time one is unjust, and as it is shown in French's wording of the idea:

Thus, none of the plays in which those Characters appear is actually about justice, but rather about some element which is confused with it....Indeed, ultimate justice is unimaginable: in a world in which most people are more sinned against than sinning, in a nature that is random, and carries all of us to a death that appears to be an end and a defeat... Yet, if we are to create a semblance Of justice in human affairs, we must attempt to envision such an ideal.¹¹

French adds that justice in its abstract meaning, that is, the kind of justice that is seen when stripped of its relationships with other material values prone to changes across the time and according to the different places in which they assume their presence,

Can only mean an arrangement of values
And elements prevailing to every person
the room each needs or wants in which to
grow and exist, consonant with not
infringing too much on, not violating the
space of others.¹²

Unlike the other characters that figure out in Shakespeare's tragedies, the actual battle for justice in *The Tempest* is one that is fought within the mind of only one character—Prospero—who appears from beginning to end to be quite conscious of how to deal with the set of values which he has gained from his comprehensive understanding of his society's traditions and conventions and from what he himself considers to be valid in human thought and behaviour. Thus, the battle is therefore one that is made among a group of characters: it is a battle that happens to be within "the psyche of one man who contains within himself, in varying degrees of acceptance, all of the qualities of all the poles."

The enchanted island where the action of the play occurs can be seen as the entire world in miniature in which all the characters who have already been cast ashore represent a society that is like any other society characterized by all the features of human life, thinking, aspirations, in other words with all things—abstract and concrete—that are supposed to be human or related in one way or another to humanity.

In Act II, scene ii, Lord Francisco makes it clear that he has seen Ferdinand struggling with the waves and manages to save himself and get to the shore. But King Alonso does not believe in the announcements made by Lord Francisco and the other

members of the royal entourage cast on the enchanted island and considers it a joke. As part of human aspirations, Sebastian who now regards himself as an heir to the throne reflects an aspect of human nature that aspires to have power and sovereignty over mankind. He hides this kind of thinking within his mind and begins to trespass his present position and denounce his brother's agreement to let his daughter Claribel marry an African despite the fact that all the members of the royal court have not shown their consent in this respect, and Claribel herself has not been satisfied with it. Thus Sebastian starts to rebuke his broken-hearted king and holds him responsible for the supposed death of Ferdinand at the time he definitely knows that Alonso is not responsible for it, and at the same time he considers him responsible for the death of all those who have already died during the catastrophe. This is the reason why Gonzalo chides Sebastian for his irresponsible behaviour, for at this time he is supposed to reduce his brother's misery for the calamity facing him from the supposed loss of his only one son, and not rebuke him at all.

Having realized the tension among characters, Gonzalo immediately tries to change the subject matter of his speech and begins to talk about the subject matter dealing with the idea of utopia. He has been reading an essay concerning this topic which is written by Montaigne and which provides him with the rules he is talking about in this regard: "Gonzalo's utopia is closely based on a famous passage by Montaigne, one of the few verbal borrowings from Floria's translation which is generally accepted. As shown in his speech, Gonzalo believes that all the costumes and traditions practised by ordinary leaders should be abandoned and therefore he concludes that if he were a king he would dismiss wealth, poverty, commerce and all signs relevant to urbanized societies and he would leave all things to nature, and he believes that all signs of war should be eliminated. He also believes that all people, men and women, should be set free to do whatsoever they like to do on the condition that they should remain innocent. This new way of thinking held by Gonzalo does not entertain the minds of both Alonso and Sebastian who show their ridicule of his ideas and declare that there is not any sign of government on the island and that the idea that he might be king is inconsistent. Alonso is made tired by this argument and asks Gonzalo to keep quiet. The latter says that he has just tried to entertain others who always laugh at nothing. Gonzalo's way of thinking is quite sound and natural for a man in his situation, for he has got the right and at the same time the opportunity to express himself in the way he does in front of his masters and king. As a matter of fact, Gonzalo's ideas are the result of reading Montaigne's book about utopia, which indicates that Shakespeare is quite aware of the moral, social, and political implications that are contained in it and at the same time it may be a good opportunity for Shakespeare to display such ideas as these in *The Tempest* for the good of human societies that aspire to see that all the excellent moral values prevail for the good of human life and prosperity. For any marriage to occur in actual life implies beforehand the consent of all parties concerned who have already reconciled and settled their wedding affairs and decide to lead the kind of relationship void of all signs of bad behaviour and atrocities. Concerning the sources of *The Tempest*, it has been pointed out by Iyengar that although some critics may think that it is too difficult to find a suitable source for the play, it has been suggested that there is a story telling of a flagship that was wrecked somewhere near the shores of Bermudas.

Only one ship out of eight had been destroyed whose sailors who lost their way at the sea for nine months eventually found their way to Virginia using two boats which they made of cedar wood.

Iyengar gives an elaborate account of William Strachey's letter, "True Repertory of the Wracke" concerning the circumstances that led to the destruction of the ship, mainly the high storm, and at the same time he describes the kind of life that is lived on the island by those who have survived all the dangers facing them. He declares in this regard the following remarks: "Yet it pleased our merciful God, to make even this hideous and hated place, both the place of our saftai, and meanes of our deliverance." Strachey describes the wreck, the nature of the island, and the kind of the indigenous people inhabiting it. Despite the fact that this letter was not published until the year 1625, Iyengar makes it certain that Shakespeare "evidently had access to the 'True Repertory' and perhaps had even an access to meet Strachey."¹⁷ Therefore, it must be discerned that Shakespeare must have his account of the story from these actual happenings, especially the workings of Providence:

Shakespeare must have found in that 'real story' of the colonists cast on the Bermudas the germs of the romance that should convey his final vision of a reformed and redeemed humanity, of nature glorified by art, and of man and nature glorified by art, and of man and nature touched by Grace—in short, of fallen Adam and Eve returning to Paradise, or New Jerusalem, not exactly innocent as in those far-off prelapsarian days, but chastened by experience, enriched by 'art', and armoured by Grace.¹⁸

Shakespeare tries to manipulate many and various sources and ponders and addresses whatsoever ideas and concepts necessary and essential to his dramatic experience concerning *The Tempest*. Muir emphasizes the idea that Shakespeare may possibly rely on a plot found in a lost play or in an undiscovered story, or it may seem that he has invented the plot of the play, and as he puts it in his own words:

It is, of course, possible that a lost or an Undiscovered tale provided Shakespeare with his plot; but it seems more likely that for once he invented the plot, making use of memories of masques, plays, romances, perhaps examples of the *Commedia*, and books of travel; and that these memories coalesced with others from Virgil and Ovid. In Montaigne and the Bible, as well as from his own previous romances, he would find the principle of

the necessity of forgiveness which animates
the whole play.¹⁹

It has been pointed out by Professor Kermode that "many elements are mixed in Ariel, and his strange richness derives from the mixture."²⁰ Muir elaborates the idea that Shakespeare draws on "English folklore, classical mythology, neo-platonism, magical theory,[and] medieval theology."²¹

Then, there appear the quarrelling characters who become angry. In the meantime, Ariel appears and assumes his presence unseen by them, trying to silence them to sleep by his unheard music. They all respond to his Musical sleep except Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian, but after a little while the former surrenders to sleep and the other two promise to remain awake as watchers for the safety of others. At the same time, Antonio grasps the idea of obtaining Milan's independence from Naples, because he thinks it is now for him a very good yet helpful circumstance to achieve what he wants in this regard.

Having in mind the disappearance of both Ferdinand and Claribel—the former is supposedly dead and the latter has already been married to an African of royal blood—Sebastian now considers himself heir to the throne. As a characteristic feature of human nature and human reflections, Antonio begins to think of the idea of making Sebastian involved in Alonso's murder so that he can achieve his aim.

Shakespeare's skilful penetration into the psychology of the human mind and behaviour is best reflected in the inner conflict and thinking of Antonio and Sebastian, each aspires for what each lacks in and each behaves according to his self-interest and human impulses. Thus Sebastian seems not to respond directly to what Antonio tells him about—for the latter has cautiously reminded him of the supposed fact that Sebastian is now heir to the throne.

Interestingly enough, the kind of imagery employed by Shakespeare is supposed to be of certain importance to both theme and structure of the play. For instance, the image of the sea is a recurrent one throughout the entire play. It is described as being a powerful and hostile sea against which Ferdinand, as Francisco announces, desperately struggles against its waves. Thus this natural element is viewed as an inimical factor that may threaten the fate and the existence of man. Wolfgang Clemen realizes that it is throughout the use of images these moral implications addressed in the play are elaborated: "We shall see that this aspect of nature as a hostile force which threatens man's existence is repeatedly emphasized through imagery." Thus Francisco describes how Ferdinand desperately exerts efforts to avoid the dangers of the sea:

I saw him beat the surges under him,
And ride upon their backs; he trod the water,
Whose enmity he flung aside, and breasted
The surge most swol'n that met him, his bold head
'Bove the continuous waves he kept, and oar'd
Himself with his good arms in lusty stroke
To the shore, that o'er his wave-worn basis bow'd,
As stooping to relieve him.²³

(II, i, 115-121)

In the last scene of the play Prospero says the following:

Their understanding
Begins to swell , and the approaching tide
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore
That now lies foul and muddy.

(V, i, 79)

It is worth mentioning that natural phenomena play a great role in the shaping factors and elements that contribute to the evolution of the theme of reconciliation and forgiveness in the final stage of *The Tempest*. Here is a great natural force working on man negatively and positively to direct his actions and fulfils his disappointments or aspirations respectively, whatsoever they may be. Clemen points to the fact that the play consists of particular significant issues. He says: "It is, however, through imagery that we are made to see these deeper significances."

At the beginning of the play, it is Prospero who raises the "sea storm" (I, ii, 175) and after a little while the image of Ariel is viewed to be like a "being who is himself a kind of storm spirit and, though his spirit-like nature, is related to the airy elements."²⁵ Ariel himself is therefore a kind of nature and organic element of the wind and the waves of the sea as it is indicated in the descriptive imagery used to modify both the sea and Ariel at the same time.

From the start, it is noted that even nature and natural elements are readily to respond to the powers of good represented by Prospero in order to push the action of the play towards that refined state of human relationships—forgiveness and reconciliation:

Jove's lighnings, the precursors
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and the cracks
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,
Yea, his dread tident shake.

(I. ii. 201)

Ariel's activity concerning the storm that comes from high places suggests his god-like function in this natural phenomenon that has been intentionally raised according to the orders of Prospero. Thus, Clemen gives a valid analysis of the notion that Ariel is a god-like character as inferred from the kind of imagery employed in his speeches, and as Clemen puts it in the following: "Ariel's experience and vision of the storm is from above, from the regions of the sky, and his reference to Jupiter and Neptune suggests his own god-like role in the storm"

Shakespeare does not only create that refined atmosphere represented by the elements of nature and epitomized into the spirit of Ariel, but he also creates an earthly

atmosphere epitomized by the embodiment of Caliban. At the beginning of his appearance he is called "thou earth," as contrasted with Ariel that is an "airy spirit," and thus Caliban is "at home in a lower animal world. His imagination is ruled by the primitive needs of life, and this is expressed in his language."²⁸ Caliban's physical and earthly appearance can best be shown in his remarks said to Prospero when Act II is about to finish:

I prithee, let me bring thee where crabs grow;
And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts;
Show thee a jay's nest and instruct thee how
To snare the nimble marmoset; I'll bring thee
To clustering filberts and sometimes I'll get thee
Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with me?
(II. ii. 171)

It has been made clear that Shakespeare manages, by means of describing the natural objects and phenomenon, to develop the theme of nature's aggressiveness against those who prove themselves to be iniquitous against others. Clemen puts it in his own words :

As a last example of how Shakespeare evokes the scenery of the island, and, at the same time, further develops the theme of nature's hostility against traitorous mankind, we may quote Ariel's description of how he led astray Caliban and his companions: "So I charm'd their ears/ that calf-like they my lowing follow'd through (IV. i. 178)."²⁹

With the aid of his magical experience and the helpful circumstances, say his employing of the physical power of Caliban and the supernatural power of Ariel, the castaway duke, as it seems, has been granted a marvelous chance to adjust himself to the new life he is going to live on the enchanted island and at the same time to have full grasp of the situation of his old enemies as they become, like him, castaways, but without the supernatural power which he possesses. Of course, he has been in the position to have full control over them and direct the action of the play in the direction which leads to what he considers good for all the characters involved, enemies and otherwise. Prospero's final decision as to his intention of making reconciliation among all the other characters including himself and of forgiving all those who once bitterly harmed him is considered the sound epitome of his lifelong experience in life, profound prudence, and above all successful judgment on all levels, political, economical, social—being a step forward in the direction of prosperity and all signs of life.

Notes

1. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Shakespeare: His World and Art* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986), p. 597.

7. Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Palantine Books, 1983), p. 320.

12. Ibid., p. 320.

13. Ibid., 319.

Ibid., 320.

Ibid.

Ibid., 319-320.

Ibid., 320.

Ibid.

14. Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen and co. Ltd., 1977), p. 281.

15. Iyengar, p. 597-598.

16. William Strachey, in Iyengar, p. 598.

17. Iyengar, p. 598.

18. Ibid.

19. Muir, p. 283.

20. Frank Kermode, in Muir, p. 281.

21. Muir, p. 281.

22. Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1977), p.185.

23. All the textual quotations of Shakespeare's plays are taken from G. B. Harrison, ed., *Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968), and are parenthetically indicated in the body of this thesis by Act, Scene, and line numbers.

24. Clemen, 182.

25. Ibid., 184.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 187.

Ibid., 191.

Bibliography

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Shakespeare: His World and Art* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1986).

Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Palantine Books, 1983).

Kenneth Muir, *The Sources of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Methuen and co. Ltd., 1977).

Wolfgang Clemen, *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1977).

G. B. Harrison, ed., *Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968)

الخلاصة

تفتقر أعمال شكسبير دائما بالدين لما تحتويه من مضامين أخلاقية مفصلة والتي دعا إليها الكاتب أن اهتمام شكسبير بالمضامين الأخلاقية وعرضه للموضوع بكل جوانبه وللشخصيات أيضا . لم يكن ابدا امرا كيفيا أو اعتباطيا فقد وجدت هذه المضامين جذورها في إدراك الكاتب لمسؤوليته الأخلاقية بكل تفاصيلها باعتباره كاتباً مسرحياً يتقصى لكل الوسائل الضرورية لخير المجتمع الأمر الذي حدا بشكسبير ان يعمل جاهدا للاكتشاف وفي ذات الوقت عرض تلك الحلول الناجحة للمشاكل والأزمات الإنسانية الخطيرة... وأن الكاتب عمل جاهدا لعرض بعض المواقف الإنسانية التي يراها ملائمة لتنظيم العلاقة بين الإنسان والإنسان الآخر من جهة والعلاقة بين الإنسان والمجتمع من جهة أخرى.