



ENGLISH LITERATURE PROJECT

CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF PROSPERO FROM
THE PLAY, THE TEMPEST.

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2 INTRODUCTION

Prospero is the main protagonist of Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*. He is probably the most unusual of Shakespeare's central characters in that. However, he is a human being with human qualities, including human faults, he has magical powers: he can control the weather, the conditions on the island on which he lives, and also the actions and movements of people and the spirits who also live on the island.

Despite his shortcomings as a man, however, Prospero is central to *The Tempest*'s narrative. Prospero generates the plot of the play almost single-handedly, as his various schemes, spells, and manipulations all work as part of his grand design to achieve the play's happy ending. Watching Prospero work through *The Tempest* is like watching a dramatist create a play, building a story from a material at hand and developing his plot so that the resolution brings the world into line with his idea of goodness and justice. He is the cause of bringing the play to a cheerful ending.

3 PROSPERO, THE PROTAGONIST OF THE PLAY

Prospero is the main protagonist. Prospero sets the events of the play in motion by conjuring the terrible tempest that shipwrecks his enemies. The violence of the tempest indicates the magnitude of Prospero's rage. After setting things in motion with the tempest, Prospero goes on to orchestrate all of the characters' movements throughout the rest of the play. He starts by instructing his servant Ariel to place the castaways on three different parts of the island. Also, with Ariel's help, Prospero disorients the different groups of men, making them feel lost and helpless. He keeps up his manipulations of the island's new inhabitants until the final act of the play when he leads them all to the same place for the final scene of confrontation and reconciliation. The control he exerts over all other characters makes Prospero something even more than the play's protagonist; he is also a master manipulator, much like a puppeteer.

Prospero's desire for revenge drives his manipulation of others. He manipulates the stranded characters in numerous ways. In separating the castaways, Prospero makes each group believe the others have perished. This mistaken belief makes several plot points possible. Ferdinand, who believes he alone survived, is ready to pledge himself to Prospero and fall in love with Miranda. Alonso, who believes his son has died, loses all hope, which inspires Antonio and Sebastian to plot his assassination. Prospero also subtly manipulates Miranda into falling in love with Ferdinand as a part of his grand plan to resolve his conflict with Alonso. He hopes the union of their children will help heal the wound between them. What Prospero wants more than anything else is reconciliation.

Furthermore, reconciliation is precisely what he gets in the final act. With peaceful relations restored with Alonso and his men, Prospero gives up on magic and prepares for his return to power in Milan. The play, which begins with a violent tempest and concludes with calm celebration, parallels the trajectory of Prospero's character arc. Whereas he starts off seething with rage and vengefulness, he eventually calms down and sets the stage for emotional appeasement.

3.1 PROSPERO, THE DUKE OF MILAN

Prospero is the rightful duke of Milan. Twelve years earlier, he found refuge on this island after his younger brother, Antonio, seized Prospero's title and property. Prospero functions as a god on the island, manipulating everyone within his reach. He is helpless against his enemies until they appear on a ship nearby; but when they are close enough, he can use his magic to create a storm and bring them under his control.

Prospero's magic is the white magic of nature, not the black magic of evil men. This former duke of Milan is a complex personality. Although he refuses to free Ariel and enslaves Caliban, Prospero is really a beneficent ruler, never intending to injure even his enemies. Early in the play, Prospero appears callous and cruel, especially in his treatment of Ariel and Caliban. He is also autocratic in his treatment of Ferdinand, but

Prospero realizes that Ferdinand and Miranda will value one another more if there are a few impediments to their courtship.

Prospero's humanity is evident in his treatment of Antonio, whom he calls traitor but whom he declines to treat as a traitor. Another example of Prospero's goodness is when he stops Alonso from apologizing to Miranda, telling him that there is no need for more amends. By the play's conclusion, it is clear that Prospero is just and fair, in addition to intelligent.

3.2 PROSPERO, MIRANDA'S FATHER

Prospero assures his daughter, Miranda, that "I have done nothing but in care of thee". On the one hand, this is true. On the other hand, Prospero seems never to do anything without an ulterior motive, even those things that he does out of love for Miranda.

Prospero has controlled Miranda's education and intellectual development and shielded her from care and worry. Prospero can put Miranda to sleep when he needs to conduct business with Ariel, then wake her at will when his business is concluded.

Prospero's magic powers ensure that there is order on the island, which provided a safe and stable living environment for Miranda for the past twelve years, and benefit Prospero, the spirit Ariel, and the grotesque Caliban as well.

Prospero uses magic to control Caliban, who is a threat to Miranda and who has already tried to molest her. For that offence, Prospero confines Caliban to a small, rocky part of the island.

3.3 PROSPERO, A MAGICIAN

Throughout the play, Prospero refers to his magic as 'art', developing a sustained parallel between theatre and magic. The tempest opens with one of Shakespeare's most realistic location scenes: 'A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning heard. Enter a Ship-Master and a Boatswain'. We are on the swaying deck of a stricken ship, amid the panicked sailors and their bewildered aristocratic passengers. We think we are in the middle of a 'real' storm. However, the next scene reveals that this was a theatrical illusion, made up by Prospero from the island to bring his enemies into his power. The seafarers were never in danger: the events looked believable. However, they were created out of a few props and a believable script. As in a play, events happen, controlled by an unseen dramatist, to further a yet-unknown plot. This is at once theatre and magic: a spectacle by actors with a believably salty script, and a demonstration of Prospero's magic 'art' in which 'there is no harm done'.

We have been as much the victims of Prospero's magic as the pinched, and cramped Caliban or the bereft King Alonso made to believe his son is drowned. The difference is that theatre patrons are willingly deceived, participating in their own delusions.

3.4 PROSPERO, A POLITICAL FIGURE

Prospero is a political figure, he lost his kingdom due to his love for books, and he is bent on getting his kingdom back using magic he learned from those books. He does it by putting his enemies at his mercy, then plays the good guy by helping and forgiving them. He is attacking them through their sense of guilt and making them willingly give back what they took away from him. The marriage between Miranda and Ferdinand is just a tool for him to build a relationship with the king of Naples, therefore strengthening his rule in Milan. This interpretation would turn the story from a fairy tale to a political story, where the character of Prospero is not acting according to his goodwill but out of the deep calculation.

In the last two acts, we come to embrace Prospero as a more likeable and sympathetic character. His love for Miranda, ability to forgive his enemies, and the real happy ending he creates all coalesce to mitigate the undesirable actions he undertook along the way. Though Prospero can sometimes act like an autocrat, he ultimately enables the audience to share his understanding of the world.

4 CONCLUSION

Despite Prospero's shortcomings as a man, he is pivotal to the narrative of "The Tempest." Prospero almost single-handedly drives the play's plot forward with spells, schemes, and manipulations which all work in tandem as part of his grand plan to achieve the play's ending.

Because of this and the "playwright" theme of the epilogue, many critics and readers alike interpret Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare himself.

Prospero's final speech, in which he likens himself to a playwright by asking the audience for applause, strengthens this reading of the play and makes the play's final scene function as a moving celebration of creativity, humanity, and art.

Overall, Prospero is quite a foreboding character—he deals out punishments, treats his servants with contempt, and his morality and fairness are questionable. Both Ariel and Caliban want to be free of their master, which suggests he is unpleasant to work for.