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**FROM SWORD TO FACELESS GAZE: THE STUDY OF THE  
DYNAMICS OF POWER IN  
*THE TEMPEST***



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**RESEARCH PAPER**

The *Tempest* by Shakespeare is usually approached as a political text rather than simply a literary one, and the issue of power and control is one of the central concepts in almost all political readings of this text. Analyzing the various forms of the dynamics of power in this drama, one can claim that Shakespeare, through demonstrating the characters' tendency to control the actions of the others, illustrates different forms of dominion, from traditional direct exercise of power to the more modern and new form of surveillance, which is the invisible repression. The aim, here, is to surpass two extremes of interpretations usually applied to this text, divided by the question of whether the ways of control shown in this drama are good or evil. These two readings include mainly Humanistic rendering of the issue of power, resulted in an ideal presentation of Prospero as an example of universal human values, and the colonial reading of the drama as the reflection of the dark side of the Renaissance European

confrontation with the uncivilized other. The approach, however, taken here towards *The Tempest*, does not intend to answer the question of goodness or badness of the power politics, but to show Shakespeare's multi-layered outlook towards the issue of power which enlists him both as the illustrator of the traditional system of power and the spokesman for a modern model of domination.

The play has a strange tale. Prospero, the exiled duke of Milan, the present lord of a small island, tosses the ship which carries his usurping brother and the king of Naples and their companions, by a tempest and strands those on board. The play ends with all these enemies of Prospero standing within his power, expecting to be punished by him only to find out at last that they are all forgiven. Power is a term with an extensive range of meanings, which in general describe one character's control over the actions of the other characters. Power has a variety of exhibitions, and Shakespeare presents different kinds of power that men possess and are possessed by, through interwoven relations and conflicts, in *The Tempest*. Characters, in whatever position and status, burn with the desire to authorize others and this desire is, in most cases, fulfilled through the actual exercise of power either through the military (by the sword) or political action.

Through Prospero, we come to learn that Antonio in collaboration with Alonso, the King of Naples, has usurped his brother's throne. Antonio, through further descriptions, is presented as a great manipulator who does not refrain from committing any crime to reach his goal which is a deep desire for power. One can admit that Antonio possesses one thing that Macbeth lacked initially, and that is the determination and opportunistic decisiveness that should accompany the desire. Prospero, being obsessed with his own studies, willingly granted the duties of dukedom to Antonio who knew how to make use of this opportunity and changed it into a tangible form of power necessary for a ruler. This reminds one of the Machiavellian Prince for whom goal justifies the means. Antonio, as Prospero, says of him:

PROSPERO. Having both the key  
Of officer and office, set all hearts i'th' state  
To what tune pleased his ear, that now he was  
The ury which had hid my princely trunk  
And sucked my verdure out on't. (1.2.83-86)

Antonio is indeed a usurper, because

PROSPERO. He being thus lorded  
Not only with my revenue yielded  
But what my power might else exact,

like one

Who having unto truth, by telling of it,

Made such a sinner of his memory

To credit his own lies. (1.2.97-102)

Antonio sends Duke Prospero to exile, child at arm, on the boat to a far island and does whatever “monstrous brutalities” (Wells 70) to seize power. The re-enactment of the inner desire for power is further highlighted by Antonio persuading Sebastian to murder Alonso.

ANTONIO. Will you grant with me

That Ferdinand is drowned?

SEBASTIAN. He’s gone.

ANTONIO. Who’s the next heir of Naples?

SEBASTIAN. Claribel.

ANTONIO. She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells

Ten leagues beyond man’s life; she that from Naples

Can have no note, unless the sun were posted [...]

SEBASTIAN. What stuff is this? How say you?

‘Tis true my brother’s daughter’s Queen of Tunis;

So is she heir of Naples; ‘twix which regions

There is some space.

ANTONIO. A space whose every cubit

Seems to cry out “How shat Claribel

Measure us back to Naples? Keep in Tunis,

And let Sebastian wake!” (2.1.246-61)

This, one might find, is a very striking reminder of *Macbeth* and Duncan’s murder, a sleeping king, out of strong desire for power. Both characters see “a crown / Dropping upon (their) head(s)” through “imagination” (2.1.199), and decide to take action against any obstacles. The point is that normally, the power which is achieved by savage harshness and obvious act of murder or exile “puts the instrument of legal terror directly in the hands of those in power “and consequently creates” the spirit of consent and submission” (Hay 41). There are other examples of power dynamics as such within the drama. Sycorax’s demonic tyranny is a desire for power in itself.

The witch had imprisoned Ariel in a cloven oak tree for twelve years, to be saved by Prospero and begin living under the domination of another power.

PROSPERO. And in her most unmitigable rage  
Into a cloven pine, within which rift  
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years. (1.2. 276-79)

The pitiful despair of a life lived as a servant, not as the one who rules, is obvious in the following lines:

ARIEL. I Prithee,  
Remember I have done thee worthy service,  
Told thee no lies, made no mistaking, served  
Without or grudge or grumblings. Thou did promise  
To bate me a full year. (1.2. 248-51)

But as all the subjects are made to believe that their lives are indebted to their rulers, Ariel submits when Prospero reminds him that

Thou Dost forget  
From what a torment I did free thee? (1.2. 252-53)

And further:

PROSPERO. It was mine art,  
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape  
The pine, and let thee out. (291-93)

The will to power and the authoritarian exercise of it on others does not merely belong to the lords and the magicians. Those who occupy lower positions in the closed system of hierarchy in this island potentially possess the desire to yield power over others as well. If Antonio achieved his present power by exile and encourages Sebastian for the same achievement through murder, Stephano, the drunken butler of the shipwrecked party, expresses his inner desire through the magic of wine. In Act III, Scene ii, Caliban suggests that Stephano kills Prospero, and Stephano very immediately visualizes his own reign:

STEPHANO. Monster, I will kill this man: his daughter  
And I will be king and queen, – save our Grace!  
And Trinculo and thyself shall be viceroys. Dost thou  
Like the plot, Trinculo? (109-12)

Another plot for murder, and the reason, still, is power! Stephano even plans for his future as the ruler of the island by counting on the spirits “that make noises” (140) on the isle through manipulating them to provide music for his kingdom for free:

STEPHANO. This will prove a brave kingdom to me,  
Where I shall have my music for nothing. (148-9)

And even the desire to possess the beautiful Miranda's body after the king, her father, is destroyed can be interpreted as a form of power practice over the other:

Caliban. And that most deeply to consider is  
The beauty of his daughter. He himself  
Calls her a noperiel. I never saw a woman  
But only Sycorax my dam and she,  
But she as far surpasseth Sycorax  
As greatest does least.

STEPHANO. Is it so brave a lass?

CALIBAN. Ay, Lord. She will become thy bed, I warrant,  
And bring thee forth brave brood.

Caliban, intoxicated by his first taste of alcohol Stephano has given him, promises to worship and serve Stephano. It seems that the ruling forces have successfully made a slave from cannibal, who always takes the position of the servant, the one who should be controlled, in different power relationships. He attaches himself to Stephano and Trinculo in a slave-like manner: "I will be thy foot-licker" (4.1. 219) and obviously admits his readiness to serve a new master: "Has a new master: – get a new man" (2.2. 185)

A surprisingly vivid expression of power status is found in the roaring Boatswain who cries out at his royal passengers, "keep your cabins; you do assist the storm" (1.1. 14). The ship carries a group of "great ones", lords and noblemen with the king at their top. However, "emergencies crown their own kings" (Godard 173).

BOATSWAIN. When the sea is. Hence! What cares

These roars for the name of king?

To cabin! Silence! Trouble us not! (16)

The above rhetorical question overthrows the whole stuff ever said on the subject of worldly place and power. Power here does not rely on titles and blood but the natural situation hands one the power to command, and to everybody of any account, obedience. Boatswain directly commands his subjects (the royal group) and proves the notion that whenever one takes the position of power, no matter who he is and from what social class, the actual exercise of vigor and authority is unavoidable.

BOATWAIN.               None that I more love than myself.

You are a councilor: if you can command these  
elements to silence and work the peace of the  
present, we will not hand a rope more; use your  
authority. If you cannot, give thanks you lived  
so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin  
for the mischance of the hour if it is to hap.

Cheerily, good hearers! Out of our, I way I say. (1.1. 21-8)

Even the favorable character of the drama, Gonzalo, envisions an ideal commonwealth in which he is the king and the decision-making figure:

GONZALO. Had I plantation of this isle, my lord, –

ANTONIO. He'd sow it with nettle – seed.

SEBASTIAN. Or docks or mallows.

GONZALO. And were the king on't, what would I do?

SEBASTIAN. 'Scape being drunk for want of wine.

GONZALO. I'd the commonwealth I would by contraries

Execute all things; for no kind of traffic

Would I admit; no name of magistrate;

Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,

And use of service, none... (2.1. 148-57)

Very practically, Gonzalo talks about an opportunity to organize a community by taking the possession of its virgin soil. Gonzalo's vision of his utopian kingship is interrupted by Sebastian and Antonio, but that does not discourage him from dreaming over his probable future monarchy:

GONZALO. All things in common nature should produce

Without sweat or endeavor: treason, felony,

Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,

Would I not have; but nature should bring forth,

Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,

To feed my innocent people. (162-67)

Taking military action, plot, murder, exile and all other forms of exercising forceful, and sometimes physically hurtful, power have such symptoms as “convulsions”, “cramps” or “blisters” which leaves all victims “frantic”, as “[they] devour [their] reason”, and are “jostled

from [their] senses” (3.2. 92-4). However, the drama suggests another possibility of authority, other power structure, which can be interpreted through the mechanisms of modernity and leaves behind the “armed” dominance of the traditional system of direct power and vigorous control. This modern approach can be demonstrated in regard to the major character of the drama, Prospero, the previous duke of Milan and the present king of the island and the designer of the whole plan of the tempest and thus the actions of the drama. According to this outlook, Prospero practices a new form of surveillance on his subjects which justifies a more punitive form of social control which is based, essentially, on the invisibility of the ruler. Theodor Adorno and Marx Horkheimer, in their developing of the notion of the modern man’s alienation under capitalist systems, argued that it was “the power of the system rather than a conscious strategy on the part of the rulers that was responsible for the spiritual impoverishment of modern man” (qtd. in Wells 68). “The power-that-is-knowledge” is what they believed in and Foucault uses it extensively in his *Discipline and Punish*. There, he discusses the state’s abandonment of torture in favor of new technologies for controlling the mind and throwing away the monstrous brutalities of the ancient systems, but claims that these have been replaced by something more sinister: “what was emerging was (...) not so much a new respect for humanity of the condemned (...) as a tendency towards a (...) closer penal mapping of the social body” (Foucault 38).

This is the core of Foucault’s argument which can be applied to Shakespeare’s Prospero and his treatment of the people on the island. In the opening scene of *The Tempest*, there is not only a sinking ship but a dissolving society. Screams and roars dominate the ship and death are threatening the royal group. The situation reminds one of the carnivals, in which the social hierarchy is destroyed and confusion prevails. This stormy experience is then followed by isolation and division as the characters are left scattered on the island. However, this chaos is brought into order by everyone taking his appropriate place in a new kind of social system designed and imposed by Prospero’s hand, so that

PROSPERO.                    The charm dissolves apace;  
And as the morning steals upon the night,  
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses  
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle  
Their clearer vision. (5.1. 65-9)

But how does Prospero fulfill this task of decontamination without any violent punishment? One has to take in mind that *The Tempest* is a comedy and at the end, no one is revenged bloodily. The pattern for power which Prospero has chosen is actually the best justification of

the existing paradox of retribution and order out of confusion and treason, without violence and revenge.

Prospero is the mark for a new era of power and punishment. When the prisoners are released and the magic ends, each takes up his place as “docile bodies” – in Foucault’s terminology – under a new system of subjection, as “they all enter the circle which Prospero had made, and there stand charm’d” (5.1. Stage Direction 57). The model for this disciplinary order is the Panopticon of the Enlightenment which Jeremy Bentham suggested and later on, Foucault took as his core model of discipline. The Panopticon, in Foucault’s account, is “a machine for dissociating seeing from being, because in the principle ring, one is totally seen, without seeing, whilst in the center, one sees everything without being seen” (qtd. in Wilson 154). Prospero controls and moves the whole actions of the drama while remaining totally invisible to them. His invisibility is the final key to the new system of dominance Shakespeare tends to demonstrate here.

PROSPERO.                                 Their understanding  
Begins to swell, and the approaching tide  
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore,  
That now lies foul and muddy. Not one of them  
That yet looks on me or would know me. (80-84)

For Prospero, the actual exercise of power is unnecessary, for from now on, the subjects feel under permanent control and as a result do not commit any mistake, for “he who is subject to visibility, assumes responsibility for his own subjection” (155).

This invisibility of the power center is best visualized through Ariel’s being everywhere, manipulating the characters as he wills, without being seen. Ariel is shown as the agent of Prospero’s purpose. He is Prospero’s instrument in controlling and developing the action. He puts people to sleep, so tempting the murderers, but wakes them just in time (2.1), plays tricks on drunkards (3.2), hears their plot and finally destroys their plan, puts the ship safely in harbor (1.2) and later guides and releases the mariners (5.1). And he does all without being seen. In this model, it does not matter who exercises power because power no more possesses any physical weight, but is manifested as a system of observation: That’s why Prospero can “abjure” the “rough magic” of his theatre of punishment and “bury” “the book” from which has implemented his plan:

PROSPERO.                                 But this rough magic  
I here abjure, and when I have required  
Some heavenly music (which even now I do)



To work mine end upon their senses that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
I'll drown my book. (50-57)

The other point admitted by Foucault is the relation between power and knowledge. His well-known statement that “knowledge is power” means that knowledge is an instrument of power, although the two exist quite independently. Foucault's point is that, at least for the study of human beings, the goals of power and the goals of knowledge cannot be separated: in knowing we control and in controlling we know. Considering the drama, one might come across questions regarding Prospero's books: What is the nature of those books? What makes Prospero so powerful on the island? And can structure of power and knowledge be related here? Prospero arrives on the island when Miranda is three years old. He is an aged man who has to bring up a very young daughter. Maybe the very first signs of Prospero's power can be traced in the task of growing up a girl on his own. The point here is the frequent references to the text to Prospero's books, to show him as a man of letters, classically educated, who has obtained his knowledge from books.

In his long speech to Miranda, Prospero continues explaining to his daughter how his brother was able to wrest away his dukedom when he tells her that his old library was large enough to encompass his interests, so that was where he spent most of his time:

PROSPERO. Me, poor man, my library  
Was dukedom large enough? (1.2. 110)

Prospero explains to Miranda how they would not have survived had it not been for Gonzalo who, in addition to the necessities of life, had provided Prospero with some of his own books, which Prospero vows that he has valued more than his dukedom:

PROSPERO. Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me  
From mine own library with volumes that  
I prize above my dukedom. (166-68)

Prospero's knowledge is frequently associated with power and dukedom. Later on, Caliban admits that “Without them (his books), Hi's but a sot, as I am (Caliban)” and “nor hath not one spirit to command.”(3.2. 95-96). This quote indicates that without his books, Prospero is no different from his servants. If he didn't have his books, he wouldn't be able to keep servants. Caliban plans with Stephano and Trinculo to seize Prospero's books, which means that they want to take his power from his hands. He warns them that in order to have the

power they must first possess Prospero's books and so harshly advise them to "Burn, but his books" (98). Knowledge leads to authority. Authority and influence are yet another form of power because influence implies the power of someone or something to affect others.

Prospero, at the end of the drama, regains his dukedom, not through murder or exile (as Antonio did) but through the continuous observation of the condemned. By giving up the "corporal power", he will make his state more modern; a state ruled by the invisible omniscient, "a faceless gaze" in Foucault's phrase, as he addresses Ariel:

PROSPERO. Be subject to no sight, but thine and mine, invisible  
To every eyeball else. (1.2. 302-3)

Such interpretation justifies Ariel's freedom and his being ultimately vanished into air reasonably: Ariel leaves because there is no more need to him as the surveillance is now undertaken by the subjects themselves. This is best shown in Prospero's epilogue:

PROSPERO. As you from crimes would pardoned be,  
Let your indulgence set me free. (19-20).

Prospero embraces his foes, because the modern king does not feel the necessity to exert any corporal dominance, but out of devising a machine/system of power which controls every movement of the subject unceasingly, he is peaceful in mind that the "project" is taking its course and "invisible repression" is taking the place of "direct sovereignty".

### **Conclusion**

Power is a central concern in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. But what distinguishes this comedy from other works of the same type is the author's suggestion of possibilities of various structures of power within a society. While there are instances of the direct control and military or corporal dominance in the power relation between different characters, Shakespeare pictures a new mode of power – new for his time –, whose action does no more render the actual exercise of power. What matters in this new system is an invisible exercise of surveillance, which would finally result in the total uselessness of both gallows and the throne. On the basis of this analysis, Shakespeare is the speaking mouth of a new world and the organizer of the modern state.

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