

On The Postmodernist Elements in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

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Abstract

Having been discussed for more than four centuries, Shakespeare (1564-1616), believed by many critics to be the most important English dramatist, is still inexhaustible. Through these years and especially in the twentieth century, many different approaches have been applied to his plays. This study is an attempt to have a postmodernist reading of *The Tempest* (1610). Based on the definition and characterization of postmodernism by Ihab Hassan and Brian McHale, and through a careful language analysis, the postmodernist elements in the speeches of characters are detected and discussed. By using postmodernist elements and techniques such as puns, wordplays, paradoxes, and versal prose, the language becomes anarchic, playful, disperse, polymorphous and indeterminate. By finding and analyzing these features in the language of the play it becomes arguable that *The Tempest* is a postmodern comedy.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *The Tempest*; Language; Postmodern; Wordplay.

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Introduction

Up to the recent times, it had been a long-held idea that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's last play. Being so, Shakespeare put all his knowledge, experience, and talent into it, making it one of his richest plays. *The Tempest* is of such significance that it is included in many Shakespeare collections and many anthologies of English and even Western literature.

In *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery* (1951) a chapter is devoted to *The Tempest*. In this chapter W. H. Clemens (1951) discusses the different types of imagery in *The Tempest* and the influence upon the reader's view of the play. He believes the imagery in *The Tempest* serves more than just creating an atmosphere or background or intensifying the theme of the play (Clemens 1951, p. 182). Clemens believes that since *The Tempest* is among the plays where the supernatural has a significant role, therefore the skillful use of imagery here serves as a mediator of these supernatural elements. In this regard he categorizes the three major groups of imagery as the sea imagery, the animal and vegetation imagery, and finally the olfactory imagery. By carefully examining these groups he concludes that they have a huge role in creating the strange vision of the "nature world", making a counterpart to the world of the supernatural in the play (Clemens 1951, p. 194).

In *The Masterpieces of Western Literature* (1966), a chapter is also allocated to *The Tempest*. In this chapter David R. Clark (1966) analyses the significance of Prospero and his

different roles in the play. By recognizing "personal discipline" and "social responsibility" as the conditions of freedom, he studies Prospero's role in obtaining such a freedom for himself as well as other characters (Clark 1966, p. 1).

Interesting studies have been done in recent decades regarding contemporary and postmodern readings of Shakespeare. The originally Polish Jan Kott (1967) in his *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1967) tries to trace modern and postmodern elements in Shakespeare. For example, he deconstructs the long-lasting belief of regarding *The Tempest* as a play of "forgiveness and reconciliation" (p. 238). He also rejects the popular autobiographical reading of the play (p. 240). His book was so influential that some years later a book named *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?* (1989) was published on his view points. The book is in fact a collection of meetings held by scholars on Kott's theories. His ideas received a wide range of responses from the well-known Shakespeare scholar Helen Gardener who called them "outrageous arrogances" to Bertolt Brecht who insisted that Shakespeare should always be regarded a man of his time (Elson 1989, p. 4).

The aim of this article is to have a postmodern reading of *The Tempest*. In other words, this study is going to analyze the play in terms of language techniques and to show that based on these techniques the play can be regarded as a postmodern comedy. The famous critic and writer Ihab Hassan (1982) has defined postmodernism as "a new aesthetic formation" (ctd. in

Malpas 2005, p. 6). In his momentous book *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1982), Hassan has made a table of comparison between modernism and postmodernism. In contrast to modernist features he attributes the following elements to postmodernism: "antiform, play, chance, anarchy, participation, dispersal, text / intertext, misreading, mutant, polymorphous, rhetoric, schizophrenia, the Holy Ghost, and indeterminacy" (Hassan 1982, pp. 267-268). All these features are at the service of decentering the language and making it polysemous. By tracing and analyzing these elements in the language of *The Tempest*, it becomes debatable that it has a playful, decentered, and polysemous diction and therefore can be regarded as a postmodern play.

With a focus on postmodern elements mentioned by Hassan (1982), this study is an attempt to show and analyze these features in *The Tempest*, which results in manifesting that *The Tempest* is a postmodern play. The article is divided into five main sections. The first section deals with the names of characters. In this part a thorough analysis of the names of some of the characters is given. It is shown that through the use of allusive, playful, and polysemous names, Shakespeare has enriched the play with a postmodern language, besides making it intertextual which again is itself a postmodern feature. The second part is allocated to versal prose. Aristotle believed that in a play, high characters must speak high, refined and elevated language, while the low characters should have a low and base diction (Warrington 1963, pp. 12&26). Breaking this rule results in

violating the hierarchy of the play, and thus, making the language anarchic. In this part, examples of versal prose are discussed and their role in making *The Tempest* a postmodern play is displayed. The third part is devoted to puns and wordplays. In this part, by a close reading of the play, significant examples of puns, word plays, and paradoxes are detected and analyzed; the play is indeed rich in terms of this technique. By making the diction of the play chancy, playful, anarchic, mutant, polymorphous and indeterminate, this technique is at the service of decentering the language, and therefore contributes a lot in creating a postmodern atmosphere. The fourth part talks about ontological interferences. Brian McHale (1987) argues that postmodernism is distinguished by a shift from modernism (McHale 1987, p. 10). That is a change in the point of concentration from epistemology in modernism to ontology in postmodernism. In other words in modernism, there is a focus on the matters regarding knowledge, and how it is acquired, while in postmodernism the focus is on questions and issues regarding the very nature of existence. Based on this definition, in this section of the article those parts of the play are analyzed which are important regarding ontological interferences. The fifth and final section deals with another postmodern feature; Hassan (1982) attributes "the holy ghost" to postmodernism in contrast to "god the father" which is a modernist feature (p. 268). Here, with concentration on the epilogue of the play the manifestation of this postmodern element is shown. This section concludes this study on postmodernist elements in *The Tempest*

believed to be a postmodern play, since it contains many of the postmodernist elements mentioned by major literary theorists.

Names of Characters

As mentioned earlier, "play, anarchy, dispersal, and intertextuality" are among the features of a postmodern piece of literary writing. Here in this section the names of some characters, are in line with these features, are analyzed. Some names are playful: having their roots in Greek and Latin, their meanings are associated with characters' occupation, speeches, actions, and mentality. Some are allusive. By referring to historical, geographical, mythological and religious figures, events and places, the names make the passage intertextual. Finally, some names possess all the above elements. All these features are at the service of decentering the language and making different layers of meaning which is a pivotal postmodern concept.

Caliban

Caliban is one of the most interesting and controversial characters of Shakespeare. The significance has caused Shakespeare critics and scholars to write a numerous number of articles on Caliban, scrutinizing the different parts of this Shakespearean character. One of them is "Caliban's Mask" (2003), by Kevin Pask. Here, he tries to have an analysis of the different responses on *The Tempest* from its own time up to the Restoration Period with a special focus on the character of Caliban. For instance, the two contrary viewpoints of Addison and Jonson are

mentioned, where Addison regards the creation of Caliban as "artistic creation" and "imaginative control" but, the latter regards it as a large "artistic weakness" (Pask 2003, p. 740). Another study is "The Backward Voice of Coriolanus" (2004). Here, Maurice Hunt (2004) discusses the idea of purgation in the speeches of Shakespeare characters. In one part of the article he talks about this issue in the language of Caliban and other characters in *The Tempest*. For example, he believes this purgation is manifest in the conversations of Trinculo and Stephano. Caliban's curses also function as "symbolic purgation" and "gradual reclamation" of this character (Hunt, 2004, p. 225).

As manifested in this chapter, and later in other sections of the article, Caliban's name as well as his presence, shape, diction, and personality contribute largely to the richness of the play. An important feature of Shakespeare's time was the sea voyages, which resulted in, first, the discovery and exploration of the new islands and continents and, then, the act of colonizing them. Many travel writings were produced during that time explaining the adventures of the mariners and voyagers at sea and in the "new world." Shakespeare was certainly familiar with them, as he uses the material in *The Tempest* and many of his other plays. Among these accounts, two are of utmost importance: the first one is Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" (1580) which is believed to be the only undisputed source of *The Tempest* (Kermode, 1954, p. xxxiv). Montaigne (1533-1592) traveled to Brazil in 1557 and wrote his memories of the travel in *Essays* (1580), one of which is "Of Cannibals." He describes the

supposed practice of cannibalism among the natives with a positive, naturalistic attitude towards them. He is very critical of European culture and believes that

They are even savage, as we call those fruits wilde, which nature of her selfe ... hath produced: where as indeed those which our selves have altered by our artifice all devices, and diverted from their common order, we should rather term savage. (ctd. in Kermode 1954, p. xxxv)

The second source is *Bermuda Pamphlets* (1610). In May 1609 some ships left England for the Virginia colony. One of these ships was lost because of the storm and was driven near the coast of Bermudas while the other ships reached the main destination. After sometime in May 1610 the lost ship also managed to reach the main land of America. Many narratives of this adventure, regarding the voyagers' confrontation with the nature and inhabitants of those islands were written and published in England. By using the names such as "Caliban", "Setebos" (Kermode 1954, I.ii.375), and "still vexed Bermoothes" (I.ii.229) in *The Tempest*, there leaves almost no doubt that Shakespeare was familiar with these accounts.

Based on the information about the sources of *The Tempest*, it is generally accepted that Caliban's name is an anagram of the word "cannibal" (Skura 1989, p.51). Being a distortion of the word "carib," which later became "cannib" and "cannibal," both words refer to the native Caribbean and their practice of cannibalism. Although some other critics such as Chambers have proposed another meaning: it is also believed that the name is derived from the gypsy word "cauliban" meaning

"blackness" (Kermode 1954, p. xxxviii). Caliban's representation in the play, through the eyes of other characters as well as through his own acts and speeches, resembles both meanings properly. First of all, Caliban is described as a "salvage and deformed slave" in *Dramatis Personae*, preparing the reader to confront an animalistic, evil creature. The reader confronts Caliban, first, in act I, scene ii, where he expresses his wish to rape Miranda (I.ii.351-352). Later he plots to murder Prospero by encouraging Stephano to kill him, seize Miranda as his wife and become the king of the isle (III.ii.85-100). Caliban is continually referred to as: "slave, villain, earth, tortoise, poisonous, abhorred, capable of all ill, savage, vile race, hag seed, and devil" (I.ii.315-372). Just in one scene (II, ii) he is nineteen times referred to as "monster" and "moon calf" by Trinculo and Stephano. In all these instances, Caliban is associated with being terrestrial, earthly, evil, black, and lowly. Caliban was taught language by Prospero and Miranda, but he even uses this virtue as an opportunity to constantly curse others (II.ii.1-13)—even Caliban himself acknowledges his talent in cursing (I.ii.323-326). Finally at the end of the play, Prospero, when forgiving his enemies declares Caliban as a "thing of darkness" which belongs to him. Thus, as the above evidences clarify, Caliban's name is in complete accordance with his shape, actions, language and personality. Moreover, by being associated with different sources of *The Tempest*, the name adds to the multiple layers of allusiveness and intertextuality of the play. By being meaningful, and related to Caliban's character, his name further makes the language of *The Tempest* playful, and

indeterminate. Therefore, Caliban's name has a huge role in making the language of the play postmodern.

Sycorax

Sycorax is also one of the interesting minor characters of Shakespeare. Though an absent character, she has a great impact on creating a postmodern atmosphere in the play. Shakespeare critics are conscious of the importance of absent characters in his works. One study analyzing the absent figures in *The Tempest* is done by Sarah Annes Brown (2008). In "The Return of Prospero's Wife: Mother Figures in *The Tempest*" (2008), Brown states that *The Tempest* is among the plays that receives a wide range of responses both in older time and modern era. Her focus is on the absent characters of the play, particularly the absent mother figures (p. 146). The article studies the importance of Sycorax and Prospero's wife in *The Tempest*.

Sycorax's name is of Latin root, and a combination of two words: "sys" meaning "sow" and "korax" meaning "raven," the animals that are associated with lust, darkness, and evil omen. Her name is also in full correspondence with her past and her action. First of all, she was a witch practicing black magic (I.ii.258). In the Renaissance time witches were considered evil and unlucky, and the practice of witchcraft was regarded as sinful. Many witches were burnt alive or left to drown in the Thames in that time because of these reasons. Furthermore, Sycorax had committed a crime, whose normal punishment was execution, but, because of being pregnant she had been exiled—instead of being

executed (I.ii.261-267). She had continued her practice of necromancy in her exile in the island by confining Ariel into a tree (I.ii.285&293). Caliban also refers to her black magic as well as her name: Cal: "As wicked dew as ever my mother brush'd, / With raven's feather from unwholesome fen, / Drop on you both! / A south – west blow on ye, And blister yon all o'er!" (I.ii.323-325).

At a deeper layer of intertextuality, she was also a worshipper of Setebos (I.ii.374-376) who was a god of Patagonians. It is very likely that Shakespeare might have come across the word in Robert Eden's *History of Travaile* (1577) where narrating Magellan's voyages, the writer refers to Patagonians and their method of worshipping their god, Setebos (Kermode 1954, p. xxxii). Further, at another level of allusiveness, Sycorax has features in common with the ancient mythological witches, particularly Circe a Greek mythological figure, had been exiled to the solitary island of Aea because of committing murder. According to Homer, she invited Odysseus's men to a feast and changed them into swine.

So as manifested above, by using different layers of allusions, as well as playing on the word in just a single name of an absent character, Shakespeare displays his mastery in the language as well as adding to its richness and multiplicity of meaning.

Versal Prose

In his *Poetics* (335 B. C.), in "Definition of Tragedy," Aristotle (384-322 B. C.) argues that in a play "in some portions verse only is employed, and in others song" (Warrington 1963, p. 12). What Aristotle means is that verse and prose shall not mix with each other in the language of the play. In "Delineation of Characters," he further clarifies that "all the characters should remain consistent throughout the play" (Ibid. p. 26). In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare, particularly, tries to be loyal to Aristotle by observing the three unities of time, place, and action. However, deviations are not difficult to be observed. High characters lower their language by cursing and using inappropriate words and phrases, and base characters use highly rhymed verses and/or very courtly and refined diction which is a postmodern feature. By disturbing the hierarchy of language as well as making it mutant and idiolect, the diction of the play becomes chaotic and polymorphous. Besides, this technique, by opposing the characters' language to their social status disrupts the consistency of the characters. In the following part instances of versal prose in the play are detected and analyzed.

Caliban is an important character regarding the use of versal prose. Caliban defined as a "savage and deformed slave" in the List of Characters, indeed, satisfies the definition by constant cursing during the course of the play. But, there are some occasions in which his language becomes dignified, elevated, and highly rhymed, showing his ability and skill in using language.

One example is act II, scene ii where Trinculo and Stephano find Caliban. Assuming the king and all his men drowned, they choose Stephano to be the king of the island. Caliban is also happy of getting rid of his cruel master, Prospero, and decides to worship Stephano as a god. He promises Stephano to show him the wonders and natural sources of food and drink in the isle. Happily he celebrates his freedom with the following song:

Cal: *No more dams i'll make for fish;
Nor fetch in firing
At requiring;
Nor scrape trenching, nor wash dish:
'Ban, 'Ban, Ca Caliban
Has a new master: get a new man.*

Freedom, high-day! high day,
freedom! freedom,
high-day, freedom! (II.ii.180-187)

Though simple and childish, this piece of song shows Caliban's ability in using language in other ways than cursing. It also exhibits another dimension of Caliban's mentality and personality: the reader is confronted with a Caliban who can sing and compose rhymed verses. This side, which is shadowed by his dominant negative personality throughout the play, is very different from the all-time cursing and nagging deformed slave. Another example of Caliban's elegant and refined diction is in act III, scene ii where Caliban tells his story to Stephano and Trinculo and encourages Stephano to kill Prospero and become the king of the isle. After plotting to do so, Trinculo and Stephano start to sing merrily. But, Caliban reminds them that they are not singing "in tune" (III.ii.122). Ariel, invisible, comes and plays the music, and the other two are frightened by the unknown source of the sound. But, Caliban is not in horror and comforts them instead:

Cal: Be not afeard; the isle is full of
noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give
delight, and
hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling
instruments
Will hum about my ear; and
sometimes voices,
That, if I then had wak'd after long
sleep,
Will making me sleep again: and
then, in dreaming,
The clouds me thought would
open, and show
riches.
Ready to drop upon me; that when
I wak'd,
I cried to dream again. (III.ii.133-
141)

Caliban's referring to words and entities such as "airs, music, delight, and dream, " with his love and enjoyment of them, is in sharp contrast with his dominant language and personality throughout the play. As mentioned earlier, Caliban also warns the other two that they are not singing "in tune." That an uncivilized and abominable slave is aware of musical tunes and sensitive to deviations from that is of utmost amazement. Caliban's diction, in several occasions, diverges from his social status and dominant language and characteristic in the play. This results in creating an anarchic atmosphere in the diction of *The Tempest*, as well as inconsistency of the characters. These features contribute a lot in facilitating a postmodern reading of the play.

Puns/Wordlays

One of the weightiest elements that make a postmodern reading of *The Tempest* possible is the extensive use of puns and wordplays. By playing on different meanings of a single word, Shakespeare intensifies the "chancy", "anarchic", and "indeterminate" tone of the play and "disperses" the language from its center. He further provides an opportunity to have different interpretations and "misreadings" of the play. Moreover, puns and wordplays are associated, mostly, with the "rhetoric" aspect of the language which concerns the mastery and talent in representing speech and diction, rather than the "semantic" aspect, concerned mostly with delivering the meaning of the text. This technique also helps to create "signifiers" which lead to multiple "signifieds" at a time. Finally, it enriches the "intertextuality" and "allusiveness" of the play in many occasions, as it paves the way for associations between the play and other literary, religious, geographical, and historical texts. All the above mentioned features contribute to the decentering of the language and therefore creation of a postmodern play.

Act II, scene i, is so full of puns and language plays that the whole scene may be considered a huge wordplay. Here, king and his attendants are searching the isle to find Ferdinand. The scene begins with Gonzalo, "an honest old councillor," hoping their search to be fruitful. Alonso, who is not so much optimistic, asks him to be quiet and leave him in "peace" (II.i.9). Sebastian, cynical and sarcastic throughout the scene, puns on Alonso's

"peace" by saying that: "He receives comfort like cold porridge" (II.i.10), with a wordplay on Alonso's "peace" and "pease porridge." Antonio continues the wordplay by an allusion to the "visitor" or the church official who comforts the ill (II.i.11) by which he means that Gonzalo is like a priest who is vainly trying to console Alonso. The language play further continues by Sebastian comparing Gonzalo to a clock which is striking at every hour and cannot remain quiet (II.i.13). The scene continues as the following:

Gon: Sir,
Seb: [Aside to Antonio] One: tell.
Gon: When every grief is entertain'd
that's offer'd,
Comes to the entertainer
.....
Seb: A dollar
Gon: Dolour comes to him, indeed: you
have spoken
truer than you purpo'sd. (II.i.14-20)

Here in another attempt, Gonzalo tries to cheer up Alonso. He states that an entertainer makes his audience happy and what comes to him is, as Sebastian interrupts him, a "dollar." Gonzalo puns on the word and uses "dollar," meaning "grief". Sebastian intends to say that the entertainer gains money as his reward but, Gonzalo means that he takes the grief away from the audience. After some chat, Adrian, one of the courtiers, comments on the island that: "Though this island seems to be deserted [...] uninhabitable and almost inaccessible [...] It must needs be of subtle, tender, delicate, temperance" (II.i.34&37&41-42). Antonio plays on the word "temperance" saying that "Temperance was a

delicate wench" (II.i.44). By "temperance," Adrian means the climate of the island, while Antonio means the proper name of a prostitute. In line with his bleak view, and continuing the conversation on the weather of the isle, Antonio states that it is "perfumed by a fen" (II.i.47) producing a huge paradox, by referring to Adrian's optimistic view on the "sweet breathe of air" (II.i.45). Paradoxes, that will be further analyzed, later in the scene, contribute a lot to the playfulness of the language. Gonzalo, cheerful and optimistic as usual, states that their garments are as fresh as when they left the wedding ceremony (II.i.59-62). Antonio answers that if but one of his pockets could speak, it would reveal his lies (II.i.63-64). Sebastian continuing the mimicry, puns on the word "pocket" and says that it can "pocket up" Gonzalo's reports (II.i.65), meaning that the pockets, which are unlike the outer garments dirty and muddy and also invisible to the viewer, can conceal Gonzalo's lies about the freshness of the clothes. The conversation continues as the following:

Gon: Methinks our garments are now as
fresh as when
we put them on first in Afric, at the
marriage of the
King's fair daughter Claribel to the
king of Tunis.

Seb: 'T was a sweet marriage, and we
prosper well in our
return.

Adr: Tunis was never grac'd before with
such a paragon
to their queen.

Gon: Not since widow Dido's time.

Ant: Widow! a pox o'that! How came
that widow in?
widow Dido!

Seb: What if he had said "widower
Aeneas" too? Good
Lord, how you take it!
Adr: "Widow Dido" said you? You
make me study of
that: she was of Carthage, not of
Tunis.
Gon: This Tunis sir, was Carthage.
Adr: Carthage?
Gon: I assure you, Carthage.
Ant: His word is more than the
miraculous harp.
Seb: he hath rais'd the wall, and houses
too.
Ant: What impossible matter will he
make easy next?
Seb: I think he will carry this island
home in his pocket,
and give it his son for an apple.
Ant: And, sowing the kernels of it in the
sea, bring forth
more islands.
Gon: Ay (II.i.66-90).

Here, Adrian comments that such a grace has never been fallen on Tunis. Gonzalo Continues: "not since widow Dido's time." This short sentence becomes the source for a chain of word plays, puns, paradoxes, and allusions. Dido was the mythological queen of Carthage whom Elizabethans associated, mostly, as a lover of Aeneas, not as the widow of Sychaeus who was originally her husband. The mistake paves the way for the two jokers to mock Gonzalo. What makes it even worse is Adrian's comment. Puzzled by the phrase "widow Dido," he expresses that: "she was of Carthage, not of Tunis." In another paradoxical mistake Gonzalo assumes Carthage and Tunis to be the same. Antonio and Sebastian, seize the opportunity by referring to Amphion's harp, which raised the walls of Thebes, and continue to make sneering comments on Gonzalo. While the group continues the search,

Sebastian mercilessly tries to put the blame of Ferdinand's loss on Alonso. Gonzalo warns the harshness of his language because "when he should bring plaster he rubs the sore" (II.i.134-135). Antonio plays on the simple sentence by comparing Gonzalo to a surgeon. Then, Gonzalo contemplates the possibility of colonizing the island: ["had I a plantation of this isle my lord-----", (II.i.139)]. Again, Antonio and Sebastian choose to understand him as they like and interpret the word literary, meaning "farming and agriculture" (II.i.139-140). Gonzalo decides to elaborate on the features of his commonwealth:

Gon: I' th' 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; contract,
succession,
Bourn, bound of land, filth,
vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or
oil;
No occupation; all men idle, all;
And women too, but innocent and
pure:
No sovereignty;_____ (II.i.143-
152)

In this passage, Gonzalo, in numerating the elements of his colony, deprives it of all its necessary features and finishes his speech by the paradoxical statement that in his commonwealth there will be "no sovereignty."

After a while by the magical music of Ariel, the group falls into sleep except Antonio and Sebastian. From now on to the end of the scene when courtiers are awakened the reader finds significant examples of wordplays and paradoxes. Antonio tries to seduce Sebastian that supposing Ferdinand to be drowned he is the second line to the throne, and it is a great opportunity for him to get rid of Alonso, and become king. Sebastian showing his doubtfulness states that he is "standing water" (II.i.216), not to know whether to ebb or flow. Antonio using the same analogy says that he will teach him "how to flow" (II.i.217). Answering him with the same wordplay Sebastian says "to ebb hereditary sloth instructs me" (II.i.217-218). Besides continuing the sea imagery, Sebastian here puns on the phrase, meaning that because of his natural laziness and being a younger brother it is not appropriate for him to be ambitious. Antonio goes on:

Ant: O,
 If you but knew how you the
 purpose cherish
 While thus you mock it! How, in
 stripping it,
 You more invest it! Ebbing men,
 indeed,
 Most often do so near the bottom
 run
 By their own fear of sloth.
 (II.i.218-223)

Here, Antonio intensifying his seductions suggests that Sebastian is in fact willing to become king. Since "ebbing men," or men who hesitate and move backwards will get "near the bottom," and will never reach their goal. Apart from his intelligent use of paradox (how, in stripping it, you more invest it!), Antonio

apparently uses the same sea imagery and word play which lingers in their conversation, in order to persuade Sebastian to do his intended evil act. Further in the scene, recognizing that Sebastian has not yet completely believed that Ferdinand is drowned, Antonio states:

Ant: O, out of that "no hope"
What great hope have you! no hope
that way is
Another way so high a hope, that
even
Ambition cannot pierce a wink
beyond,
But doubt discovery there. Will
you grant with me
That Ferdinand is drown'd?
(II.i.234-239)

Here, like the previously-quoted passage, Antonio with the skillful use of paradox, plays on Sebastian's sense of doubtfulness, that "out of no hope," what "high a hope" emerges. He means that by murdering Alonso, Sebastian can easily reach his goal to be the king.

To conclude this part, it is essential to mention that the vast and extensive use of puns, wordplays, and paradoxes gives the language of *The Tempest* a highly postmodern air, for these techniques cause the diction to become considerably playful, anarchic, uncertain, and indeterminate; all postmodern features.

Ontological Interferences

Brian McHale in his *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) discusses that the difference between modernism and

postmodernism may be understood based on their focal point. He believes that in modernist fiction there is a focus on epistemological matters, while in postmodernism the focus has been shifted to ontological issues (1987, p.10). In other words, in modernism the concentration is on questions and matters related to knowledge and how they are gained, while in postmodernism the questions are related to the notion of "being" and "existence," such as "what is a world, what kinds of worlds are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? What happens when different kinds of worlds are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (Ibid., p.10). As evident in the above questions, in postmodernism, the focus is on the very concept of "reality," "being," "different worlds," "their boundaries," and "the intermingling of these worlds." In this section, based on McHale's definition and characterization of postmodernism, the study focuses on ontological interferences in *The Tempest*. The first part of this section is devoted to detecting this feature in the setting of the play, and the second part to the two worlds of dream and reality, their boundaries and their amalgamation in the play.

The setting of the play

While keeping the characters real and tangible, Shakespeare makes the atmosphere of his plays as imaginary and dreamy as possible. In this section the setting of the play as one aspect of the imaginary quality of *The Tempest* is analyzed. As mentioned earlier, Shakespeare is loyal to Aristotle by observing

the unities of time, place, and action. *The Tempest* happens in one island and the setting does not change throughout the play. But, the location of that very island is itself ambiguous. There are two sets of information, each supporting a separate island as the setting of the play. Based on *Dramatis Personae* as well as the evidences in the text, one supportable location for the play is an island in the Mediterranean Sea. The main characters of the play, Prospero, Miranda, Alonso and his attendants are all of Milan or Naples and are on their way back from Claribel's wedding in Tunis to their homeland Italy (II.i.66-68), when they are caught by a tempest and driven to an island. Another group of evidences supports a place near Americas as the setting. First of all, Ariel in reporting to Prospero about his mission of drowning the ship, clearly states that he had saved the people on board, and the ship is safe "in the deep nook where once thou cal'dst me upon at midnight to fetch dew from the still-vexed Bermoothes" (I.ii.226-230). Talking about the rest of the crew, who are moving back to Naples supposing the king and his attendants all drowned, Ariel, very interestingly, in the same passage refers to "Mediterranean flot" (I.ii.234), thousands of miles away of Bermoothes. Another evidence is the reference to Setebos—a god of the Patagonians. Caliban explicitly mentions that his mother was a worshipper of Setebos (I.ii.373-376). Moreover, Caliban himself at the end of the play invokes to Setebos to avoid Prospero's punishment (V.i.261-263), showing that he also worships the same god. On the other hand, Sycorax, Caliban's mother, is said to be an Algerian who had been banished in an island, presumably in the

Mediterranean, where she gives birth to Caliban (I. ii.261&267-282). It is very curious that an Algerian who lives in a Mediterranean island is a worshipper of a god of native Americans. The third and the last evidence is the presence of Caliban himself as an islander. In the Renaissance time, Europeans associated mostly the "new world" with novelty, secrecy, and exoticism. Since Ptolemy's *Geography* written in the 2nd century A. D. in Alexandria, Europeans had been familiar with the Mediterranean, Africa, and Asia (Brotton 2005, pp. 79-81), at least 1200 years before Renaissance. They associated darkness, mystery, and weirdness mostly with their newly discovered lands and their people; Americas and Australia are noteworthy. All of these features are present in Caliban whose presence in the play, his name, his shape and color, his deformity, his language, and actions have a close resemblance to that of the inhabitants of the "new world."

Thus, as argued in this section, the two sets of information in the play each have enough weight to support a separate place as the setting, and finally they leave it equivocal as to where the real island that *The Tempest* takes place is. This absorbing instance of the violation of boundaries between possible existing worlds paves the way for the reader to think of ontological interferences when one is reminded of the fact that this imaginary setting is a construct of Shakespeare's world of the imagination.

Dream vs. Reality

Another important case of ontological interference is the existence and intermingling of the two realms of dream and reality. At the end of act II, scene i, the courtiers are overwhelmed by a magical sleep, put to them by Ariel's music. The reader here begins to confront the two domains of dream and reality. When Alonso and his party fall asleep, the limit between the two worlds of sleep and reality starts to blur. This confusion is intensified by the conversation between Sebastian and Antonio whose language is full of sleepy, dreamy, and hallucinatory implications. After all fall asleep, Sebastian wonders the strange "drowsiness" which has possessed them (II.i.194), and does not cause his "eyelids to sink," and make him "sleep;" nor does Antonio feel sleepy. His spirits are "nimble" and he fantasizes a crown falling on Sebastian's head. Sebastian wonders if Antonio is "awake," since he speaks "sleepy language" (II.i.206). He believes Antonio's speeches to be strange and fanciful because "this is a strange repose to be asleep with eyes wide open, standing, speaking, moving and yet so fast asleep" (II.i.208-210). Antonio, on the other hand believes that it is Sebastian who lets his fortune "sleep" or rather die, and keeps his eyes shut, while he is awake. Shocked by Antonio's speeches and believing him not to be awake, Sebastian compares what Antonio says to "the snores of a sleeping person" saying that "there is meaning in" his "snores" (II.i.212-213). Antonio's temptations continue till he says what he means in plain words using the same sleep and dream imagery. Addressing Alonso's daughter, Claribel, Antonio asks her to remain in Tunis and "let Sebastian wake" (II.i.263). Then he asks Sebastian to suppose as

if "this were death that now that seiz'd them [The courtiers]" (II.i.255-256), since even the dead can rule as properly as these men. This "sleep," he believes, is indeed an opportunity for Sebastian's "advancement" (II.i.263). The intermingling of the two worlds of dream and reality reaches its peak at the end of the scene, when Ariel sings in Gonzalo's ear to wake because while he "snoring lies, open-eyed conspiracy" is taking place. Hearing this, Gonzalo wakes, and other courtiers rise by his cry, and the plot ends unsuccessfully. Shakespeare has stuffed this short passage with as much references to sleep, dream, and imagination as possible, removing the borders of imagination and reality.

Another significant example of this mixture occurs in act IV, scene i. Almost finished with his plan, and granted Ferdinand with the marriage to Miranda, Prospero then summons the goddesses (Iris, Juno, and Ceres), nymphs and reapers, in order to celebrate the happy marriage with their song and music. After they finish, Prospero continues:

Pros: You do look my son, in a mov'd
sort,
As if you were dismay'd: be cheerful,
sir.
Our revels now are ended, These our
actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this
vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the
gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe
itself
Yea, all which it inherits, shall
dissolve,

And, like this insubstantial pageant
faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such
stuff
As dreams are made on: And our
little life
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.146-
158)

Here is an amazing instance of ontological confusion. First of all, Prospero confesses that all which has happened has been a pure fantasy; it was a play with "imaginary" players, that are going to melt into "thin air" when the play ends. Further, he also states that all the locations of the play, such as palaces, temples, and even the globe itself are going to be "dissolved." Astonishingly, by blurring the borders of dream and reality, Prospero declares that human beings themselves are "such stuff as dreams are made on," and their life is concluded by a "sleep." Questioning the very nature of "being," Prospero in his last statement clearly mentions that human life is nothing but a fantasy.

In this part in the light of Brian McHale's characterization of postmodernism, an analysis of the language with regard to ontological confusions in *The Tempest* was given. What follows is a focus on "the holy ghost" which is, believed by Ihab Hassan, another postmodernist feature.

God the Father vs. The Holy Ghost

In his famous table, Hassan (1982) attributes two interesting features to modernism and postmodernism. He assigns

"god the father" to modernism, in contrast to "the holy ghost" which is a postmodern element (Hassan 1982, p. 268). Here, with a focus on the epilogue of *The Tempest* it is argued that at the end of the play, Prospero as "god the father" is weakened, and Ariel as "the holy ghost" is powered up and finally freed. Thus, by the decline of "god the father," and giving power to "the holy ghost" another postmodern element is intensified. Ariel functions as an archangel to Prospero, who appears as God in the island. Right from the beginning of the play, Prospero promises Ariel to set him free (I.ii.242-250). He repeats his vow several times during the play (I.ii.423-424&444-445&IV.i.35&264-266&V.i.87&95). He had promised Ariel that after a full year of service he would be liberated. First of all, it is interesting that Prospero's power, all throughout the play, seems to be attached to Ariel. Prospero never performs magic himself. He orders Ariel and it is Ariel who does the job. In other words, Prospero's power is put into action through Ariel. All the magical events of the play such as drowning the ship, scattering the people on board in different parts of the island, the magical sleep of the courtiers and their awakening, appearing and disappearing of the banquet, and the summon of goddesses, spirits and reapers, are done either by Ariel or spirits under his command. So, Ariel is the main tool for Prospero to actualize his plans. In fact, Prospero is powerless without Ariel. Interestingly, Prospero acknowledges his weakness without Ariel when he says that he shall miss Ariel when he is liberated (V.i.95). At the end of the play, Prospero produces the following epilogue:

*Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own,
Which is most faint: now, 'tis true,
I must be here confin'd by you,
Or sent to Naples. Let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got,
And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell,
In this bare island by your spell;
But release me from my bands,
With the help of your good hands:
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant:
And my ending is despair,
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardon'd
be,
Let your indulgence set me free.
Exit.*

Prospero's language is full of the implications of 'weakness, bondage, and sadness.' He must be "confined" in the deserted isle for ever or be sent to Naples. But, he is "demanding" to be "released" from his "bonds." In order to avoid his project to "fail" and his ending in "despair," he is asking to be "relieved" and "set free." In sharp contrast to Prospero's gloomy and helpless language, there exists Ariel's happy and lively diction in his joyful song, when informed that he is soon going to be liberated. He merrily celebrates the occasion by declaring that from now on "Merrily, merrily, shall I live now, under the blossoms that hang on the bough" (V.i.93-94). The ongoing tension between Prospero as the magician and commander vs. Ariel as the agent reaches to the peak in the epilogue. Ariel has been released long before the

play ends, but Prospero, on the other hand, has been "bounded" and is asking to "be set free." Actually, Ariel or "the holy ghost" now completely dominates and overpowers Prospero or "god the father." Ariel has gained his liberty, while Prospero in contrast, has been confined, and is asking for his freedom. In fact, the phrase "setting free" makes a pun here. Using it for Ariel, it indicates freedom, joy, power, and happiness, while on the other hand for Prospero, it is a demand for becoming liberated, which adds to the indeterminate quality of the play.

Conclusion

This study was an attempt to show that *The Tempest* is a postmodern play. Based on Hassan's (1982) table of comparison between modernism and postmodernism (pp. 267-268), and to a lesser extent McHale's (1987) definition and classification of postmodernism (p.10) it was argued that the language of *The Tempest* is full of postmodern elements. Divided in five parts the article analyzed the five main techniques which make *The Tempest* open to a postmodernist approach. The method practiced here can be applied to Shakespeare's other plays as well. For instance, among the comedies *Twelfth Night* (1601) is very rewarding in this regard, since it possesses important postmodern features such as wordplays, versal prose, and disguise. Among the tragedies *Macbeth* (1606) is of great significance in terms of ontological confusions, and intermingling of the worlds of magic, dream, hallucination, and reality, all throughout the play. Because of being rich in language techniques and the indeterminacy of

language, these plays are apt to be analyzed with postmodernist approaches.

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