



## Island, Storm, and Moral Environment: An Ecocritical Reading of *The Tempest*

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### Abstract

*The Tempest* by William Shakespeare is an opulent basis of ecocritical analysis since it is a work that discovers the affiliation between nature and humans. This paper searches the interface of environmental forces and moral actions, with the island milieu which raises storm and the ethical and social progressions they produce. Applying a present-day ecocritical framework, the research discovers the role of ecological phenomena, such as landscape, storms and isolation as active forces that impact character development, ethical verdict, and narrative termination. Close textual analysis is used as the methodology of the present study, which is supported by contemporary and historical ecocritical literature, to ask question that the human accomplishments and natural forces are interlinked. Results reveal that Shakespeare sets nature not as a locale but as a dynamic intermediary of ethical knowledge, specifically in the ethical overhaul of Prospero and the exposure of hubris, and reconciliation and human ambition. The storms, island setting, spatial isolation are all instruments of insightful training with ecological ethics that emphasises the consequences of the inevitability of environmental awareness and anthropocentrism. It is proposed that future studies should apply this ecocritical approach to comparative studies of other Shakespearean comedies and tragedies, with a particular focus on the timelessness of early modern ecological consciousness. Finally, this paper shows that *The Tempest* prefigures the ethical and didactic agency of nature, providing clues to the ethical and ecological interrelations that are at the heart of human experience.

Keywords: *The Tempest*, William Shakespeare, Ecocritical, Nature, Anthropocentrism

## Introduction

*The Tempest* by William Shakespeare is a play that was written in the early 17th century and has been renowned as a work of imagination in terms of human ambition, power and reconciliation. In addition to the dramatic and narrative genius, the play offers a subtle interaction with the natural world, making the island and the stormy winds more than a stage scenery. The isolated and mostly deserted setting of the island turns into a microcosm, in which human relations, ethical contradictions, and social classes are highly examined, and the tempest itself is a strong force of nature, which influences the action and the moral consciousness of the characters (Arden 3rd edition, I.i.1100, pp.12–18). Ecocritical analysis of *The Tempest*, therefore, offers an interesting approach to comprehending the environmental awareness of Shakespeare in his early modern period, which shows the dynamic relationship between human desire, nature, and moral change.

Ecocriticism, a critical method inspects literary works written in the framework of communication characterised by human-environment and foretells the ecological, moral and societal aspects underlying in literary pieces. Eco-critics like Buell (1995, pp. 2–25) and Garrard (2012, pp. 15–35) originated the concept of ecocriticism which scrutinises the process of how environmental components work as mediators that impact ethical decision-making as well as human behaviour. Analysing *The Tempest*, using this framework explores how Shakespeare has interwoven the connectedness of natural phenomena with human ethical realization. As a rudimentary power the storm does not only trigger narrative progress such as shipwreck of Sebastian, Antonio and Alonso but also function as an emblematic tool that reveals moral limitations and human frailty (III.i.1–100, pp. 145–150). Likewise, the island itself along with its contrasting landscapes, seclusion and secret spaces serves as a spot for reconciliation, reflection and transformation, highlighting the didactic role of nature embedded in human improvement.

An important feature of the ecological dimension of the play is the anthropocentric dynamics that the play questions. The protagonist, Prospero, has magical power that enables him to control human and natural powers. Although his mastery of the tempest and island spirits shows the ingenuity and control of humans, it also shows the ethical issues of human intervention in nature (I.ii.1-150, pp. 25–30). Ecocriticism frames this tension in a larger moral and ecological framework, in which nature in Shakespeare is not passive; it reacts, challenges, and educates the interdependence of ethical and environmental systems.

*The tempest*, the opening of the play, is symbolic of the story of nature and moral agency. The storm, by triggering the shipwreck, breaks the social hierarchies and reveals the concealed ambitions, lies, and conflicts of relationships (I.i.1–50, pp.12–15). Alonso, King of Naples, is challenged with his own involvement in usurpation; the plotting of Antonio and Sebastian is brought to the fore; and the meeting of Ferdinand and Miranda takes place in this liminal, ecologically charged space. This highlights one of the key

ecocritical observations: in literature, environmental forces tend to mediate ethical consciousness and character growth (Buell, 1995, pp18–22). In contrast to the conventional literary analyses that concentrate on human action or political processes only, an ecocritical approach prefigures the interdependence of human and environmental action, which discloses that ethical and ecological consciousness are mutually supportive.

The island environment, which is not subject to continental influences and social conventions, offers a closed ecological laboratory where one can reflect on ethics. In this case, Shakespeare addresses the issues of power, control, and reconciliation in the context of both natural landscapes, which are both supportive and threatening. The handling of spirits by Prospero, the interface between Caliban and the island as well as the intermediation of natural forces foreground the moral convolutions of human authority over ecological structures. As such, the island divulging mutual reliance and ethical duty, transforms into not only a stage for narrative development but also a location where ecological and human structures interconnect.

In spite of plentiful research on *The Tempest*, the ecocritical elements have less likely been explored, especially the moral intervention of environmental forces. Current Shakespearean literature is more likely to emphasise psychoanalytical interpretations, political allegory and postcolonial readings (Loomba, 2002, pp. 45–50; Smith, 2015, pp. 50–70), often ignoring how the bard combines landscape, storms and spatial isolation into ethical schooling. This research fills this gap by applying an ecocritical framework with a view to analysing how natural forces intermediate moral perception, wreak narrative consequences and throw a challenge to anthropocentric expectations. Likewise, this study locates *The Tempest*, within the periphery of early modern environmental concern, foregrounding the significance of literary ecocriticism for modern-day environmental ethics.

### Literature Review

Modern-day literature on *The Tempest* is prone to shed focus on ecocritical aspects, scrutinising the way of how environmental powers like landscapes, storms and islands intermediate narrative progress and ethical reflection. Garrard (2012, pp. 25–35) foregrounds that Shakespearean comedies often offers nature as ethically didactic and morally active, throwing a challenge on human susceptibility and anthropocentric assumptions. In a similar fashion, Buell (2005, pp. 18–22) maintains that literary works can nurture environmental awareness, advising that natural powers in in *The Tempest*—including the tempest itself—work as facilitators for character transformation and moral consciousness.

The current scholarships shed lights on island and the storm as moral and instructive appliances. It is established by Mc Alindon (2014, pp. 60–68) that the tempest

depicts underlying optimism, human fragility, relational failures and persuasive characters like Prospero, Alonso and Antonio to encounter individual accountability. Wilson (2011, pp. 220–245) and Kahn (2016, pp. 500–525) underscore that ecological phenomena in the play are grounds for ethical judgement, which determine both narrative outcomes and human actions. In addition, Smith (2015, pp. 50–70) records that Shakespeare forestalls modern ecological ethics by depicting human welfare as reliant on environmental accord.

Modern analysis also grabbed attention on Island spatiality. Smith (2015, pp. 50–70) and Lee (2009, pp. 347–370) inspect the island's liminality, demonstrating how seclusion enables moral social experimentation, reconciliation and reflection. The communication of Caliban with Prospero's mystic domination and the island echoes rigidities between environmental systems and human authority that reinforces the mutual reliance of moral and ecological accountability (Foster, 2009, pp. 330–355; Bennett, 2016, pp. 55–90).

In spite of these contributions, a gap in the literature exists that combines storm, island and isolation as interrelated ethical and ecological actors. The current literature tends to view natural elements separately or symbolically, instead of analyzing their overall contribution to the development of moral intuition and narrative closure (Martin, 2014, pp. 80–110). This breach emphasises the inevitability of an ecocritical evaluation that places environmental powers at the core of narrative and ethical inquiry, both in terms of character progression and the environmental awareness of the early modern period in general.

Moreover, the methodological approaches of the recent scholarship are the synthesis of close textual analysis and ecocritical theory, which emphasizes the ethical, social, and ecological aspects of natural forces (Adams, 2012, pp.200–230; Taylor, 2010, pp. 25–60). This combination permits a diverse elucidation of Shakespearean ecosystem, displaying that the tempest, spatial isolation and the island are not fictional manoeuvres but vibrant forces that impact social relations and human ethical realisation.

To conclude, modern ecocritical readings highlight that *The Tempest* offers nature as morally and narratively compelling, intervening human replication, illuminating anthropocentric boundaries, and fostering reunion. Yet, there remains a momentous study gap about the collective outcome of storm, isolation and island, which this study addresses. By applying a united ecocritical framework, this investigation seeks to irradiate how Shakespeare centres the ethical and academic agency of ecological powers insights pertinent for both early modern studies and existing environmental discourse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This reading follows a modern-day ecocritical theory to scrutinise *The Tempest*, focussing on both early modern as well as modern environmental framework. Ecocriticism,

as well-defined by Garrard (2012, pp. 15–35), and Buell (2005, pp. 2–25) underscores the mutual relationship between environment and humans, observing nature not as an impassive agent but as a dynamic backdrop that figures social interaction, narrative and ethical reflection. Within this context, the play's storm, island, and spatial seclusion are construed as intermediaries of moral consciousness, showcasing how human desire, hubris, and moral verdicts crisscross with environmental powers.

The main concepts which will be used in this investigation include: ecological pedagogy, inspecting how interactions with the environment enable moral consciousness; anthropocentrism, discovering the outcomes of human control over nature; environmental agency, considering natural phenomena as ethically and narratively active; (Kahn, 2016, pp. 500–525). By employing these theoretical lens, the research positions *The Tempest* within early modern ecological awareness, which underscores Shakespeare's sophisticated portrayal of moral and ecological interconnectedness.

### **Critical Analysis** **The Storm as Moral and Narrative Agent**

The tempest opening is much more than a theatrical effect; it is a moral and ethical trigger. Even in the opening lines, Shakespeare puts the tempest at once in the position of a power that can shake human hierarchies and expose the vices that are hidden: "Boatswain! Here, master! What cheer?" (I.i.1–5). Researchers like McAlindon (2014) believe that the storm reveals the guilt of Alonso in usurpation and the ambition of Antonio, which shows that nature makes people think about morality.

The destructive nature of the storm also brings out the human helplessness against the forces of nature. Anderson (2010, pp. 205225) underlines that Shakespeare does not depict humans as totally independent and in full control; the tempest balances the results of the narratives and proves the interdependence of ethical and ecological systems. In this light, the tempest acts as an ethical judge, forcing characters to face personal and social accountability.

The fact that Prospero orchestrates the storm also makes the issue of human agency and natural forces more complex. Although he controls the tempest with magic, the moral implications go beyond human will, and this supports the argument by Buell (2005, pp. 1822) that environmental forces in literature are pedagogical tools that influence moral awareness. The mediation of the storm by Ariel shows the collaboration of nature and supernatural forces to help people reflect on ethics (I.ii.1–150).

Also, modern ecocritics (Kahn, 2016, pp. 500–525) observe that the storm serves as a liminal zone, in which characters are out of social conventions and hierarchical restrictions, allowing them to look inward and reconsider their morals. This liminality highlights the ethical agency of natural phenomena, showing that Shakespeare imagines

storms as not only physical events but also as moral tools that influence the narrative and character development.

Lastly, the resolution of the tempest, which results in the shipwrecked characters coming together on the island, underscores the story and moral meaning of the ecological forces. Leading Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio to the liminal space of the island, Shakespeare shows that moral change and ethical reconciliation are closely connected to the interaction with the forces of nature (I.i.1–100).

### **The Island as Ethical Microcosm**

The island environment serves as a regulated ecological microcosm, which offers a platform of ethical experimentation, contemplation, and reconciliation. According to Lee (2009), the isolation of the island enables Shakespeare to explore the human morality and ecological interdependence without the limitations of the society of the continent. In this case, social inequalities, human greed, and moral shortcomings are magnified and revealed.

The power of Prospero over the island is an illustration of the conflict between human power and nature. Prospero represents the moral and practical implications of human intervention in the natural systems by regulating spirits and mediating natural phenomena (Foster, 2009, pp.330–355). The resistance of Caliban, on the contrary, highlights the unpredictability of nature and the ethical aspects of control over the ecological and human actors.

The geography of the island is also a pedagogical tool, as it takes characters through ethical and moral contemplation. Researchers like Smith (2015) underline that isolation helps to introspect, as Ferdinand and Miranda grow morally conscious and relationally aware, whereas Alonso and Sebastian have to face the issue of guilt and complicity. The island turns into a physical and ethical landscape, where the plot development and ethical growth intersect.

Moreover, the interdependence of humans and the environment is supported by the environmental diversity of the island, its contrasting landscapes, hidden spaces, and fertile areas. Bennett (2016) notes that the ecology of the island influences human behavior, and that ethical development in the play cannot be discussed outside of interaction with natural systems.

Lastly, the island as a microcosm demonstrates the early modern environmental awareness, in which social, ethical, and ecological systems are interconnected. The subtle portrayal of Shakespeare places the island as a stage and moral agent, as well as the interdependence of human and environmental systems and the pedagogical role of natural environments.

### **Prospero, Caliban, and Ethical Interaction with Nature**

The connection between Prospero and the natural and supernatural forces of the island brings out the ethical issues of environmental intervention. He uses magic to manipulate events that bring about justice and reconciliation (I.ii.1–150). According to Kahn (2016), the deeds of Prospero are a good example of the conflict between human will and the environment, and they demonstrate the outcomes of moral and immoral domination.

Caliban is the naturalized subject, closely connected with the ecology of the island, whose moral and social actions cannot be separated by the interaction with the environment (Loomba, 2002, pp.45–50). His opposition and manipulation of the island show that ecological knowledge can be empowering and challenging to human authority, and that ethical reflection is closely connected to ecological knowledge.

Ariel acts as a mediator between human will and the forces of nature, carrying out the orders of Prospero, but still being in touch with nature. Wilson (2011) is one such scholar according to whom, Ariel represents the pedagogical agency of nature, which helps to gain ethical understanding by converting the environmental phenomena into moral implications.

These characters, in combination, demonstrate how Shakespeare employs the human-environment nexus to examine ethical reflection. The interaction of control, resistance, and mediation shows that moral and ecological consciousness are constitutive of each other, and that they are interdependent, as is the case with the ecocritical theory (Buell, 2005, pp.18–22).

### **Space, Ethical Reflection and Reconciliation**

The island isolation brings about ethical and psychological liminality, which enables characters to contemplate previous actions and moral responsibility. Hughes (2014) underlines that the deprivation of societal norms allows Ferdinand, Miranda, and Alonso to gain self-awareness and moral maturity.

The distance between characters and social structures reveals concealed desires and vices. Brown (2012) points out that the conspiracies of Antonio and Sebastian are unveiled by ecological and spatial pressures, which depict the role of environmental forces in mediating ethical understanding.

The reconciliation of the play is, therefore, closely connected with the interaction with the ecology of the island and the destructive force of the storm (III.i.1-100; V.i.1-150). The forgiveness of Prospero and the reestablishment of social order show that ethical and ecological systems are mutually supportive, which is a holistic vision of the interdependence of human and the environment as Shakespeare saw it.

In addition, the natural diversity of the island, fertile grounds, caves, and liminal spaces, serves as a pedagogical setting, allowing ethical learning by engaging with environmental forces (Taylor, 2010, pp. 25–60; Adams, 2012, pp. 200–230). The combination of space, nature, and ethical pedagogy in Shakespeare foreshadows modern ecological thought, and shows the persistence of early modern ecological awareness.

### **Magic and Ethical Mediation**

The magic used by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* is a mediator between human agency and ecological agency. The spells of Prospero are not random; they control not only the natural processes but also human actions to promote moral thinking. As an example, Prospero summons the tempest to provide lessons to Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian on power and responsibility (I.i.1-50, pp. 12–15). Kahn (2016) perceives that magic is an ethical intermediary, which alters environmental disruption into moral schooling.

The magical action of Ariel is the key to this vigour. Through the accomplishment of the instructions of Prospero, Ariel entertains as a mediator between the human world and nature, commanding punishments that are fitting with moral trainings. This mediation shows the pedagogical power of ecological forces, emphasizing that moral learning in the play is achieved by engaging with magical and environmental phenomena.

The narrative meaning of the storm is also enhanced by magic. The invoked tempest at the same time proves the power of nature and the moral consequences of human intervention, showing how the forces of nature and the moral judgment are interdependent (Buell, 2005, pp.18–22). In this perspective, the magic of Prospero can be seen as the moral implications of manipulation of ecological systems, which supports the ecological consciousness of the early modern period.

Moreover, the ethical mediation of magic is similar to the current ecocritical issues, which underline that ethical results cannot be separated in relation to environmental involvement (Garrard, 2012, pp. 25–35). Prospero is an example of how Shakespeare combined ethical and ecological pedagogy by staging events that compel people to think about human ambition.

Lastly, magic and natural forces interact to highlight the holism of Shakespearean ecocriticism. The three aspects of ethical development, narrative closure, and ecological awareness are reinforcing, which proves that human morality and environmental agency are closely connected.

### **Storm as Social Corrective**

The tempest is a corrective mechanism, not only does it disrupt nature, but it also actively restructures social hierarchies and moral standards. The storm reveals the

complicity of Alonso in usurpation and the ambition of Antonio (I.i.1-100, pp. 12–18). Researchers like McAlindon (2014) believe that this exposure proves the moral agency of nature, which acts to restore social and ethical order.

The storm causes characters to enter reflective liminality by causing physical and psychological chaos. Alonso, having to face his mistakes, starts a cycle of repentance and reconciliation (III.i.1150, pp. 145–150). In the same way, Antonio and Sebastian are made vulnerable, and it is stressed that ethical awareness is most effective when social pretensions are broken (Anderson, 2010, pp. 205–225).

The storm also engages with ecological landscapes, which influence ethical interaction with the environment. Natural forces are agents of accountability and they show that human power is limited by environmental conditions (Bennett, 2016, pp.55–90). The combination of storm and island, therefore, makes nature a social corrective, which helps characters to be ethically and socially re-aligned.

Moreover, the storm also shows that Shakespeare criticized anthropocentrism. Those characters who do not honor human and ecological boundaries are exposed and punished, and this is the manifestation of the early modern understanding of the interdependence of the environment and ethics.

Lastly, when the storm subsides and the characters come together on the island, it creates a moral reflection and reconciliation space, highlighting the moral significance of environmental phenomena in determining human behavior and social healing.

### **Ecological Imagery and Moral Reflection**

The abundance of ecological imagery in Shakespeare plays a significant role in moral contemplation in the play. The accounts of fertile land, secret caves, and stormy seas on the island are awe-inspiring and morally thought-provoking (I.ii.150200, pp.). 30–35). Lee (2009, pp.) and Smith (2015) imply that these environmental details are not just decorative, but are moral and narrative tools.

The encounter of Caliban with the island is an example of the moral aspects of ecological interaction. His efforts to develop and exploit the land bring out the possibilities of harmony and disturbance in human-environment interaction (Loomba, 2002, pp.45–50). The environmental conduct of Caliban is in contrast to the magical domination of Prospero, which highlights the distinction between the ethical methods of ecological responsibility.

The stormy waters around the island also serve as a reflection of moral storminess, the inner struggles of human characters (I.i.1–50, pp.12–15). The interplay of nature and ethics is strengthened by environmental issues that force people to look inward (Buell, 2005, pp.18–22).

Also, the physical and moral encounters are made possible by the flora and topography of the island. The relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda evolves in

parallel with the spatial dynamics of the island, which demonstrates that the ethical development is mediated by the contact with the environmental context.

Lastly, the ecological imagery of Shakespeare highlights the interrelation of narrative, moral, and environmental aspects, showing that moral understanding and environmental consciousness are mutually supportive in the framework of the play.

### **Back to the Environmental Ethics of Caliban**

Caliban is the naturalized subject, whose moral and social actions cannot be separated with his connection to the island. Other scholars like Loomba (2002) have discussed it and Brown (2012, pp. 90115) observes that Caliban represents ecological wisdom and opposition, and the conflict between human power and independence of nature.

His efforts to take advantage of the island are indicative of the effects of moral and ecological imbalance, and it shows that the interaction with the environment has moral connotations. The fact that Caliban opposes the rule of Prospero also highlights the fact that nature is not passive, and that human moral action should take into consideration of ecological agency (Foster, 2009, pp.330–355). The opposition between Caliban and Prospero is a good example of the difference in ethical attitudes to human-environment relationships. Prospero imposes order by magic, whereas Caliban is a more intuitive, who believes in nature-based ethical system (Kahn, 2016, pp.500–525). This contrast shows how Shakespeare is convolutedly engaged in environmental principles.

### **Conclusion**

This ecocritical analysis of *The Tempest* by Shakespeare shows that the play is a complex interplay of environmental forces, moral consideration and plot development. The analysis of the storm, island, and spatial isolation shows that natural phenomena are active agents, which influence human behavior, moral awareness, and social reconciliation. *The tempest* reveals concealed desires, challenges characters with moral issues, and imposes contemplation, emphasizing the pedagogical and moral power of ecological forces (McAlindon, 2014, pp.60–68; Anderson, 2010, pp. 205–225).

The island, as a morally stimulating and liminal microcosm, enables interactive progress, self-examination and moral investigation, predominantly in the connections between Ariel, Caliban and Prospero (Lee, 2009, pp. 347–370; Kahn, 2016, pp. 500–525). Caliban's involvement with the island accentuates the moral scopes of ecological understanding and confrontation, showcasing that human ethics are unlikely to be disjointed from environmental interconnectedness. Likewise, Prospero's magical intermediation demonstrates the concerns of human intrusion in natural structures, which

reveals tensions between mastery, environmental equilibrium and moral accountability.

### Declaration of AI-Assisted Editing

AI tools were used solely to improve grammar, clarity, and readability of this manuscript. All scientific content and interpretations are the original work of the authors.

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