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A Study of the Revenge Theme in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with Psychoanalytical Exploration of the Character of Caliban

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Abstract:

The Tempest has brought a tempest regarding its genre among the Critics and Researchers as in its first appearance the play is a Comedy, but in reality it has been feathered with genres like Pastoral Romance and Italian Pastoral Comedy. In the play revenge theme is played sophisticatedly and sweetly, and the revengers are seen with the weapons harmful to none. They are invisibly present in the field of retaliatory actions. No bloodshed takes place here and the enemies are going through a process of interrogation and self introspection. Desire for retribution results in joyous harmony. Again Caliban is presented in the play with all the energy striving to mitigate the hunger for sex and to quench the thirst for power in every possible way. This article is trying to justify *The Tempest* as sweet revenge comedy and to catch up the behaviors of Caliban to find if he is a reflection of Freudian Id.

Keywords: Sweet revenge comedy, Caliban, sexual hunger, Freudian Id

Introduction:

William Shakespeare was born to acquire enviable popularity as a poet and dramatist. He set off his adventure in the world of English Literature with the familiarity of an 'upstart crow'. But, between the dusk of 16th century and the dawn of 17th century he was widely recognized as the bard of Avon and the master of both comedy and tragedy. His versatile genius was appreciated in Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598): "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage." According to Dover Wilson, in the canon of Shakespeare thirty seven plays are recorded. Fifteen of them are Comedies. Shakespeare arrived on the stage of Elizabethan theatre as a Comedy playwright with his *Comedy of Errors*(1592-93) and bid farewell to the stage with *The Tempest* (1611-12). So, *The Tempest* is the last Comedy of Shakespeare. A comedy is a form of play which concentrates on love, marriage, union, celebration, wit and humour including happy ending. Though *The Tempest* is categorized as Comedy in the First Folio, the revenge theme has been played here in different tunes adding a new flavor to the almost much used theme.

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Shakespeare who first learned the craft from a very popular Elizabethan model Seneca explored and internalized the techniques of the Roman playwright in plays like *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III*. He also pursued the revenge theme in *Hamlet* indebted to a great extent to Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and a less known and debated play *Ur-Hamlet*. But, he focused a new light on the same theme towards the end of his dramatic career in *The Tempest*. It neither has the elements of horror popularized in blood and thunder tragedy of Seneca, nor does it have a prolonged procrastinated pursued of the revenge desire ending with sudden impulsive actions. It focuses on the restoration of order and normalcy inseparable from a joyous celebration of life through a very constructive kind of revenge. The play is a comedy because there is the romantic love between Ferdinand and Miranda, the union between two brothers, and humour producing Stephano-Trinculo episode. In this so called comedy Caliban is the servant of magician Prospero in an island. He is half human, half brute. Prof Wilson has observed him as 'Shakespeare's portrait of the missing link'- a type of 'pre-Darwinian realization of the intermediate link between brute and man.' He is the embodiment of Freudian component of human psyche i.e. Id. He is the fleshly version of whatever is evil and unsocial.

***The Tempest* as sweet revenge comedy:**

The Tempest is not just Shakespeare's Comedy, but sweet revenge comedy. A sweet revenge comedy is by definition a

comedy which represents revenge with lesser intensity as chief motive besides love, marriage and humour and ends with delightful unity. It includes the features mentioned below-

- i. Its chief motive is revenge-feeble and 'sweet revenge'.
- ii. No murder, bloodshed and not even death take place.
- iii. Romantic love and union become the two ventricles of the play.
- iv. Humour producing episode by the clown character
- v. Delightful ending

The Tempest with nine Scenes is one of the shortest plays by Shakespeare. In the play feeble and 'sweet revenge' is visualized as central drive. There are two revenges in the form of Prospero and Caliban. Prospero, who is living in an island with his daughter Miranda, takes revenge against his brother Antonio who dethroned him, usurped the throne of Milan and threw him away from his dukedom to a boat in dangerous sea. He has also revenged against Alonso who made a conspiracy with Antonio for dethroning him. On the other hand, Caliban, son of witch Sycorax is trying to revenge against Prospero who disowned him from being the 'possessor of the island' and made him his servant.

The play begins with the revenge taken by Prospero upon Antonio in the middle of the sea as Antonio along with crew members is struggling to survive

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being severely attacked by a storm that Prospero's magic has created:

Miranda: If by your art, my dearest father, you have/ put the wild waters in this roar, allay them. (Act I, Scene ii, 7)

They are screaming and shouting for help and trying to prevent the ship from being drowned. They are in the quagmire of distress. But, the intensity of the revenge is too weak to harm anyone as Prospero assures Miranda who is agitated with doleful eyes at the sight of the 'poor souls' on the deck: "Be collected:/ No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart/ There's no harm done."(Act I, Scene ii, 8) Revenge is in progress in a very sophisticated way. Prospero has separated father and son (Alonso and Ferdinand) from each other with the help of Ariel after shipwreck.

Ariel: [...] In troops I have dispersed them 'bout the isle./ The king's son have I landed by himself.

(Act I, Scene ii, 15)

Again, a banquet is arranged for Alonso and his companions and Sebastian asks politely 'Will't please you taste of what is here?'(Act iii, Scene iii, 56). They are ready to eat and at that juncture food is taken away to make them more hungry as a part of revenge. But, they are not to be

killed rather their agony will be doubled as Ariel informs-"do pronounce by me /Ling'ring perdition, worse than any death" (Act iii, Scene iii, 57).

Marriage is used as a weapon by Prospero for revenge. He has been sharpening the marriage tool since the first encounter between Ferdinand and Miranda in the island. He has allowed them to come in close contact with each other gradually. From a distance he has witnessed them expressing their love for one another. And soon after he has hailed this as 'Fair encounter/ Of two most rare affections' and blessed them saying 'Heavens rain grace/On that which breeds between 'em.'(Act iii,Scene I, 48) He is also pleased with the development of the love affair between Ferdinand and his beloved daughter Miranda as he has uttered 'So glad of this as they I cannot be,/ Who are surprised withal, but my rejoicing/ At nothing can be more'(Act iii, Scene I, 49).He throws the physically harmless weapon i.e marriage in Act iv, Scene I aiming at Alonso as he hands over his daughter to Ferdinand, the son of Alonso saying that 'Then as my gift, and thine own acquisition/ Worthly purchased, take my daughter.' and it hurts Alonso, the father of Ferdinand without bloodshed when Alonso finds his son Ferdinand absorbed in playing Chess with Miranda, the daughter of Prospero against whom he once made a conspiracy. The weapon penetrates into the heart of Alonso not shedding a drop of blood and not even causing his death when

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he comes to know from Prospero about their wedlock:

Prospero: [...] so to Naples,/ where I have hope to see the nuptial/ of these our dear-below'd solemnized; (Act v, Scene I, 81)

Prospero is non-violent revenger. He remained physically absent when revenge was being taken. He had only dictated Ariel, his principal servant about how to treat his enemies as he has asked him if he has performed what was ordered:

Prospero: Hast thou, spirit, /Performed to point the tempest that I bade thee? (Act I, Scene ii,14)

No face to face battle or murder has taken place. Though there is shipwreck as a form of revenge, no death is reported; the ship exists with its unchanged shape. Nobody is lost. Alonso gets back his son who was thought to be dead. Sailors are also alive. It is interesting to note that the revenger is concerned about the safety of revengee (the person against whom revenge is taken):

Prospero: But are they, Ariel, safe? (Act I, Scene ii, 15)

And Ariel assures him that “Not a hair perished./ On their sustaining garments not a blemish,/ But fresher than before;” (Act I, Scene ii,15) So, it is a revenge without bloodshed- a hide and seek revenge, a sophisticated revenge by Prospero.

Caliban is the Hamlet of *The Tempest* on account of his role as a revenger. He can't wound Prospero, his

master physically rather uses abusive language against him and curses him as a part of revenge:

Caliban: As wicked dew as e'er my mother brushed

With raven's feather from unwholesome fen

Drop on you both! A southwest blow on ye,

And blister you all o'er! (Act I, Scene ii,20)

Caliban : All the infections that the sun sucks up

From bogs, fens, flats, on Prospero fall, and make him

By inch-meal a disease! (Act ii, Scene ii, 39)

Caliban mistakes Stephano as God and makes conspiracy with him against Prospero. But,the revenger himself is helpless and afraid of the magic art of Prospero as he has said-

Caliban: No, pray thee.

[Aside] I must obey. His art is of such power,

It would control my danm's god Setebos,

And make a vassal of him.(Act i, Scene ii,22)

His mind is crowded with the thoughts of how and when to approach with the

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intention of murdering Prospero, but lacks the courage of execution by himself. And that's why, he hires Stephano as a murderer in exchange of his life-long service to him as his servant. He turns himself into a guide to him and pours the ideas in him:

Caliban: Why, as I told the,
'tis a custom with him

I'th' afternoon to
sleep. There thou mayst
brain him,

Having first seized
his books; or with a log

Batter his skull, or
paunch him with a stake,

Or cut his weasand
with thy knife. Remember

First to possess his
books, for without them

He's but a sot, as I
am, nor hath not

One spirit to
command. (Act iii, Scene ii,
52)

But, all the conspiracy is proved to be vain as Ariel binds them with a spell and entices them into a dirty pond. So, once again revenge by Caliban brings no direct attack, bloodshed and death.

If Prospero's revenge and Caliban's revenge are the left and right atrium of *The Tempest*, romantic love and union are the left and right ventricle of *The Tempest*. At

the first sight Ferdinand falls in love with Miranda and vice versa:

Ferdinand : O, if a virgin,

And your
affection not gone forth, I'll
make you

The queen of
Naples. (Act I, Scene ii, 24)

Miranda: My affections

Are then most
humble. I have no ambition

To see a goodlier man.
(Act I, Scene ii, 26)

The romantic love relationship that was born in Act I, Scene ii gets its maturity in Act iii, Scene i. Miranda can't tolerate the miserable sight that her fiancé is carrying logs. She wants to take the burden on her own shoulder as she says " pray give me that;/ I'll carry it to the pile." (Act iii, Scene I, 46)She has lost in the love of Ferdinand; she is elated to have him as her companion and is unwilling to imagine a figure as her lover other than him as she says " I would not wish/ any companion in the world but you,/ Nor can imagination form a shape/ Besides yourself, to like of." (Act iii, Scene I, 47)On the other hand, Ferdinand finds happiness everywhere and everytime in her company: " 'tis fresh morning with me/ When you are by at night." (Act iii, Scene I, 46)On hearing Ferdinand's disclosure of love for her- "...I/ beyond all limit of what else I' th' world,/ Do love, prize, honour

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you.” (Act iii, Scene I, 48) tears come down on her cheeks and then they promise to be married placing their hands upon one another:

Ferdinand: Ay, with a heart has willing/As bondage e'er of freedom. Here's my hand.

Miranda: And mine, with my heart in't. (Act iii, Scene I, 48,49)

The play ends with the union of two brothers Antonio and Prospero who were separated from each other for twelve years. And Prospero announces that a marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda is going to be celebrated in Naples. Again humour which is the part and parcel of Comedy is presented 'by the behavior of Trinculo and Caliban- Trinculo creeping under his gabardine and Caliban shivering all the time in fear taking Trinculo to be a spirit till at last Stephano drags Trinculo out by his leg.' (Sen 36)

Psychoanalytical exploration of the character of Caliban:

The parental identity of Psychoanalysis is Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. He made a surgical operation on human psyche and there he found three different components: Id, Ego, and Superego. According to him, Id is 'the source of all psychic energy'. Freud opined that Id is guided by pleasure principle, Ego is guided by reality principle and Superego is controlled by principle of conscience. Therefore, what Sigmund Freud has termed as Id as a part of human psyche in 20th

century William Shakespeare represented it in the form of Caliban in his play *The Tempest* in 16th century. Freud's Id remains absent from the consciousness; it is unconscious. In this area all the primitive desires- 'desire for power, for sex, for amusement, for food without an eye to consequences'(Critical theory today 25) originate. That is to say, it is blind to reality while driving to immediate gratification of those physical desires. Shakespeare gave a fleshly version of that Freudian Id i.e. Caliban. He is visible unlike Freudian Id. In the character of Caliban endeavors to fulfill those pleasures are seen. He has attempted to molest Prospero's daughter Miranda and Prospero complains against him saying "till thou didst seek to violate / The honour of my child." (Act I, Scene ii, 21) This attempt is done for the fulfillment of the desire for sex. But, before or during his effort he never thought of the result of his action. Here, like Id he has acted according to pleasure principle. Again, Caliban considers himself as the true successor of the island. His words clarify that he had the aspiration of being the owner of the island but gets cheated by Prospero: "As I told thee before, I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island." (Act iii, Scene ii, 50) So, he is the representative of desire for power. And pleasure principle has driven visible Id i.e. Caliban immediately for the satisfaction of the desire for power as Caliban chooses Stephano as a murderer of Prospero as soon as he meets

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them(Stephano and Trinculo) and executes them in the process.

Prospero is powermonger, tyrannical ruler, practitioner of power and magic. He has deprived Caliban of his Island by magic art and thereby, he is turned to be an usurper. He exercises his power over all the spirits of earth, water, fire and air. He is a tyrannical master to Ariel and especially to Caliban. When Ariel reminded him of his promise “thou did promise to bate me a full year”, he replied angrily “ If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak/ And peg thee in his knotty entrails till/ Thou hast howled away twelve winters.” (Act I, Scene ii, 18)He is more cruel to Caliban whenever he is disobedient to him: “ If thou neglect’st, or dost unwillingly/ What I command, I’ll rack thee with old cramps,/ Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,/ That beasts shall tremble at thy din.”(Act I, Scene ii, 21) Even he is severe to his would be son-in-law Ferdinand as he says “ I must uneasy make,lest too light winning/ Make the prize light” (Act I, Scene ii,25) when Ferdinand at first sight proposes to make her queen of Naples. Prospero’s greed for supernatural power, tyranny and practice of magic are the bad human impulses whose material form is Caliban.

Caliban is ‘misshapen knave’ in his physical appearance. To Prospero he is ‘tortoise’. Again Trinculo addresses him as ‘a strange fish’ with human legs. That is to say, what actually he looks like is unknown to everyone. According to Coleridge, he is

‘a sort of creature of the earth, as Ariel is a sort of creature of the air.’ His behavior is proved to be beastly and malignant through his shrewish and unsocial attack on Prospero’s daughter for sex. He also attacks his master verbally in abusive language. He takes wine from Trinculo and Stephano and plots against his master to kill him. He is power hungry. His socially unacceptable wild behaviors along with his unusual appearance equalize the nature of Id. In short, Caliban is the very epitome of Freudian Id, ‘the psychological reservoir of our(human) instincts’(Tyson, 25)

Conclusion:

In the play *The Tempest* revenge is introduced in a very lighthearted way. The ways followed by Prospero like harmless shipwreck, separation between father and son and marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda to revenge against Alonso, are by the name of retaliatory action pill coated sugar. And the appointment of drunkard Stephano along with Trinculo by Caliban and their approach for murdering Prospero is ridiculous one. The play from beginning to the end rides on feeble revenge in the accompaniment of humour, love and union. So, *The Tempest* as sweet revenge comedy is perfect and justified. On the other hand, Caliban stands for aggressive and sex based drives of human. His each and every action is marked by pleasure principle. So, Shakespeare is successful in making Caliban a concrete version of Freudian Id. Caliban has become the very synonym of Id.

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