

# Patriarchal Ideologies and Traditional Gender Roles in William Shakespeare's Play *The Tempest*

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## Abstract

*The paper delves into William Shakespeare's portrayal of patriarchy, gender inequality, and the subjugation of women in his play *The Tempest* which promotes patriarchal ideologies to a great extent. It attempts to highlight the traditional patriarchal norms evident through Prospero's exertion of control over his daughter, Miranda. It also investigates why the best attributes of women of the Elizabethan period are their physical beauty, chastity and obedience. The study again examines the illustration of women as 'the other' and objects of male gaze and lustful desire as well as pawns for men in terms of attaining personal ambitions and objectives. It tries to explore the commodification of women, their lack of agency, their silence, vulnerability and their passive existence owing to male supremacy, societal expectations, and patriarchal views. Grounded in the theory of feminism, this qualitative research aims to achieve its intended objectives. The primary data for this study is sourced from William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* and is further supplemented by additional information obtained from reliable secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** Patriarchal Ideologies, Gender Roles, Commodification of Women, Male Supremacy, The Second Sex

## Introduction

*The Tempest*, a famous romantic comedy, is considered often by many as the last play written by William Shakespeare (Snider 197). It effectively reflects the patriarchal standards prevalent during his time in England. It depicts women as either possessions of men or objects of sexual desire. In this play, women are delineated as 'the other' or 'the second sex', expected to conform to societal obligations and expectations dictated by men. Patriarchy 'is based on a male-centred worldview and it works to subordinate, marginalise, and interiorize women in all fields' (Sen and Das 21). Shakespeare throws light on the popular patriarchal belief that a woman's sacred responsibility is only to protect her chastity and virginity for her lawful spouse and execute gender-specific tasks assigned to her by men. The play exemplifies the features closely associated with the concept of ideal woman within the contemporary Shakespearean society. These traits underscore the entrenched notion of female inferiority in a patriarchal system where men exercise ownership over women, rendering them far from equal. The play serves as a flagbearer of patriarchy and toxic masculinity. It also promotes women who are silent, tame, and marginalised. It denies their autonomous identity and their rightful opportunity to express themselves, rendering them instead as prized possessions for men to brag about and share.

Shakespeare's limited incorporation of robust female characters might be perceived as a conscious decision to maintain patriarchal authority and reinforce gender bias. Within the play, Miranda stands as the sole prominent female figure, embodying the conventional ideal of womanhood in Elizabethan society.

Miranda's subservience to her father, Prospero, the Duke of Milan, is clearly evident throughout, as she is seen listening to his speeches very obediently and following his directives properly. There are actually some secondary female characters in *The Tempest* such as Sycorax, Caliban's mother, Prospero's mother, Miranda's mother, and Alonso's daughter named Claribel. They remain peripheral and unexplored. They are completely absent physically, leaving a minimal impact on the narrative, acknowledged only briefly by male characters in passing remarks. The present study explores William Shakespeare's portrayal of male authority, societal biases, men-women relationships, and gender discrepancies by exposing traditional patriarchal ideologies through Prospero's complete dominance and influence over Miranda and the absence of formidable female figures in *The Tempest*. Additionally, it delineates the objectification and othering of women in a patriarchal society in terms of their interactions with men. Moreover, it underscores the expectation for women to possess physical beauty, maintain virginity, and uphold moral virtues to be deemed ideal Elizabethan women. Therefore, a deliberate attempt is made to scrutinise the objectification and exploitation of women, their lack of agency, and their susceptibility stemming from traditional patriarchal beliefs, social limitations, and toxic masculinity by deciphering *The Tempest* through the lens of feminism.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The article primarily deals with three major objectives. They are outlined as follows—

1. To assess how William Shakespeare portrays women in *The Tempest* as marginalised entities, relegated to the status of 'the other'.
2. To investigate the deliberate exclusion of strong female characters within the narrative as a strategic mechanism aimed at advancing patriarchal values, sustaining gender imbalances, and reinforcing male hegemony.
3. To unveil the presence of patriarchal beliefs and entrenched gender roles throughout the play, especially regarding the dynamics between genders, the construction of an idealised feminine archetype with prescribed attributes, and the depiction of women as vulnerable, objectified beings devoid of autonomy and agency.

### **Review of Literature**

*The Tempest*, written about 1611, is a tragicomedy that undoubtedly exposes women's marginalised status as 'the other' during the contemporary Elizabethan era in England through his portrayal of female characters and their suffering, vulnerability, objectification, and their lack of expression and agency. Shakespeare depicts Prospero, a white European male figure, as the play's central character who is an epitome of colonial mentality, and a flagbearer of patriarchy. After being illegally usurped from his position as the Duke of Milan by his own brother, Antonio and Alonso, the King of Naples; he along with his daughter, Miranda lands on the island of Sycorax and establishes his supremacy over Sycorax's son, Caliban, forcing him into servitude, despite the fact that Caliban is the rightful owner of the island, by using his magic spells to gain custody of the island and its natural resources. Shakespeare also demonstrates the existence of sexism, bias, misogyny, and blatant inequalities between men and women as the by-product of patriarchal ideologies and traditional gender roles through the interactions, and relationship/s between the male and female characters and their respective behaviours. Riyad Abdurahman Manqoush examines the play from a feminist perspective, revealing not only Shakespeare's views towards women, their emotional and subservient nature but also their treatment as lesser beings or inferior ones in Elizabethan English society, particularly in relation to men. He addresses that the play has an obvious manifestation of patriarchal ideology and concludes that '*The Tempest* is loaded with misogyny which stands beyond marginalizing the female characters' (Manqoush 393). Shakespeare's representation of women is nothing but stereotyped and hackneyed as women like Miranda, Sycorax, and Claribel are primarily evaluated by male figures based on their bodily attributes, morality, virginity, and suitability for new political coalitions. Besides, women have to undergo men's gaze, verbal abuse, racial taunt, and criticism. Ann Thompson in 'Miranda, Where's Your Sister?: Reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*' offers a feminist analysis of the play, emphasising the conspicuous absence of female characters. She attempts to scrutinise the concept of femininity in *The*

*Tempest* that hardly acknowledges the significance and existence of strong female characters but ‘attributes enormous power to female chastity and fertility’ (Thompson 173). The main focus on the aspects of female chastity and fertility instead of their personality and way of thinking serves to reinforce patriarchal dominance. Sofia Muñoz Valdivieso comments that as a dependent and subordinate woman, Miranda’s role is both paradoxical and vital for the dynamics of power and the developments of the events in *The Tempest* (Valdivieso 302). Regarding the character of Miranda, Lorie Jerrell Leininger notes that Miranda is ‘deprived of any possibility of human freedom, growth, or thought’ (Leininger 291) because she is dominated and used as a commodity by Prospero for his personal objectives. However, she is given a limited amount of power as well as a voice that she uses against Caliban to frighten him. It reinforces Jessica Slights’ claim that Miranda acts as ‘an emblem of a colonialist ruling class’ (Slights 357). Miranda is portrayed as naive and emotional in the play. She is a victim of double erasure in the play.

Ania Loomba, a postcolonial feminist critic, examines how colonial and patriarchal ideals influence and constrain the portrayal of women. She is most known for her critical analysis of Shakespeare’s plays, where she investigates the portrayal of female characters and the broader ramifications of these portrayals in colonial and patriarchal contexts. She gives a lot of attention to the character of Sycorax upon her closer examination of *The Tempest* who simply exists on the accounts of other male characters and labels her as the counterpart to Miranda. According to her, Sycorax’s race defines her sexual or gender identity and for this reason, Prospero uses derogatory remarks and racial slurs to address Sycorax and to threaten Caliban and Ariel as a way to exert power and legalise his illegal takeover of the island. She contemplates that ‘Prospero as colonialist consolidates power which is specifically white and male, and constructs Sycorax as a black, wayward and wicked witch in order to legitimise it’ (Loomba 152). As a white patriarch, Prospero criticises the rule of Sycorax and her witchcraft. Stephen Orgel notes that for Prospero, Sycorax ‘embodies to an extreme degree all the negative assumptions about women’ (Orgel 5). She exists mainly as an idea

instead of an entity to counter Prospero and his masculinity. Prospero’s gendered insults, use of sexist language and outbursts aim to demonise her, revealing his deep-seated fear, anxiety, and disdain for women in positions of power. Brittney Blystone in her paper looks into the potential reasons for Sycorax’s absence from the perspectives of gender and power; and denotes that ‘Because of Sycorax’s absence, she and Prospero become the extreme opposites of power and gender in *The Tempest*’ (Blystone 81). To Prospero, Sycorax is a constant threat and represents all that reflects anti-patriarchal ideals and may resist patriarchy to create a space for greater female autonomy. While numerous scholarly articles have been written on William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, most of them explore the play from a postcolonial perspective, examining the dynamics between the European colonists and the colonised. However, some researchers have also analysed the play through a feminist lens, primarily focusing on either Miranda or Sycorax. This existing coverage is not adequate at all. That is why the current study aims to address this gap by examining all the female characters: Sycorax, Claribel, Miranda, and her mother. It highlights Shakespeare’s exclusion of strong female characters to perpetuate gender disparity and patriarchal ideologies. Additionally, it uncovers Shakespeare’s creation of an idealised feminine archetype with specific attributes and the representation of women’s objectified and marginalised condition in a patriarchal society during the Elizabethan era in England.

### **Methodology**

The article employs a qualitative research approach and uses the theory of feminism as its theoretical ground to meet its proposed objectives. Through a comprehensive textual interpretation of William Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, the study uncovers how the scarcity of female characters perpetuates patriarchal power dynamics and traditional gender roles. Additionally, it elucidates the objectification of women as the weaker sex and non-essential entities in their interactions with men, exposing societal expectations, limitations, and patriarchal ideologies that dictate women’s choices, and actions as well as judge their value based on

their beauty and moral virtue. The analysis of the current study is reinforced by incorporating data from secondary sources.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Feminism is a concept or movement that calls for equality and wants to improve the subjugated state of women by highlighting the causes and effects of their vulnerability in a patriarchal society. Javeed Ahmad Raina associates 'feminism' with a broad spectrum of political movements, ideologies, and social initiatives that 'share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes' (Raina 3372). Clarence Lewis Barnhart and Robert K. Barnhart outline the term 'feminism' as 'the doctrine that favours more rights and activities for women in their economic, social, political and private lives' (Barnhart and Barnhart 784). It aims at putting an end to all sorts of sexual exploitation, sexist ideologies, stereotyped gender roles, and inequalities by empowering women and creating opportunities for them in society. Therefore, feminism can be dubbed as a social movement that delves into the examination of women's roles and statuses within the specific cultural frameworks they inhabit (Banks 1). Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* defines 'feminism' as a 'system of political, economic and social equality between sexes' (Millett 74). It advocates for equality for women in all sectors. Estelle B. Freedman in her book *The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* records that 'feminism is a social movement that tries to achieve political equality between men and women, with the understanding that gender always intersects with others on social hierarchies' (Freedman 24). Its main objective is to end the sexist exploitation of women who are treated as passive objects in a patriarchal society. In her celebrated work called *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir discusses her idea of womanhood, equating it with being perceived as 'the Other' and cites the Aristotelian perspective of woman which is 'The female is a female only by virtue of a certain lack of qualities' (Beauvoir 25). She also critiques patriarchal societies for suppressing women and argues that womanhood is not an inherent trait but rather a societal construct that individuals adopt as they mature. Girls are

steered toward the path of womanhood as they grow up, with their autonomy restricted and their identities shaped by their upbringing within a world defined by men. At times, they also act as the carrier of these ideologies consciously or subconsciously. Women of the subaltern suffer more as they go through the process of double-colonisation. They are always marginalised and categorised as the second sex. They are vulnerable to various kinds of abuse and mistreatment. Their bodies are used to evoke either voyeuristic pleasures or sexual feelings for men. This present study sheds light on how patriarchy, women's proneness, and stereotypical gender roles are portrayed in *The Tempest* from a feminist perspective.

### **Textual Analysis**

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reflects an Elizabethan society where women lack autonomy, freedom of choice, and individuality. The play illustrates the dominance of patriarchal norms, emphasising a woman's worth through her purity. The sparse presence of female characters suggests men's perceptions of women's roles and gender bias. Traditional gender stereotypes sketch men as strong, independent, rational, protective and decisive, while women are seen as emotional, dependent, nurturing, defenseless and submissive. Through Prospero's control over his daughter Miranda, William Shakespeare substantiates traditional gender norms. He is a prime example of an alpha male driven by patriarchal ideologies. As a patriarchal figure, he dictates every aspect of Miranda's life, including her feelings for Ferdinand, her personality, and sexual orientation. Miranda listens to his long tale of exposition and obediently follows her father's commands, reflecting her subordination. She is portrayed as an object, valued for her compliance, virtue, and beauty whereas Prospero occupies the role of the self, the subject. Shakespeare presents Miranda as the quintessential obedient woman of the era and epitome of virtue, reinforcing societal expectations of submission and deference to male authority.

In *The Tempest*, Miranda's assigned gender role and physical appearance contribute to her perceived inferiority to men. She is often objectified due

to her beauty, being likened to a goddess by male characters like Ferdinand and Alonso. Throughout the play, she is treated more as a sexual object than an individual, largely defined by her relationship with others, particularly her father, Prospero. Shakespeare uses the character of Miranda to manifest the limited roles and power dynamics for women during his time, reflecting the societal system and values of the Elizabethan era. Miranda's lack of autonomy in respect of choosing her own path, actions, or even her life partner underscores the oppressive nature of patriarchal society. Ultimately, she serves as a pawn for Prospero's ambitions as well as to achieve his greater superiority rather than being regarded as an independent entity. Miranda's portrayal to a great extent echoes the theme of 'the other' explored by French feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir in her famous work *The Second Sex*, demonstrating women as subordinate and inferior to men in a male-dominated world. Miranda embodies the ideal woman of Elizabethan society, characterised as beautiful, naive, and innocent, akin to a goddess. Her virginity further aligns her with this ideal, as seen in Ferdinand's immediate interest in marrying her contingent upon her virginity. Ferdinand's emphasis on Miranda's virginity underlines its utmost importance to him, as he seeks confirmation whether she is human, maiden and pure as prerequisites for his affection towards her. Ferdinand says, 'O, if a virgin,/ And your affection not gone forth, I'll make you/ The Queen of Naples' (I.ii.447-450). Prospero's fixation on Miranda's sexuality highlights the patriarchal society's primary focus on female virtue. Her purity dictates her prospects, rendering her objectified and reliant on others. Prospero sternly warns Ferdinand that any violation of Miranda's chastity before marriage will incur his severe disapproval and potentially lead to a barren and unhappy union. His relentless attempt to safeguard Miranda's virginity prioritises it over her subsequent happiness, supplementing the notion that a woman's ultimate worth is tied to her sexual innocence. Miranda's virginity becomes a commodity subject to male control, rather than her own choice or preference. Within patriarchal frameworks, her sexual agency is restricted, determined by men's expectations and desires regarding her purity. Prospero's actions

seek to align Miranda's virginity with his own values and beliefs. She lacks the authority to inform Ferdinand of her innocence because it's not within her rights to choose her own husband. Her father, Prospero, holds that prerogative. He treats her as a doll, a valued possession, referring to her as 'the prize' and not only directing but also influencing her actions without her consent. Miranda is conditioned to accept her assigned roles as a woman and obeys Prospero's commands unquestioningly. This sort of patriarchal ideology literally dehumanises women. Prospero exercises his power and magical aura to sustain control over every aspect of her life, from her speech to her marriage prospects and education. Additionally, he manipulates Miranda to serve his own agenda of reclaiming his kingdom.

Miranda's representation in the play mirrors the plight of the thousands of women in reality. She is well-behaved and obedient, and accepts his imposition on her life. Despite this, Miranda loves Ferdinand from the bottom of her heart and empathises with his suffering when Prospero unjustly locks him up in the cell and forces him to undergo arduous tasks such as gathering firewood from the forest for Prospero's use. Miranda offers to alleviate his burden by carrying logs for him so that he can sit down and take some rest. In a male dominated society, men are the heads and the masters whereas the women are the tails and the mistresses. They solely belong to their husbands or their fathers and have some certain duties towards them. Ferdinand regards Miranda as his mistress and implies, 'The very instant that I saw you did/My heart fly to your service, there resides/ To make me slave to it. And for your sake/Am I this patient log-man' (III.i.64-67). *The Tempest* portrays the women as fragile and pathetic beings who struggle to assert themselves and express their opinions. Miranda is compelled to adhere to the societal expectations imposed on her gender. Despite her father's warnings, she develops sincere feelings for Ferdinand and defies his counsel to be in his presence. She desires to marry him. She is a paragon of exceptional beauty and virtue. She utters, 'I am your wife, if you will marry me;/ If not, I'll die your maid. To be your fellow/You may deny me, but I'll be your servant/Whether you will or no' (III.i.83-86). Miranda wants to spend her whole



life in his blissful company. Her love is enduring and steadfast. She does not hesitate to express her willingness to serve him as a maid if he chooses not to marry her. From a feminist perspective, Miranda's eagerness to become Ferdinand's maidservant reflects the societal pressures on women to prioritise male companionship and conform to male domination. Her offer may arise from internalised patriarchal norms finalising women's validity in terms of their relationships with men. Miranda's declaration promotes the idea that women's value is often defined by their ability to meet traditional gender roles of servitude and obedience to men. Her choice may also be seen as the byproduct of her limited worldview. Miranda is unaware that she is essentially shifting from being under Prospero's guardianship and protection to being under Ferdinand's like a doll or a plaything. This portrayal underlines the constraints imposed on women within patriarchal societies, where gender norms and social expectations curb their choices and aspirations. Besides, Ferdinand's character is also influenced by traditional gender roles in the play. As a prince, he is supposed to show courage, nobility, and honour. His initial attraction to Miranda and determination to demonstrate his value by undertaking menial tasks at Prospero's request exemplify the chivalric ideals of courtly love and masculine duty. Prospero enforces strict rules and regulations on Miranda's interactions with Ferdinand, but she pleads with him not to harm Ferdinand. Despite obediently following Prospero's commands, Miranda secretly defies him out of compassion and love for Ferdinand, fearing the consequences of her disobedience. Prospero observes their clandestine meeting and is unsettled by Miranda's defiance, yet desires their affection and sees himself as the orchestrator of their relationship. He envisions Miranda as the queen of Naples and believes Ferdinand's marriage to her is essential for reconciling with Alonso. Prospero tests Ferdinand's love for Miranda through imprisonment and punishment, making their union appear challenging. Any deviation from the patriarchal line results in harsh punishment from Prospero, similar to how he treats Ariel and Caliban. He uses derogatory terms like 'my foot', 'wench' when Miranda attempts to break the patriarchal norms and challenges his

authority. Prospero asserts his authority over her as both her father and the ruler of the exotic island. Miranda is well aware of her position as a woman in the play. Even though she feels sincerely attracted to Ferdinand, Prospero cunningly exploits her mental and emotional faculties to intensify her attraction and love. Prospero's obsession with obtaining a desirable marriage for Miranda emphasises the significance of lineage and the perpetuation of paternal tradition. His orchestration of Miranda's relationship with Ferdinand is a calculated attempt to reestablish his prestige and win political allies. This reflects societal expectations that women's primary roles are to marry and support familial relationships. Prospero manipulates Miranda as a mere pawn in his overarching political schemes, showcasing the pervasive theme of male dominance over women in *The Tempest*. Prospero uses his magical skills and power to ignite the passion of love between Ferdinand and Miranda.

Shakespeare uses the character of Miranda in *The Tempest* to depict the daily struggles of oppressed women in the Elizabethan era in England. Prospero arranges Miranda's marriage ceremony to Ferdinand without her input, speaking about their union in her presence as if her opinion doesn't matter at all. She is treated as a commodity traded from Prospero to Ferdinand, devoid of autonomy. Prospero's speech while blessing Miranda and Ferdinand for their impending wedding suggests that he views his daughter as his property. He tells Ferdinand, 'As my gift and thine own acquisition/Worthily purchased, take my daughter' (IV.i.13-14). Various terms such as 'gift', 'acquisition', and 'purchased' used in association with Miranda connote that she is viewed as a commodity to be exchanged from one man to another. In Prospero's perspective, Miranda's real worth is primarily tied to her purity, crucial for her politically strategic union with Ferdinand. The marriage symbolises a fresh start, a future that Prospero eagerly seeks for himself. Hence, Prospero's own fate is intertwined with Miranda's chastity, which he leverages as a form of currency. He reaps significant rewards from this association, highlighting the intricate blend of reverence and commodification surrounding Miranda's sexual purity.

Miranda receives a comprehensive education from her father but lacks practical life experience. She does not have the exposure of interacting with the opposite sex in the exotic island to form her opinions. She encounters mainly three male characters throughout the play: Prospero, Caliban, and Ferdinand. The trio of male characters in *The Tempest* symbolise various facets of masculinity, each leaving a distinct imprint on Miranda's personal journey and development. Prospero epitomises the role of a nurturing father and teacher, providing guidance and direction for her growth. Meanwhile, Caliban embodies the primal urges and complexities inherent in human nature, serving as a stark contrast to Prospero's benevolence. Lastly, Ferdinand represents the allure of romantic love and the promise of a life beyond the island's isolation, sparking hope and possibility in Miranda's heart. Through her interactions with these characters, Miranda undergoes a transformative exploration of herself and the world around her. Prospero is usurped from his position as the Duke of Milan and banished wrongfully from his own kingdom. Therefore, Miranda harbours deep affection for her father and empathises with him for his fate and struggles as he is betrayed by his own brother, Antonio with the help of Sebastian and Alonso, the King of Naples. There are no other women on the island except herself, and she has no recollection of any female presence. She tells Ferdinand, 'I do not know/One of my sex; no woman's face remember,/ Save, from my glass, mine own ; nor have I seen/More that I may call men than you, good friend,/ And my dear father' (III.i.48-52). Miranda lacks any real-life female role models and relies solely on the absent female characters and her father's instructions to learn how women should behave, dress and appear. Miranda's mother is never physically present in the play, and Prospero only mentions her once while praising her virtue. Miranda is said to closely resemble her mother, and Prospero describes his wife as a paragon of beauty and greatness as a perfect wife and an ideal woman. He informs Miranda, 'Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and/She said thou wast my daughter' (I.ii.56-57). Prospero's praise of his wife's virtue features the importance placed on virtue in women. Additionally, he also mentions his biological mother in the play,

portraying her as a woman of virtue. In patriarchal societies, a woman's calibre is often judged by her obedience and virtue, crucial qualities for being esteemed as a good wife.

*The Tempest* exposes the gender discrimination inherent in patriarchal societies, as illustrated through Miranda's character. Shakespeare highlights the marginalisation of women in society, portraying Prospero's possessive treatment of Miranda. It indicates the patriarchal stand that he is a superior being for his male identity and masculine power whereas Miranda is the inferior one. Caliban, recognizing Miranda's vulnerability, seeks revenge against Prospero by attempting to assault her, claiming rightful ownership of the island and deeming Prospero a usurper. Caliban's disregard for Prospero's authority and his targeting of Miranda reflect both Prospero's overprotective love for his daughter and Caliban's awareness of her genuine value to him. Caliban's attempted violation of Miranda's honour is a direct attack on Prospero's reputation, as a father's failure to protect his daughter's virtue undoubtedly brings great shame upon him. Susan Brownmiller, a renowned feminist writer, in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* outlines rape as 'nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear' (Brownmiller 5). Caliban is not different from other patriarchal males in this regard and wants to exercise his power and establish his authority over her female body by any means necessary. In Caliban's view, assaulting Miranda sexually is the best way to defame Prospero, secure the custody of the island, as well as bag her as his mistress. Therefore, Caliban tells Prospero, 'Wouldn't had been done!/Thus didst prevent me- I had peopled else/This isle with Calibans' (I.ii.349-351). Caliban's statement reveals his motives for his atrocious plot. He not only wants to reclaim his lost power but also seeks retribution against Prospero for enslaving him, discriminating him racially, terrorising him verbally, abusing him physically, compelling him to undergo hard labour, banishing his mother, Sycorax, from her own island, and above all, snatching away his opportunity to become the rightful authority of the island. His objective is to increase his influence on the island and make his

presence clearly felt by coercively impregnating Miranda, thus subjecting her to his carnal desires. Caliban's perspective also indicates the existence of sexism and misogyny prevalent in a male-dominated society by showcasing the objectification of women, sense of entitlement, and unequal power dynamics that contribute to gender-based violence. Prospero's treatment of Caliban and Ariel serves as a manifestation of colonial and patriarchal dominance. His absolute control over Caliban, whom he refers to as a 'savage', exemplifies the overlap of racial and patriarchal oppression, considering Caliban as naturally inferior and under his authority. Likewise, Ariel, despite receiving a certain degree of kindness, remains obligated to serve Prospero until freed, underscoring the hierarchy and control that are inherent in patriarchal systems. Caliban harbours a deep-seated hatred towards Prospero and begrudges serving him, prompting him to scheme to repossess his island. Upon encountering Stephano and Trinculo after the shipwreck, Caliban seeks their alliance. He views Stephano as a divine figure descended from heaven. He offers his services to Stephano in exchange for his patronage. They conspire to eliminate Prospero, with Caliban offering Miranda's hand in marriage to Stephano as a reward on his behalf if they succeed. Caliban eloquently describes Miranda's beauty, presenting her as a token of gratitude to Stephano should their plan to overthrow and assassinate Prospero come to fruition. Caliban tells Stephano, 'Ah, Lord, She will become thy bed, I warrant,/ And bring thee forth brave brood' (III.ii.97-98). According to Caliban's assessment of Miranda, her prime significance lies within her beauty and her potential to bear children for Stephano. He knows her physical attractiveness is valuable and uses it to lure Stephano to go after Prospero. Stephano accepts the offer and declares that they will rule the island together as king and queen after killing Prospero. Stephano tells Caliban, 'Monster, I will kill this man: His daughter and I will be king/ and queen,—save our graces!' (III.ii.99-100). Throughout the play, Miranda is viewed as nothing more than men's possession and object of sexual desire to satisfy their lust without having any agency over her own life. She lacks the freedom to express herself or to make choices independently,

akin to a puppet controlled by men in a puppet show. Whenever she tries to oppose her father or go against his directives, he uses his manipulation, persuasion, and magic spells reminding his authority over her. She ultimately accepts Prospero's guidance and authority, symbolising her dependency on him for her survival. The other female characters in the play serve mainly to highlight Miranda's status emphasising her submissive and obedient nature, particularly in her interactions with Prospero, Caliban, Ferdinand.

Claribel is a minor character in the play. She does not appear physically. She is only referenced by the other male characters. As the daughter of Alonso, the King of Naples, she falls victim to patriarchal ideology, injustice, and gender disparity depicted in the narrative. Her marriage to the King of Tunis, an African ruler, whom she doesn't favour, is cited as an indirect catalyst for the misfortunes endured by Alonso and his companions during their sea voyage. Despite her lack of involvement in the shipwreck incident, Claribel is unjustly held responsible and blamed for the shipwreck and their troubles. She is unfairly accused by the male characters and becomes a scapegoat for the disaster. During the Elizabethan era, women were relegated to subordinate roles, treated as possessions of their fathers during childhood and transferred to their husbands upon marriage. Their autonomy in determining a spouse was severely restricted, with marriages often arranged like business deals. Claribel's union with the King of Tunis is deemed undesirable, seemingly orchestrated for King Alonso's political gain. From a feminist perspective, her forced marriage is a violation of her human rights. King Alonso exerts his authority over Claribel using her marriage as a means to advance his personal agenda. Claribel's feelings are disregarded in this arrangement, despite it likely having a detrimental impact on her life and mind. She is compelled to marry against her will, highlighting the lack of autonomy that aristocratic women had in the 17th century, reduced to mere objects manipulated and exploited in the power dynamics controlled physically and psychologically by men. Despite being a small character in *The Tempest*, Claribel has a significant impact on postcolonial discourse. She personifies the gendered



and racialized dynamics of colonial power, in which women and the colonised are commodified, silenced, and erased. Her enforced silence as well as passive existence on male characters' testimonies is a reflection of the historical marginalisation of the colonised whose experiences are told and interpreted from the perspective of the colonisers. Claribel's silence serves as a metaphor for the larger stifling of colonial voices. She stands for the intersection of colonial expansion, gender, and power.

Sycorax, Caliban's mother, is a significant but absent character in *The Tempest*. She is known only through the accounts of other male characters. She serves as a dark counterpart to Prospero, representing his evil side. She is the actual owner of the island and is usurped by Prospero illegally by using his magic skills. Unlike Miranda's mother, Sycorax is depicted negatively and described extensively in misogynistic terms by Prospero such as 'a damned witch', 'a blue-eyed hag' etc. Brittney Blystone renders that by attacking Sycorax in derogatory terms like 'witch', 'whore', 'Prospero instead created the model of a powerful woman' (Blystone 81). Patriarchy and colonialism not only silence Sycorax but also erase her presence and perspective. She is described as a wicked witch, and a disobedient entity without having any virtue and class who was banished from the island for her evil deeds. It is also mentioned in the play that she obviously performed some good acts as per the directives of Prospero that led to her forgiveness. Sycorax arrives on the island carrying her child, Caliban, in her womb, conceived through an illegitimate affair with the devil named Setebos. Sycorax's expulsion from Algiers and subsequent death on the island can be interpreted as the result of a patriarchal society's desire to control and suppress powerful women, particularly those who do not conform to its norms. She stands in stark contrast to Miranda. Sycorax is ugly, vulgar, disobedient, rebellious, impure, and lacking in virtue whereas Miranda is beautiful, obedient, dutiful, virtuous, and pure. Prospero uses references to Sycorax to maintain control over Ariel when he asks for freedom from his enslavement, highlighting how men exploit women to maintain their power and achieve their desired purposes. Prospero describes Sycorax by saying, 'This damn'd witch Sycorax,/For mischiefs

manifold, and sorceries terrible/To enter human hearing, from Algiers,/Thou know'st was banish'd : for one thing she did/They would not take her life. Is not this true?' (I.ii.263-267). By underrating Sycorax's abilities as a necromancer, Prospero tries to justify his own actions of seizing her native land forcefully as an invader and reinforces the patriarchal ideology that man's authority over women is completely lawful and justified. Though her voice is silenced, Sycorax's influence persists throughout the play, as Caliban calls upon it in his rebellion against Prospero saying that 'All the charms/ Of Sycorax, toods, beetles, bats, light on you!' (I.ii.340-341). In a society dominated by men, women like Sycorax, who are considered vulgar, disobedient, unattractive, and unchaste are always despised and have to bear the stigma of 'otherness'. Xiana Vázquez Bouzá views the character of Sycorax as 'a symbol of anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal resistance' (Bouzá 185). In modern times, female power is regarded as sinister and unwelcoming, similar to how Sycorax's power is viewed as evil and associated with necromancy. A patriarchal society's outlook towards female autonomy is always a negative one. It hardly campaigns for female rights, gender equality, and acknowledges the struggles, silencing and marginalisation of the womenfolk. Sycorax's representation in the play from the perspective of the male characters perpetuates the idea that women like Sycorax who challenge male domination or possess power are inherently wicked to the backbone, backing up patriarchal structures of control and subjugation. Sycorax stands for the unseen and unheard native inhabitants whose stories and experiences are eclipsed by colonial narratives. Sycorax's destiny exemplifies how colonial and patriarchal power structures work together simultaneously to suppress and eliminate strong women, particularly those from non-European backgrounds.

In William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero and Sycorax represent opposite ends of power dynamics and gender roles. When Sycorax is not present, Prospero imagines her as his female counterpart, embodying everything that challenges traditional gender norms and patriarchal tyranny. The male characters, particularly Prospero, frequently mention and underscore her non-presence. Sycorax,

portrayed as a woman of colour, symbolises aspects of womanhood that Prospero views negatively compared to his own masculinity. He depicts her as weaker, evil, and sexually deviant, emphasising her lack of presence to establish his own superiority. Prospero dismisses Sycorax's power as inherently corrupt and evil. She controls Ariel, a male spirit, challenging conventional gender roles. Her absence allows Prospero to construct her as a symbol of the malevolent woman, contrasting with his own masculinity, ultimately leading him to thwart his own patriarchal authority. Men may feel intimidated by the ambiguous identity of women and their absence from positions of power dominated by men. In *The Tempest* Prospero transforms Sycorax into a symbol of ideas challenging his patriarchal tyranny. He aggressively defends his patriarchal and colonial authority, viewing Sycorax as a vital threat. Sycorax's race and gender clash with Prospero's, leading him to discredit her rule and existence. She is not present in the play to represent herself and authority. Her representation is shaped solely by Prospero's one-sided accounts, portraying her in a negative light. Prospero creates a distorted and imaginary picture of Sycorax to justify his takeover of her island, despite never actually encountering her. His portrayal serves his own interests, painting himself as superior to her in magical abilities. Sycorax becomes the foundation for Prospero's views on femininity, reflecting his longing for power and his fear of losing it. He uses sexist language and slurs while referring to her, viewing her as representative of his negative perceptions of women. His insults are gender specific too. Prospero is always uneasy about Sycorax because she represents the idea of powerful women, particularly maternal succession, which threatens his dominance. Caliban invokes her image and strengths to challenge Prospero and advocate for maternal succession. Caliban boldly claims, 'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,/Which thou tak'st from me' (I.ii.333-334). Caliban questions Prospero's authority, terming his ownership of the island as a colonial imposition. Caliban sees himself as the rightful owner of the island. Sycorax poses a threat to Prospero as she symbolises a different power dynamic, embodying unrestrained female sexuality that challenges traditional gender norms

and promotes greater female independence. She embodies a different concept of beauty, modesty, and virtue compared to the one Prospero expects from Miranda.

Sycorax represents Prospero's negative stereotypes about women, challenging his patriarchal beliefs about virginity through her portrayal as a powerful and independent figure despite not being chaste. While Prospero, Ferdinand, and Caliban glorify the virtue of virginity, Sycorax represents a woman who defies these conventional norms. Prospero mentions her only to exert control over and subdue Ariel. Contrary to popular belief, Sycorax does not teach Caliban to speak; instead, it is Prospero, a white European male, who imparts this English language skills to Caliban. Sycorax's inability to educate her son, Caliban, highlights the marginalised position of native women, who are denied a voice. Due to her absence, Sycorax and Prospero emerge as stark opposites in terms of power and gender dynamics within William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*.

## **Conclusion**

In William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, societal gender norms are brought to the fore, with the notable absence of strong female characters addressing women's role as 'the other' in the eyes of men. Patriarchal ideologies relegate female characters like Miranda, Claribel, and Sycorax to subordinate roles leading to their exposure to sexist slurs and misogynistic remarks. With the exception of Miranda, all female characters are sketched solely through the accounts of male characters, silencing their voices and curtailing their autonomous identity. Miranda and Claribel are denied the freedom to express themselves, choose their partners, or partake in shaping their destinies, highlighting their oppression and conformity. This predicament extends to characters like Miranda, Claribel, Sycorax and Prospero's mother, indicating the inferior and passive status of women under patriarchy. They are forced to adhere to their gender specific roles and their value is judged based on their compliance, physical charm, morality, and sexual purity. Men possess the right to own them, treat them as valuable objects or dolls and impose their will upon them without

their consent. In the play, power is contingent upon gender. Miranda experiences sexual assault from Caliban, while Prospero employs both misogynistic rhetoric and racial vilification to dehumanize Sycorax and thereby, justify his colonisation of the island. Claribel is coerced into marrying the King of Tunis without her approval, serving as a means for Alonso to advance his political agenda. In a similar vein, Prospero displays excessive possessiveness towards Miranda, dictating even her sexuality and romantic choices. He also manipulates Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand as a potent tool of seeking revenge against his adversaries and reclaiming his lost dukedom. Throughout the play, men exploit women to achieve their own ends, positioning themselves as the authoritative figures while demoting women to dependent beings. Women's rights are severely restricted in comparison to men. The treatment of the female characters in *The Tempest* reflects the marginalised and subjugated status of women as 'the second sex' in the broader societal realities. Sycorax, a powerful woman of colour without virtue and chastity, offers a twofold danger to patriarchal and colonial structures in the play. The obliteration of Sycorax's voice and her reign on the island prior to the arrival of Prospero echoes the broader colonial practice of burying indigenous histories and replacing them with the colonisers' narrative. In short, William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* serves as a critical prism through which the aspects of racism, power, control, and gender can be explored as it mirrors the patriarchal culture of the early 17th century Elizabethan society through Prospero's authority, Miranda's obedience, and the sparse presence of female voices.

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