



Love as a Construct of Power in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: A Reception-Theoretical Reading

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Abstract— *The Tempest* has been traditionally received as a romance that exalts love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. In fact, love has been traditionally understood as a redemptive moral agent that resolves conflicts and re-establishes harmony. However, this paper will use Reception Theory to show that love in *The Tempest* is a construct of power whose meaning is contingent on the reader's horizon of meaning. Through an analysis of how paternal, romantic, and supernatural love are variously constructed by early modern, Romantic, and modern readers, this paper will show that love is not a stable ethical value but an effective strategy that legitimates power. Through this reception-based analysis, this paper will show that Shakespeare's love is a multifaceted text that can be variously read to naturalize or interrogate power, and that *The Tempest* is a text whose political meaning is constructed through audience interpretation.



Keywords— *Shakespeare, The Tempest, Love, power, Reception Theory, Reader response*

I. INTRODUCTION: LOVE AND THE PROBLEM OF INTERPRETATION

The Tempest (1610-1611) is a special case in Shakespeare's canon as a text that is often interpreted in the context of reconciliation and moral resolution. Love, in critical discourse, is often considered the moral principle that regulates the play's outcome. This assumes a definite moral connotation of love.

Reception Theory, as formulated by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, contests this premise by suggesting that meaning is a product of the interaction between text and reader. Using this paradigm, this paper will argue that the meaning of love in *The Tempest* can only be constructed within certain horizons of expectations, and that these meanings often consolidate or subvert structures of power.

Instead of interrogating what love signifies in the play, this research inquiry is how love is received and how this reception impacts the perception of authority, obedience, and legitimacy.

II. PROSPERO'S PATERNAL LOVE AND CHANGING RECEPTIONS OF AUTHORITY

The relationship between Prospero and Miranda is presented as paternal love, which is marked by care, protection, and guidance. Prospero's relationship with Miranda would have been received as natural and moral by early modern audiences, who were conditioned by patriarchal norms. Prospero's control over Miranda would have been in accordance with the beliefs of paternal absolutism and filial obedience.

However, Reception Theory shows that this reading is historically mediated. Contemporary readers, influenced by feminist readings and notions of autonomy, tend to see Prospero's paternal love as oppressive and manipulative. His domination of Miranda's knowledge and emotional experience is now commonly seen as ideological indoctrination rather than paternal affection.

Therefore, paternal love becomes a location of interpretive conflict, where power becomes normalized or revealed based on the horizon of expectation of the reader

III. ROMANTIC LOVE AND READERLY IDEALIZATION

The love between Miranda and Ferdinand has always been interpreted as being of a pure, spontaneous, and restorative kind. The innocence of the love between the two characters was emphasized by Romantic and Victorian readers, who saw them as personifications of natural love unaffected by corruption.

However, a reception-based analysis shows that modern readers are more likely to question the terms of this love. The manipulation of their meeting by Prospero and the forced labor of Ferdinand are now seen as signs that romantic love is ideologically constructed.

Reception Theory shows that the liberatory or coercive nature of romantic love in *The Tempest* is not necessarily inherent but is instead revealed in the context of interpretation. As a result, love becomes a symbolic screen that either hides or reveals power.

IV. SUPERNATURAL LOVE AND THE RECEPTION OF OBEDIENCE

The Prospero-Ariel relationship has been regularly described as one of affection and mutual respect. The earlier audience may have perceived Ariel's loyalty as the result of kindness shown to him. In postcolonial and modern interpretations, however, this relationship is interpreted as a model of affective domination, in which love substitutes for force. Ariel's subjection is sustained through affective duty and a deferred freedom. Reception Theory shows that love is a disciplinary affect, whose moral sign is reversed depending on the political awareness of the reader. Love can therefore be either a symbol of unity or a device of control.

V. FORGIVENESS, LOVE, AND THE READER'S ETHICAL JUDGMENT

The final act of forgiveness in *The Tempest* is often read as the ultimate victory of love. However, in the context of Reception Theory, moral interpretation is always dependent on the reader's point of view. Some readers see the forgiveness of Prospero as an act of moral transcendence, while others see it as a moment of asserting his dominance. In this case, love validates Prospero's dominance by making it an act of mercy. Thus, the reception of forgiveness becomes the determining factor in whether love is seen as moral liberation or as political closure.

VI. RECEPTION THEORY AND THE INSTABILITY OF LOVE

Through the application of Reception Theory, it is clear that love in *The Tempest* is not a fixed moral value but a form

of interpretation. Shakespeare's use of love is intentionally open-ended, allowing the reader to engage in the process of interpretation. This is what ensures the play's relevance to each new generation, as each generation redefines love in terms of its ideological agenda. Love becomes a discursive space where power is constantly negotiated.

VII. CONCLUSION

Through the application of Reception Theory, it becomes clear that love in *The Tempest* is a dynamic construct of power, which is as much a product of reader response as it is of textual structure. Shakespeare's play does not offer a unitary ethical reading of love but instead reveals the potential of love to either authorize power or offer a critique of it. Through the application of Reception Theory, *The Tempest* is revealed to be a play that actively involves its readers in the process of political interpretation. Love, which is not merely redemptive, becomes a tool through which power is interpreted.

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