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English 305

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Essay One

2/2/2018

### The Power of Trust in *Tempest*

*The Tempest* raises fundamental questions about power within close relationships, more specifically, who has it and how they wield it. The best example of this throughout the play is Caliban and Prospero's relationship. It is important to note that the deterioration of their relationship has several causes, most obviously, Caliban's attempted rape of Prospero's daughter Miranda. However, another significant factor is Antonio's betrayal and usurpation of Prospero's power before the start of the play. This occurrence sets up an important precedent for Prospero's behavior throughout. Prospero and Caliban's relationship as former allies, now slave and master, reflects Prospero's relationship with his brother and explores the inherent lack of trust in a relationship with power imbalances. This in turn exposes Prospero's fear of losing control.

When one takes Prospero's experience with betrayal into account, it's difficult to blame him for his almost obsessive need for control over the things going on around him. He seeks justice against Alonso and Antonio throughout the play, and frequently uses his servant Ariel to do so, further exhibiting his desire for power and control. In act one, scene two, he tells Miranda about Antonio's betrayal, claiming that his trust in his brother was essentially his undoing. He says,

“And my trust,

Like a good parent, did beget of him

A falsehood in its contrary as great

As my trust was, which had indeed no limit,

A confidence sans bound....

To credit his own lie—he did believe

He was indeed the duke.” (1.2.93-97, 102-103)

This motif of trust is an important one in the play. In this scene, Prospero describes his trust in Antonio as serving the same role as a good parent might. He says his trust had “no limit”, and his confidence in his brother as being “sans bound”. Antonio betrayed him at a time when he could not have trusted him more. He encouraged him and advised him in his political work, yet Antonio repaid him by taking his Dukedom, leading to Prospero’s exile. What’s worse, he used the very tools that Prospero had trusted him with to usurp his Dukedom and exile him. In this situation, Prospero’s trust in his brother was power to Antonio, allowing him to usurp his brother.

Prospero and Caliban started as allies of circumstance. The island native was initially welcoming to the newcomers, and taught them how to survive on the island. Early on, they established a layer of trust and camaraderie. Caliban says that when they first arrived, they

“When thou camest first,

Thou strok’st me and made much of me, wouldst give me

Water with berries in’t, and teach me how

To name the bigger light, and how the less,

That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee

And showed thee all the qualities o’ th’ isle,” (1.2.335-340)

In the beginning, Miranda and Prospero clearly felt comfortable around Caliban and trust developed between them. During this period of time, they were all teaching each other new

things, acting as both teacher and student instead of master and slave. Sharing their knowledge held power, so Prospero and Miranda taught Caliban about the world, and Caliban taught them about the island. Since they each served roles in their relationship that gave them power, there was not yet an imbalance between them that stopped them from being able to trust each other.

It's not clear at first what caused the change, but ironically, Prospero eventually usurped Caliban's position as his own brother had done to him. They lose their trust in each other, and the balance of power shifts. Prospero uses his new authority to exert control over Caliban. Instead of forcing Caliban to flee in exile, Prospero imprisoned and enslaved him. From Caliban's telling of the story, the actions seem unjust. That changes when Prospero delivers a damning statement of Caliban's character:

"Thou most lying slave,

Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee,

Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee

In mine own cell till thou didst seek to violate

The honor of my child. " (1.2.348-351)

In these lines, Prospero berates Caliban for betraying him, saying that he lost the trust they had in him when he tried to rape Miranda. When Caliban violated Miranda's "honor", he also violated Prospero's trust. He attacked the last thing that Prospero had that was precious to him, even after Prospero and Miranda treated him with kindness. Once again Prospero was blindsided by someone he had placed his trust in, this time by a near stranger who he had allowed to live under his own roof. Unlike in his experience with being usurped by his brother, Prospero took control

and took the power he could get from the situation. He used the violation of trust as reasoning for power over Caliban and made the island native his slave.

Few could blame Prospero for his desire for power after his brother's betrayal. In *the Tempest*, trust is power in the cases of Antonio's betrayal of Prospero and Prospero's betrayal of Caliban. These betrayals created power imbalances that changed the course of the tempest. This is a revealing fact in terms of Prospero's actions throughout the play, as it explains his near obsession with power over the other characters.

## Works Cited

Graff, Gerald, and James Phelan. *William Shakespeare, the tempest: a case study in critical controversy*. Palgrave Macmillan., 2009.