

Article

A Comparative Study of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Césaire's *A Tempest*: Seeing Vital Similarities and Differences

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a narrative of deception, magic, marriage, and revenge. The play highlights how a power struggle leads Prospero, the former Duke of Milan and a skilled magician, into exile on an island with his daughter, Miranda. Through the alliance with Ariel, his subordinate spirit, Prospero orchestrates a shipwreck to punish his rival, Antonio, seen as a foe. The subsequent events resolve past conflicts and culminate in the romantic union of Ferdinand and Miranda. Additionally, Shakespeare explores themes of enslavement and freedom, exemplified through Prospero's servants, Ariel and Caliban. Conversely, Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* presents a postcolonial reinterpretation of Shakespeare's work, sharing the core plot but differing significantly in characterization and themes. Césaire's adaptation emphasizes the power dynamics between colonizers and the colonized, contrasting with Shakespeare's focus on themes of power, revenge, and love. This study employs postcolonial theory to analyze the authors' ideological intentions, particularly Césaire's. Using the French explication de texte method, the paper provides a detailed, objective examination of structure, themes, and imagery. The conclusion underscores the limited political, economic, and cultural progress in Africa and the Caribbean, highlighting the negative impacts of neocolonialism as depicted by the two authors. A clarion call is made to Afro-Caribbean leaders to intensify their efforts in ensuring proper development in their respective zones.

Keywords: Grammar, Character, Revenge, Shipwreck, Influence

Introduction

Literature is a powerful vehicle for expressing and transforming cultures around the world. Aimé Césaire and William Shakespeare are two influential poetic dramatists whose works – though separated by time and background – invite meaningful comparison. This paper offers a comparative analysis of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Césaire's *A Tempest*, identifying key similarities and differences through a methodical review. Though Césaire and Shakespeare come from distinct historical and cultural contexts, both authors use drama to examine human existence, moral ambiguity, and social order. Each work instructs readers about life, freedom, and knowledge, yet their aims and emphases differ. Shakespeare reflects the political and social concerns of early modern England, while Césaire confronts the racial and colonial injustices of the twentieth century. Both, however, engage with society's fundamental needs and purposes.

Space in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Shakespeare sets *The Tempest* on a remote, magical island—an enclosed, timeless stage detached from ordinary society. This setting creates a symbolic theatre where political, familial, and moral conflicts are played out and resolved. The island functions as a site of exile, transformation, purification, and reconciliation, enabling exploration of themes such as betrayal, revenge, forgiveness, and redemption. Its isolation invites introspection on power and the human condition.

Space in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*

Césaire retains the island setting but reimagines it through a colonial and postcolonial lens. The island becomes a metaphor for colonized territories and a stage for the domination between colonizer (Prospero) and colonized (Caliban, Ariel). In Césaire's adaptation, the insular space carries explicit political and social symbolism: it is an ideological battlefield where struggles for freedom, identity, and justice unfold. By situating the drama there, Césaire interrogates colonial legacies and amplifies the voices of the oppressed.

Comparative Note

In both plays, the island is central, but its significance shifts with each author's perspective. For Shakespeare, the island facilitates moral change and reconciliation; for Césaire, it mirrors a colonized world filled with conflict, revolt, and demands for liberation. Thus, while the physical setting appears similar, its meaning diverges according to the works' historical, cultural, and political contexts.

An Overview of the Two Plays

The Tempest is a play written by William Shakespeare in the early 1600s to discuss marriage, revenge, deception, and magic. The play commences with Prospero, the deposed Duke of Milan, and his teenage daughter, Miranda, who live on the distant island where they have been cut off for the last 12 years. Ariel, a magical spirit enslaved by Prospero, and Caliban, a native of the island who is also enslaved, are their companions on the island. Prospero was initially the Duke of Milan, but his position was seized by his brother Antonio, perhaps with the authority of King Alonso of Naples and Alonso's brother, Sebastian. The play begins with Antonio, Alonso, and several of their servants on a ship in a great storm, the titular tempest. Everyone on board is ignorant that the storm is facilitated by Prospero, who intends to shipwreck them on his island. He intends to retaliate against his brother to regain his position as the Duke of Milan. Prospero achieves his clandestine plan, and he is restored to his dukedom. He later arranges the marriage of his daughter to King Alonso's son, Prince Ferdinand.

In Césaire's *A Tempest*, the Martinican uses the same story to discuss the challenges of colonialism in his native country and in several African countries. Césaire prefers to adopt the play as a symbol of the power tussle between the colonizers and the colonized. He depicts Prospero as the colonizer who takes undue advantage and also subjugates Caliban and Ariel for his selfish ends. The two men are continually humiliated, exploited, and ridiculed. Both Caliban and Ariel are conscious of their miserable and pitiable condition, but

they differ in their means of liberation. While Ariel is seemingly passive and believes that his freedom lies in his absolute obedience, Caliban appears more aggressive, and he is of the opinion that he must fight for his freedom. It is remarkable to note that Prospero returns home in *The Tempest*, but he chooses to remain on the island in Césaire's *A Tempest* so as to continually hold on to power and also dominate the vulnerable people, demonstrating neo-colonialism. As a mark of resistance, Caliban rejects the language that Prospero taught him and chooses to speak his native language because he believes that he has been exploited. Prospero is disturbed about the development because of his selfish desire to perpetually dominate and exploit his servants. In the same vein, Césaire expects the colonized people to also reject the colonial language and embrace their native languages. In Césaire's adaptation, Caliban is presented as a militant character who does not hide his feelings and desire to fight for his freedom. He uses every means possible to rebel against Prospero. For instance, he rejects the name Caliban given to him by his master and renames himself 'X' as a mark of honor to Malcolm X, the African American revolutionary and human rights activist. He does this in recognition of his African ancestral background. Caliban is presented as an active voice against white domination and oppression.

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial theory is a scholarly discussion of the economic, political, and cultural significance of imperialism and colonialism with a deliberate focus on the effect of human domination and abuse of colonized people and their lands. Postcolonial theory began as an academic discipline in the 1960s when intellectuals from the formerly colonized countries started publishing books and papers on the recurrent consequences of colonialism and an examination of the literature, culture, history, and discussion about imperial power. Literarily, postcolonial theory is predominantly about colonialism, highlighting the consequences of colonialism on both the colonizers and the colonized. Edward Said is believed to be the precursor of postcolonial theory and one of the most dominant theorists of his time. He was greatly influenced while developing academic discourse on Orientalism. The impact of great scholars and thinkers like Frantz Fanon (1967) and Albert Memmi (1991) on the intellectual growth of Edward cannot be ignored. For instance, Fanon demonstrates how race influences the way that the colonizer relates to the oppressed and vice versa. He emphasizes that the colonizers forced the Black colonized people to accept and internalize the concept of an inferiority complex by deliberately looking down on their race. Fanon asserts that the Black man is made to believe in his inferiority to the white colonizers through psychological aspects of colonization, such as the enforcement of the colonizer's religion, culture, language, and educational systems. The colonized are convinced that they are culturally inferior as a result of the undue imposition. This conviction made it easier for the whites to validate and sustain their rule. Postcolonial theory thus brings to the fore how racial binaries, that is, how races are constructed as being opposing and distinct, even after the abolition of formal colonial rule.

Postcolonial theory is defined as an analytical framework that evaluates the effects of colonialism on societies and cultures, stressing the power dynamics and representations being adopted in the historical and current relationships between the colonized and the colonizers. The challenges related to post-colonialism are currently more extensively acknowledged than ever before among legal practitioners, political philosophers, colonizers, and scholars. However, the focus of the discussion has changed since postcolonial theory newly appeared as a new field of intellectual endeavor among philosophers. Nowadays,

postcolonial theory discusses the domination of all communities anciently considered as ethnically and racially inferior to the Europeans without any rational justification. Postcolonial theory investigates how people, governments, and societies in the previously colonized countries in the world navigate unfavorable colonized foreign relations. The adoption of 'post' by postcolonial intellectuals does not indicate that the consequences of colonialism have completely disappeared. Conversely, it emphasizes that imperial and colonial histories are still dominant in guiding international relations in the world, and how European political power and influence still dominate and relegate the developing countries. Postcolonial theory sets out to correct the economic and political imbalance in the world that is largely characterized by inequalities. The theory is preoccupied with the discrepancy in the global wealth accumulation and political influence, and why some states and groups exercise excessive power over others.

Grammatical Point of View of the Novels

The notion of grammatical point of view in drama concerns how information is delivered to the audience through dialogue, stage directions, and the distribution of speech among characters. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* (1969), both playwrights explore themes of power, authority, and identity, yet they adopt different enunciation strategies that reflect their historical and ideological contexts. While Shakespeare uses a traditional dramatic third-person perspective dominated by Prospero's narrative authority, Césaire reconfigures the distribution of voices to foreground formerly silenced characters, transforming the theatrical discourse into an anti-colonial statement.

In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare constructs a point of view that privileges Prospero as both character and narrative orchestrator. Through long monologues and explanatory dialogues, Prospero reveals past events such as his usurpation and the origins of his magical control over the island. The audience's knowledge is therefore filtered largely through his perspective, reinforcing his role as master of both magic and meaning. The elevated poetic language—often in blank verse—underscores Prospero's superiority and maintains social hierarchies: nobles speak in verse, while characters like Caliban frequently speak in prose. Although Caliban challenges Prospero's authority verbally, his linguistic subordination persists; he is mocked for his supposed barbarism and has limited narrative agency. The grammatical distribution of voice thus reflects the colonial power structure embedded within the drama.

Conversely, Césaire's *A Tempest* revisits the same story through a postcolonial lens, reformulating the narrative point of view to reclaim the voices of the oppressed. While the play remains third-person dramatic, Césaire multiplies focalization through direct addresses to the audience, the introduction of a chorus and stage director, and above all, through Caliban's assertive and defiant speech. Caliban becomes the central voice of resistance, insisting on his identity not as a "savage" but as an exploited subject—symbolically renaming himself "X" to reject colonial labels. The use of contemporary French mixed with Creole idioms, songs, and oral traditions breaks with classical theatrical norms and aligns the linguistic form with the political critique. Unlike Shakespeare, Césaire decentralizes narrative authority, exposing the cultural violence hidden beneath Prospero's control of language.

- Two articles make the difference in terms of titles: A # La. "A" is an indefinite article, and "la" is a definite article.
- In terms of both titles, the theme is the same: Tempête. The two pieces:

Talk about the same thing, treat the same subject: that of the freedom of a wounded people who want to realize themselves.

- At the level of authors, we note that there is an influence of William Shakespeare on Aimé Césaire.
- The title, in itself, is meaningful here. The A's function has the value of a programmatic function. Through the title, we perceive the text. We have the same discourse here. One and The Tempest.

Finally, the comparison of grammatical point of view in *The Tempest* and *A Tempest* reveals a shift from a Eurocentric and hierarchical distribution of voice to a more democratic and politically conscious one. Shakespeare's structure reinforces Prospero's dominance, while Césaire disrupts that narrative power, giving voice to the colonized and transforming theatre into a tool of ideological emancipation. By redefining who speaks and who is heard, Césaire not only rewrites a classic text but also reclaims linguistic authority for those historically silenced.

Action Point of the Novels

Whether we are talking about a storm or a storm, there is always destruction of lives and property. After his passage, there is regret and desolation. In the case of our study, it is not a question of the meeting of two cultures or of two civilizations that meet. One must impose oneself on the other by force. There is destruction of the weak by the strong. The weak one is always considered barbaric, backward, and uneducated. A so-called order and justice are imposed on him. All these concepts are seen through the interplay of the different characters in both books.

Analysis of Characters

1. Caliban – Ariel

Caliban, master of the island, holds Ariel under his control before the arrival of Prospero. Caliban is Black, and Ariel is a mulatto. The two do not have the same way of conceiving the struggle that leads to freedom. Representation of Caliban: From Ambiguous Savage to Revolutionary Symbol. Shakespeare's Caliban. Described as monstrous or "fish-like," often dehumanized. Viewed as a failed rebel (his plot with Stephano and Trinculo is comic). Yet, he speaks some of the most poetic lines in the play. Symbolizes the "colonized other" but without a clear political agenda. Césaire's Caliban A Black slave whose identity is tied to African heritage. Renames himself "X," evoking Malcolm X and Black radicalism. Speaks in a bold, defiant voice against colonial domination:

"Je ne me libère pas pour t'aimer. Je me libère pour moi."

His rebellion is serious, ideological, and rooted in anticolonial struggle. Represents all oppressed Black people under colonial rule.

2. Caliban – Prospero.

From master, Caliban goes to slave with the arrival of Prospero on the island. He becomes the undisputed master who dominates everyone through magic. He confiscates the freedom of all the inhabitants of the island and appropriates everything. The relationship between him and Caliban is tense from the beginning to the end of the play. Caliban finally frees himself from the monster Prospero. Prospero: Scholar-Magician or White Colonial Master? Shakespeare's Prospero. A wronged duke seeking justice. His authority is sometimes tyrannical, sometimes benevolent. His magic can be interpreted as art, intellect, or political power. By returning to Milan, he renounces domination. Césaire's Prospero A harsh, unapologetic white supremacist. Uses racial language and economic exploitation as tools of control. Never gives up power—in the final scene, he remains on the island, trying to "civilize" Caliban by force. Symbolizes the intransigence of colonial masters, even after formal decolonization.

3. Prospero – Ariel

Ariel is the good Negro to his good master, the "blessed yes." The struggle for his freedom is different from that of Caliban. It is the peaceful slave who is subject to the master Prospero. For him, it was necessary to negotiate with Prospero, who should gladly grant freedom to the island's inhabitants. Ariel: Reformist vs. Radical Responses to Oppression Césaire adds a powerful political contrast by aligning each character with a distinct philosophy of liberation. Shakespeare's Ariel: A grateful servant longing for freedom. Non-political, ethereal, obedient. His freedom is granted at the end. Césaire's Ariel, rewritten as a mixed-race or mulatto slave. Favors non-violence, negotiation, and moral persuasion. Represents the moderate, assimilationist approach to colonial liberation.

Parallel:

Ariel = Martin Luther King Jr.

Caliban = Malcolm X / Frantz Fanon

Césaire introduces ideological complexity, showing different responses to oppression within the colonized community.

The Space Where the Novels Unfold

The space in which the action takes place is first and foremost an enclosed space; we speak of a cave or an island. Where a storm comes to turn everything upside down against the will of those who are there. Life is difficult there. The Desert Island: Unoccupied space. The living conditions there are difficult. The cave: a primitive dwelling. A place where prehistoric men lived, with ferocious animals and a lack of technical means.

With the arrival of Prospero on the island, we see that a problem arises: that of the civilizing mission. In terms of the space in the work, the project is clear. It is colonization under the false pretext, with its different political and social axes. The space allows us to appreciate the unfolding of the action in the space where it takes place. The cave, the island.

A Comparative Study of Two Literary Works

The Tempest by William Shakespeare: A play exploring themes of power, colonialism, and reconciliation. *A Tempest* by Aimé Césaire: A postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare's work,

offering a critical perspective on colonialism and its impacts. Colonialism, Identity, and Power from Shakespeare to Césaire. Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* (1969) is not merely an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; it is a radical rewriting that transforms the narrative into an explicit postcolonial critique of European imperialism. While Shakespeare's original presents colonial themes only implicitly, Césaire brings them to the forefront, rewriting characters, conflicts, and symbols to address race, slavery, revolution, and the legacy of colonization in the Afro-Caribbean world.

Colonialism: Implicit in Shakespeare, Explicit in Césaire. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, colonialism is suggested but not directly stated. Prospero's takeover of the island is framed as both moral order and tyranny, leaving room for interpretation. Caliban is presented through contradictory lenses – savage yet poetic, oppressed yet violent. The play ends with reconciliation, not political liberation. Césaire's *Une Tempête*: Colonialism becomes the central theme. Prospero is rewritten as an archetypal white colonizer, explicitly racist and economically exploitative. The island is no longer a magical space but a colonial plantation. The ending is not reconciliation: Caliban refuses to submit, Prospero refuses to free him, and both remain locked in a perpetual master/slave struggle representing postcolonial power dynamics.

Similarities: Shared themes, characters, or plot elements.

This analysis could reveal insights into how Césaire's work challenges or complements Shakespeare's original themes, particularly in the context of colonialism and postcolonial critique.

Similarities

1. Themes: Both works explore power dynamics, colonialism, rebellion, and identity.
2. Characters: Both feature Prospero, Caliban, Ariel, and other characters, albeit with different portrayals.
3. Island Setting: Both stories take place on an isolated island, symbolizing isolation, control, and transformation.

The themes in "The Tempest" and "A Tempest" are multifaceted. Let's explore some key themes:

Common Themes

1. Power Dynamics: Both works examine the relationships between those in power (Prospero, the master) and those under their control (Caliban, Ariel, the slaves).
2. Colonialism and Imperialism: Both plays touch on the complexities of colonialism, though Césaire's adaptation critiques Shakespeare's portrayal more directly.
3. Identity and Self-Discovery: Characters grapple with their identities, roles, and places in the world.
4. Revenge and Forgiveness: Prospero's journey in both works involves themes of revenge, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Divergent Themes

1. Resistance and Liberation: Césaire's "A Tempest" emphasizes Caliban's resistance and desire for freedom, whereas Shakespeare's play is more nuanced in its portrayal.

2. Cultural Identity: Césaire's adaptation highlights the cultural erasure and identity struggles faced by colonized peoples.
3. Critique of Colonialism: Césaire's work directly challenges the colonialist attitudes present in Shakespeare's play.

Differences: Divergent perspectives on colonialism, power dynamics, and cultural identity.
Differences

1. Perspective: Shakespeare's "The Tempest" reflects the colonialist views of its time, while Césaire's *A Tempest* challenges these views, emphasizing the exploitation and oppression of colonized peoples.
2. Characterization: In Césaire's version, characters like Caliban are more assertive and resistant to colonial power, whereas in Shakespeare's play, they are more submissive.
3. Tone: Shakespeare's work has a more ambiguous tone, while Césaire's adaptation is more overtly political and critical of colonialism.

Key Aspects

1. Colonialism and Power: How do both works portray the relationship between colonizers and the colonized?
2. Identity and Resistance: How do characters like Caliban and Ariel navigate their identities and resist or comply with power structures?
3. Cultural Commentary: What commentary do both works offer on cultural imperialism and its legacy?

Study of Influence between Shakespeare and Césaire

In the study of the influence, which of the two, William Shakespeare or Aimé Césaire, was influenced?

In the context of comparative literature, it is clear that Aimé Césaire was influenced by William Shakespeare, particularly through the work *The Tempest*. Shakespeare, an English playwright of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is known for the richness of his characters, the complexity of his plots, and the depth of his universal themes such as power, betrayal, freedom, and the human condition. Aimé Césaire, a twentieth-century Martinican writer, poet, and politician, is part of a postcolonial and identity-based dynamic. In his play *A Tempest*, published in 1969, he appropriated Shakespeare's original text and rewrote it in a colonial context.

In this rewriting, Césaire transforms the meaning of the work by emphasizing the relations of domination between the colonizers and the colonized. The character of Caliban, who in Shakespeare represents a primitive savage, becomes in Césaire a figure of Black resistance and a symbol of revolt against colonial oppression. In this, Césaire is not content to be inspired by Shakespeare; he dialogues with him, he deconstructs his story to propose a new reading that is more committed, more current, and centered on Black identity and the condition of colonized peoples.

This influence is therefore both literary and ideological. Literary, because Césaire takes up Shakespeare's dramatic structure and characters. Ideological, because he uses this base to convey a strong political message, in line with his commitments to the Négritude

movement. Shakespeare's work thus becomes a medium on which Césaire builds an original reflection on history, memory, and emancipation.

Aimé Césaire and Williams S. did not live during the same period historically. Several centuries separate the two authors. The first is from 1610, while the second is from 1969. Shakespeare is of the Western culture of the Elizabethan period of Elizabeth's birth, during which the right to the civilizing mission is evoked. It was necessary to civilize, to bring good morals to the uncultured and backward peoples, the barbarians.

Césaire is of Negro culture, Negro diasporas, and writers of Negritude, so of the Negro Renaissance, where the right to national sovereignty is evoked. All dominated peoples must fight for their freedom. If all these hypotheses are correct, then Caesarius is the one who was influenced by Shakespeare. Thus, Aimé Césaire was influenced by William Shakespeare, but he was able to transcend this influence to create a profoundly new and militant work. *A Tempest* is the perfect example of dynamic comparative literature, where the classics are reread and reinterpreted in the light of modern issues and the cultural realities specific to each writer.

Conclusion

This comparative study of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* highlights how two texts with the same narrative framework can produce sharply different ideological meanings. Shakespeare's play, shaped by the early modern English worldview, presents a subtle exploration of power, authority, and reconciliation. Although colonial tensions exist within the text, they remain implicit in Prospero's control over Caliban and Ariel. Césaire, however, rewrites the story through an explicitly postcolonial lens, transforming the island into a contested space where racial oppression, cultural domination, and resistance are openly dramatized.

While both plays share similar themes and settings, their purposes diverge significantly. Shakespeare's island functions as a site of moral resolution, whereas Césaire's becomes a symbol of ongoing struggle and an indictment of colonial and neocolonial power structures. By giving Caliban and Ariel stronger political voices, Césaire recenters the experiences of the oppressed and challenges the Eurocentric authority embedded in Shakespeare's narrative. The study affirms the relevance of postcolonial theory in understanding how colonial histories continue to shape cultural, political, and economic realities, especially in African and Caribbean societies. Césaire's intervention therefore becomes both a literary and political act, urging formerly colonized peoples to reclaim their identities, resist cultural erasure, and pursue genuine development. In essence, the dialogue between Shakespeare and Césaire illustrates the power of literature to question inherited narratives and to advocate for liberation, self-definition, and social transformation.

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