

# The Role of Music in Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

Saffeen N. Arif<sup>1</sup> and Ahmed Abdulaziz Muhammad<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Koya University,  
Kurdistan Region-Iraq

<sup>2</sup>Department of English, Faculty of Education, Koya University,  
Kurdistan Region-Iraq

**Abstract—** Music, as a distinguished art, can combine the full spectrum of all other arts, including words, colors, singing, dancing, and stage spectacle and providing audiences with something to satisfy their artistic needs and relax their senses. In drama, the employment of music (being played separately or accompanying the action) in a standard play can probably heighten emotion, support dramatic action, and evoke atmosphere and mood in ways that words alone cannot do. The paper basically sheds light on the relationship between literature and art (music, in particular) as two branches of art that deal effectively with feelings and emotions, which are either created or supported accordingly. The second part of the paper tackles the psychological effects of music on human beings. The third and last part of the paper deals with the role of music in Shakespeare's last play, *The Tempest*.

**Index Terms—** Drama, Function, Harmony, Literature, Music.

## I. MAN AND MUSIC

To tackle the close relationship between human beings and music, a travel into time is urgently required. This bilateral relation goes back, in fact, to the first moment of creation, and particularly, to the two senses of the word creation. First of all, the literal meaning of the word "creation" has to do with the notion of what is commonly known as the Big Bang. As the Big Bang gives rise to the big explosion that resulted in the creation of this world, one can figure out and imagine the crashing noise or sound of the explosion. However, John Cramer, a physicist from Washington University, re-created the sound of the Big Bang using the data collected by a satellite sent to study the cosmic microwave background. The result shows that the first sound of the newly born universe was not human ear-splitting explosive sound; instead, it was a more like a robotic humming sound (Radzicki, 2018).

More or less, music or sound is believed to be corresponding to the dawn of creation. The idea becomes increasingly authentic

when it comes to consider human creation. Researchers and scientists do believe that the relationship between human beings and sound goes back even to the prenatal stage. There is scientific evidence that the baby can actually hear voices in the mother's womb. In this stage, babies do a lot of hearing and learning, such as recognizing the mother's voice and reacting differently to the various sounds they happen to hear. In other words, the relationship between human and sound is the same as the relationship between the explosion and the creation of life in this world from the very beginning (Williams, 2018). Therefore, human beings come to life in which sound occupies a great major space. Whether it is natural or man-made, sound is claimed to affect all the life of human beings. Nevertheless, many people acknowledge the fact that music has a certain salient effect on human being's psychology and mood.

In general, music, with its different types, helps human beings in more than one positive way. Beginning with different processes; music can help people in recalling the best parts of their memories, relaxing, and making them learn languages more easily. Besides, music can invoke different feelings within the listeners. Moreover, music has long proved to be highly effective and helpful as a therapy for certain physical and mental diseases such as Alzheimer and dementia (Williams, 2018).

It can be noticed that human beings are generally influenced by music for the abundance of auditory systems in their bodies. Studies show that listening to Mozart, for instance, can increase and support the listeners' spatial and temporal intelligence, which, in turn, gives rise to their use of their brains more actively and effectively than others. In addition, these listeners are reported to have better imagination and creativity; they enjoy art better than those who do not usually listen to musical compositions (All Answers Ltd, 2017). Interestingly, music affects people physically and mentally. The harmonious music can move people in many ways, making them feel cheerful or melancholic. Music has been proved to have various positive impacts on the body: It can have a therapeutic effect against pain, modify blood pressure, rid the body of syndromes, and help in fighting many mental and psychic diseases (Williams, 2018).

## II. LITERATURE AND MUSIC

Art can be the umbrella, so to speak, that covers both literature and music. Despite the difference in their esthetic

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Corresponding author's e-mail: saffeen.muman@koyauniversity.org/

ahmed.abdulaziz@koyauniversity.org

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or functional values, literature and music are the most imaginative productions of man. Many scholars have tried to study, highlight, and understand the identical relationship between literature and music. To facilitate such an understanding of the relationship, Steven Paul Scher, in his study made in 1982, identified three categories, which start with the literary imitation of the auditory quality of music. They include the adaptation of musical structures and patterns together with the application of certain musical techniques and devices, and then, the literary presentation of the existing musical compositions (Michael, 2017).

Characteristically, almost all cultures share the preoccupation with the creation and the possible performance of literature together with music. They both have ancient origins in human life not only in man's religious beliefs but also in his cultural practices. Different studies focus on many aspects concerning what links man with literature and music as well. As a general perspective, all theories agree on one basic idea which leads to the conclusion that both literature and music have one essential function which is summed up in their ability to convey meaning. Whereas some psychologists and psychoanalysis's emphasize the effective, curative capacity of both literature and music, others have examined the nature of emotion in response to art. Both music (most likely accompanied by songs) and literature share the considerable ability to evoke powerful feelings and semantic representations. Perhaps what connects literature and music and distinguishes them from the characteristics and qualities of other arts are that both unfold in time, in other words, the timeless and universal appeal of music and literature may put them within the same format or category (Diana, 2015).

For a long time, literature and art, in general, have been placed together in many ways. This integral relationship that gives rise to this interaction keeps encouraging such questions as related to both the form and the content. Many researches embody the interactive relationship between literature and music, for example, a contemporary scholar whose name is Daniel Albright argues that "understanding a sentence is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think." The function of music may be understood in conjunction with the notion of emotional cognition. The notion is even older than one may imagine; it goes back to Aristotle's well-known *Poetics* as it suggests the engagement of children with music. In this way, it proves especially valuable in teaching emotions and good social attitudes (Diana, 2015). In like manner, several studies have implied various literary tones and structures in the processing of basic emotions. However, it may be stated that since music itself is on no account an emotional object; hence, at least some emotions induced whereas listening to it must be deduced. Supporting the notion that musical emotion may be inferred is the evidence that listeners show activation in structures associated with cognitive empathy during listening to music (Diana, 2015). Moreover, music can reveal or convey meaning by means of its emotional and psychological effect it may have on listeners. Sometimes, it is impossible to articulate the effective vocabulary of the language whereas the intended meaning which can be offered by music is so

powerful and impressive that it is hard not to recognize it. The diversity of contemporary critical theory indicates the way of conceptualizing the relationship between literature and music and makes them natural companions (da Sousa et al., 2009).

Music remains one of the essential elements of drama from ancient times to the present day. Aristotle was the first philosopher to refer to music in conjunction with the other five elements of drama. Although there was no musical instrument at that time, the rhythms and the speakers' tones served the role of adding some musicality to the words in this respect. Worth mentioning is that music refers to the rhythm of the dialogue as well as to the compositions that are used in the play. The background music, the sound effect, and the accompanying song(s) should complement and be in support of the situations of the characters. It is likewise used to make the scene more impressive and dramatic for the audience. Music should be placed in such a way as to go well with the theme(s) of the play (Entertainism, 2018).

It is interesting to note that Shakespeare's drama comprises a lot of music. It seems that Shakespeare himself was highly interested in music and the cathartic effects it can produce, that is why he had his own musicians whom he was not obliged to pay (Miller, 2011). When music is played in the background, the author must be giving a certain sign to be received and then analyzed or understood by the audience and the readers alike. The following section is to shed light on the particular function that music is supposed to play in one of Shakespeare's famous comedies.

### III. THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) is one of these plays which are often described as being full of music, songs, and dancing; most of the scenes of this play contain musical elements. The action of the play is set on a desert island in which nobody lives but three persons. The music of the play adds more strangeness and mystery to the island (Miller, 2011). As a result of the impact of music on both characters and the audience, critics believe that the play is written to be performed rather than to be read. In fact, it revolves around the role of music in bringing about the desired effect that the author is after all through the text.

If *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) is often viewed as the most popular among Shakespeare's tragedies, *The Tempest*, then, is the most popular of all the comedies, with at least 30 operas based on it (Carpenter, 1976).

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was first performed before King James I at Whitehall on the first of November (Hallowmas Night), and it largely appealed to its audiences. Characteristically, the king had a particular interest in this kind of drama known as the masque (Wilders, 1988). The King seemed to have liked this combination that the play successfully made between the real and the imaginary.

Being originally composed as an early form of opera, the *masque* is distinguished by its "elaborate and spectacular scenic effects" together with its blend of music, song, and dance. In addition, one may find the inclusion of

mythological and allegorical figures among its characters. Seemingly, Shakespeare was influenced by this fashionable dramatic form. In *The Tempest*, these are found with such visual and musical effects as “the opening storm, the songs of Ariel, the descent of the goddesses from above the stage and the graceful dance of the nymphs and reapers” (Wilders, 1988). Here is another authentic view explaining why *The Tempest* can be seen as a masque:

*The Tempest* has, in part, the effect of a masque or a spectacle, with Prospero playing both stage manager and magician. The complicated actions involving dancers and musicians, the many interspersed songs, Ariel’s metamorphoses, and disappearances, and the masque within the play in Act VI all contribute to the pageantry of the drama, giving it a festival air. (Lawrence et al., 1985).

Orgel (1977) rightfully argues that the *masque* in Shakespeare’s comedy is by no means a court masque but a dramatic allusion to one. Unlike the *interludes* that can be separated as far as their function in dramatic structure is concerned, the *masques* in Shakespeare are integral parts of the action. Thus, the play has come to acquire various meanings and interpretations that keep it one of the classics of English drama, in particular, and of world literature, in general. Orgel goes so far as to state that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is “a text that looks different in different contexts” (Quoted in Braunmuller and Hattaway, 2003). Indeed, the storm and the tempest, on the one hand, can best symbolize turmoil; music, on the other hand, does stand for “the healing, harmonizing influence” (Dobree, 1965). As the tempest can be taken as a symbol of chaos, outside and inside, the final marriage with which the plot concludes can be taken as a symbol of order and future harmony.

*The Tempest* is largely a *romance*. The only authoritative text of the play is that of the First Folio (1623). For the importance of the *masque*, a part of the text may have been cut. In the winter of 1613, this *masque* was for the celebration and as a feature of entertainment for the betrothal during the visiting of the elector palatine. The entertainment offered at the end of the betrothal to Princess Elizabeth, the daughter of Charles I, on December 27, 1612. The royal marriage took place on February 14, 1613; whereas the play presented earlier at court on “Hallomass Nyght” November 1, 1611 (Campbell, 1974).

*The Tempest* can be classified as a fairy tale for more than one reason. Lawrence et al. (1985) agree on the fact that the story of Shakespeare’s play is “a fairy tale about the righting of wrong, ending in a dynamic marriage.” Likewise, Harrison (1968), among other critics, argues that such stories of a magician as having one daughter who falls in love with the son of her father’s enemy are common in all fairy tales.

From a different perspective, the theme of reconciliation, which seems to stand out throughout the Shakespearean comedy, paves the way for and sheds light on it as being a fairy tale, basically because in this form of writing or genre no blood is to be shed in the end. To achieve such reconciliation, Shakespeare has it that all Prospero’s enemies be finally “brought before him and forgiven.” Thus, since Alonso’s son is restored, both men (Prospero and Alonso) reconcile “in the

happiness of their children” (Harrison 1968). Bonamy Dobree quotes Prof. Kenneth Muir as saying that in the center of Shakespeare’s new “vision” lie “his belief in the necessity of forgiveness” and the principle that the “sins of the fathers are healed by the children” (1965).

In connection with the fathers’ sins that need to be pardoned is another dominant and significant fairy tale theme that the action of Shakespeare’s comedy prominently suggests which is “the regeneration of a natural and sinful man” (Dobree, 1965). When Prospero, the hero and one of the central characters in the play, “seduces his victims with illusory banquets, strange music, and sleeping spells, or hounds them with fearsome noises, physical torments, and impossible tasks” (Lawrence et al., 1985), he appears to be moving them through a purifying process out of which they can get eligible for the spirit of reconciliation that he is seeking to establish. Therefore, the theme of purification through suffering can not only be seen in the torments that Prospero’s enemies receive as a result of Prospero’s practice of his magical and supernatural powers but it also can be normally applied to Prospero himself in that the Prospero with whom the play ends is different from the one who is ruling the island throughout the play.

As *The Tempest* is Shakespeare’s last written play, he is said to be making in it his final appearance as a dramatist. By analogy, Prospero appears, ultimately, “bidding farewell to his art of magic” (Harrison, 1968). In the end, Prospero is renouncing his older self, saying goodbye to his books and magic. Although Prospero is dealing in white rather than black magic – which makes him in sharp contrast with Dr. Faustus, the principal character of Christopher Marlow’s play by the namesake – (Dobree, 1965), he himself feels such an incessant need for a fresh start, based on forgiving the ills and wrongdoings done against him in the past.

The crucial central element in *The Tempest* is its wide significant employment of music. Music is transferring and informing, shaping, and affecting the lives and actions of the characters throughout the play. A play like *The Tempest* may seem ambiguous, lacking in direction without music, which connects directly with the characters’ traits, or at least some of them:

The music of *The Tempest* provides a context for Prospero’s magical machinations and becomes, through the course of the play, a powerfully evocative symbol of this magic. In *The Tempest* music is the medium through which order emerges from chaos; it is the agent of suffering, learning, growth, and freedom. Critics who have noted the pervasiveness of music, songs, and musical allusions in Shakespeare’s drama have often attempted to extrapolate from the canon of his work and posit a distinct philosophy of music which they insist he was trying to communicate in his plays. This is most easily accomplished by rather vague references to Renaissance ideas of divine harmony and the “music of the spheres” that macrocosmic heavenly order of which this worldly microcosm was thought to be a reflection (Coletti, 1974).

Music, which is soothing and sedating of such human feelings as anger, frustration, regret, hate, and so on, comes

to occupy a central part and assumes a significant function in Prospero's reconciliatory design. Hence, the tunes and melodies played by Ariel on the lyre or harp are, according to his master's instructions, basically soft since the intention is to forget, forgive, and turn a new leaf. Instead of punishing the wrongdoer aided by the magical powers that he is in complete control of the old magician, as Harrison observes, "makes his victim dance to his music" (1968). The type of punishment that the evil characters usually receive in the Shakespearian comedy is comical in the sense that they are by no means physically hurt, but rather, made ridiculous objects of laughter. Obviously, this is a gesture implying goodwill in addition to a happy, merry conclusion of the play's dramatic action.

Together with the strange, remote, enchanted island on which most of the action of *The Tempest* is set, music appears to be that part of the romantic setting with which the playwright brings about the effects that can serve his major themes, on top of which are those of reconciliation and forgiveness. To forget and then to forgive are the principles that give rise to the emergence of a new spirit characterized by love and understanding. To this effect, music and songs are intentionally made constant sources of pleasure and goodwill. They purge the action of any probable intrusion of violence or extremities. Indeed, music is manipulated in such a way as to create harmony and deal with the chaos within characters; it has the magical power of bringing the opposites together, bringing about the thematic and structural unities that Shakespeare must have been working to achieve in his comedy. Such a powerful effect that music is shown to have extends to almost all the characters, including the monster-like Caliban. With Ariel's soft music, life can become a beautiful symphony that has no place for such hard feelings as hatred and revenge. Carpenter (1976) notices that "the distraught nobles have their faculties restored by music."

The first scene of Shakespeare's play shows the confusion along with disorder caused by the violent, stormy weather. The loud voice of the storm or the tempest helps the audience to comprehend this confusion aboard the king's ship. Shakespeare's talent is shown in bringing together and displaying the opposites. The combination of the highest and the lowest is by no means uncommon in Shakespeare's drama. The juxtaposition of the fears displayed by the good characters, along with those of the bad ones show his mastery in revealing the hidden human drives when man is put in extremes. Thus, the playwright turns to laughter to dispel and drive out any sense of fear, disappointment, or sorrow. This combination is widely made use of to make the flow of the incidents more expected and more natural (Miller, 2011).

As Prospero's obedient servant, Ariel is a representative of the conventional spirits through which a magician often has to act. Because Prospero has released him from the cloven pine in which the witch Sycorax had trapped him, he is bound to serve his master for a fixed term. Only after he has completed, it will be able to rejoice in the limitless freedom that is his natural state. This is what similar creatures have been forced to do since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ariel is also a fairy-like Puck; he

is a tiny creature, associated with butterflies and moonbeams. He dances and flits his way through the play, often breaking into song. In these songs, music, and magic unite to make them the most valuable of all the songs all through the play. Critics take Ariel to be a symbol of the poet's imagination or of his poetry (Miller, 2011).

Ariel becomes able, thanks to the fantastic or marvelous effect that his soft music can produce on humans, in general, and on Prospero's artistic spirit, in particular, to remind his master of some of his sublimated aspects, such as pity and tenderness, and, consequently, to "appeal to his noble reason" (Dobree, 1965), rather than to his revengeful side. Therefore, the character is thus a good force that can twist the actions to where the author desires them to turn.

On the other hand, the type of music played by Ariel varies in accordance with what different situations require. It is a gesture of how music can be employed to suit the diverse situations that characters may encounter on the island. At the time of distress and danger, for example, Ariel plays music that is warning in its nature. Textually, it is referred to as "solemn music" to set it apart from the soft one. In Act 11, Scene 1, Ariel enters invisibly, playing "solemn music" as he is really witnessing the evil agreement being made by Antonio and Sebastian in a wicked conspiracy meant to usurp the crown of Alonzo, King of Naples, by murdering him whereas being asleep. Therefore, Ariel sings in Gonzalo's ear warningly and wakes him up in the nick of time:

Ariel: Whereas you here do snoring lie

- Open-eyes conspiracy
- His time doth take
- If of life you keep a care
- Shake off slumber, and beware
- Awake, Awake!

(*The Tempest*, 1968, 11, 1, 300-305).

All the songs that are classified or sorted out as "solemn" are not merely intended to affect the audience, even the beast-like Caliban, who is known as a rude and uneducated native of the island, is fascinated by the sounds of the island "the isle (which) is full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" (3. 2. 127-128). Listening to soft tunes, Caliban tries to calm down his new friends, Stephano and Trinculo, who have never heard something like that before. The invisible Ariel spells music over Ferdinand making him bound to follow it (Miller, 2011).

In like manner, whereas the three conspirators (Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban) are putting their final touches on their devilish plan that is designed to murder Alonzo, Stephano, drunk, and full of joy and rapture as it was, commences his song, to which Ariel reacts by playing a solemn, strange tune on a tabor and pipe:

Caliban: That's not the tune

Stephano: What is this same?

Trinculo: This is the tune of our catch, played by the picture of Nobody.

Stephano: If thou beest a man, show thyself in thy likeness. If thou beest a devil, take 't as thou list.

Trinculo: Oh, forgive me my sins!

(*The Tempest*, 111, 11, 133-140).

It can be noticed that the quality and value of Ariel's music mostly relies on how it is received and the type of character that happens to be listening to it. For the good, honest Gonzalo, for example, it is a "marvelous sweet music" (111, 111, 20), because it has harmony in it. To Ariel's so enthralling and charming music sing and dance the shapes: Goddesses, like Iris, Ceres, and Juno, in a little masque in celebration of Ferdinand's and Miranda's wedding. In fact, Shakespeare's play is, as Clubb (2004) observes, "a maritime version of the pastoral plays in which clowns, nobles, magicians, and lovers meet in the wild to know themselves and their hearts and to right old wrongs."

Alternately, music represents a constant source of noise and discomfort for the villains and conspirators, including Antonio and Sebastian. Since Stephano is disturbed, being on an enchanted island that is, as Caliban puts it, "full of noises" or music (111, 11, 144), he (Stephano) consoles himself claiming that he, when he becomes a king in his royal robe, "...shall have (his) music for nothing" (111, 11, 154). At any rate, the point after which Prospero goes, ultimately, is to bring all his enemies in his power or before him. This is how he instructs his servant Ariel presently: "Let them be hunted soundly. At this hour/Lie at my mercy all my enemies" (1V, 1, 263-266).

Songs and music can, in a way, define what kind of an Island in which the action of *The Tempest* is mostly set. Dent (1960) sees that the function of Ariel's songs is, apparently, "to distinguish him as a supernatural character from the ordinary mortals." Music has some sort of magic in it, having the capacity of healing and calming down anger and softening hard-hearted people. Perhaps because of such merits, the English are, in effect, music-loving people (Dent, 1960).

All in all, the characters' responses to the music, be they positive or negative, largely decide and settle what type of people they are. In other words, the one who can be in full harmony with Ariel's music can be redeemed fully or partially based on his/her spirit that reacts positively to musical tunes and melodies. Although Dent (1960) points out that it is unclear whether music is employed intentionally in *The Tempest*, or it is simply "appropriate" to a "particular dramatic idea." What is evident, however, is the playwright's success in the creation of a precise Romantic atmosphere in the centre of which stands music as a unifying element to the play as a whole, structurally and thematically. In this way, employing music becomes quite relevant to the author's farewell message indicating forgiveness and reconciliation.

Seeing that the audience becomes gradually aware that everything that goes on in this island is under Prospero's control, who, with his magical powers, "can create illusions and command the winds" (Gay, 2008), it becomes convenient for Shakespeare to introduce music as an integral part that enhances and reinforces the magical, Romantic trend which the action frequently takes. Furthermore, music can be seen as the most suitable device or method that the author could ever think of to suggest the play's a happy conclusion.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* provides a clear example of the strong relationship or tie between music (art), on the one hand, and literature (writing), on the other hand. As writing is claimed by Aristotle to have some healing aspects through which the writer gets full or partial rid of such unwanted or harmful feelings as pity and fear, music, by analogy, can share with literature almost the same cathartic function, thereby enabling characters to get themselves purified and emptied of all their evil or dark motivations and plans, and all is done under the control of a singer or a musician.

*The Tempest*, which is Shakespeare's last comedy, can be a good case study of the positive effect of music on certain characters' moods and temperaments. Prospero, through his servant Ariel, is able not only to control all that is happening on his enchanted island but also bring together all his enemies in a moment where some confession of the past sins is required only to give rise to the resounding reconciliatory conclusion.

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