

Junior Research Paper Convention: Abstract Form
CCIII/Spring 2025

Lin, Vivian. Section D. "The Sea as a Mirror: Navigating the Tides of Colonial Struggles and Identity in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*."

Abstract

This paper explores how the sea in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* reflects colonial power and racial exclusion through the critical lens of Afro-pessimism. Proposed by Frank B. Wilderson III, Afro-pessimism argues that Black people are not just socially unequal but structurally excluded from civil society. The analysis focuses on three main concepts of Afro-pessimism: Gratuitous Violence, Natal Alienation, Generally Dishonored. First, Prospero manipulates the sea to create a storm, alluding to the imminent colonial violence he will cause on the island. Second, as a non-human character, Caliban is deprived of language and culture. Lastly, Ariel shows his obedience to Prospero yet he remains unrecognized as a subject, reflecting the sustained dehumanization he endures under Prospero's rule. Through the lens of Afro-pessimism, the sea in *The Tempest* not only serves as the backdrop of the story but also as a symbol of colonial power, a reflection of identity struggles, and a mirror of cultural conflicts through gratuitous violence, natal alienation, and being generally dishonored in the context of British colonial expansion in the 17th century.

Notes:

1. My RP belongs to the category of: ☒ Literary Studies or ☐ Social Studies

2. Related websites:

Chapman, Matthieu. "Red, White, and Black: Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and the Structuring of Racial Antagonisms in Early Modern England and the New World." *Theatre History Studies*, vol. 39, no. 1, Jan. 2020, pp. 7-23.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/ths.2020.0001>.

Hantman, Jeffrey L. "Caliban's Own Voice: American Indian Views of the Other in Colonial Virginia." *New Literary History*, vol. 23, no. 1, Jan. 1992, pp. 69-81.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/469158>.