

The Biblical Archetypal Model and Its Embodiment in *The Tempest*

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Abstract

The Tempest, written by William Shakespeare, is highly influenced by *The Holy Bible*, the western culture and literature source. This paper utilizes Northrop Frye's mythic archetypal criticism theory to study the play's embodiment of the biblical archetypal model. Previous studies have only dealt with one aspect of the biblical archetype in *The Tempest*. This essay discusses that the characters, structure, plot, and imagery of *The Tempest* can all find the archetypes in *The Holy Bible*. It is found that the play is the Scriptures' double to some extent, through which Shakespeare wants to spread biblical values such as morality and fraternity.

Keywords

Biblical Archetypes, Archetypal Criticism, *The Tempest*, *The Holy Bible*

1. Introduction to *The Play* and *The Theory*

1.1. Introduction to *The Tempest*

The Tempest, a late play written by the English playwright William Shakespeare, is a romance widely regarded as his "farewell to the theatre." As a Christian living in a Christian atmosphere, Shakespeare is deeply influenced by Christian culture, and his works are permeated with biblical ideas and thoughts.

The Tempest is a work full of Christian overtones. The story unfolds on an island. Prospero, the Duke of Milan, is obsessed with magic and is taken from the throne by his brother Antonio and Alonso, the king of Naples. With the help of magic, Prospero conquers the island's spirits and its only inhabitant, the ugly native Caliban. Twelve years later, the king of Naples and his son Ferdinand, and Antonio pass by the island in a boat. Prospero uses his magic to raise a storm and overturn their ship. The king and his party suffer a lot and finally recover

their lost nature. Prospero forgives their sins and marries his daughter Miranda to Ferdinand.

The plot, structure, characters, and imagery in *The Tempest* can find archetypes in *The Holy Bible*. This paper aims to study the links between *The Tempest* and the Biblical archetype under the guide of Northrop Frye's mythic archetypal criticism theory and explore the implied Christian themes in the play.

1.2. Introduction to the Biblical Archetypal Criticism

Archetype criticism is an influential school in the 20th century, which significantly impacted on literary study. Herman Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary critic, is one of the three influential figures contributing to this literary theory. Based on the research of Frazer and Jung, Frye develops archetypal biblical criticism into its summit. In Frye's mythic archetypal criticism, myth is the original literature structure system and an archetype. This independent structural unit can be an image, symbol, theme, and character that have conventionalized semantic associations or connotations for people in a particular culture and repeatedly appear in different literary works.

From the perspective of Frye, *The Holy Bible* is the core myth providing myth framework for the European poets and the root for the western literature. He states that "western literature has been more influenced by the *Bible* than by any other book" [1]. Since it came into being, the Christian masterpiece *The Holy Bible* has greatly influenced people's thinking and life in the western world. Most western writers are affected by it consciously or unconsciously as well. According to Hamilton, the theme of Frye's writing in relating the *Bible* to literature is always the same, "The *Bible* provides the archetypal vision or mythological universe from which literature directly derives or descends" [2].

The influence of *The Holy Bible* on *The Tempest* cannot be neglected. Therefore, this paper will utilize archetypal criticism to analyze the embodiment of archetypal biblical model in the play from four aspects. The purpose of the study is to reveal the implied motif and the profound thoughts and spirits of the play with the help of archetypal criticism.

2. Character Archetype of *The Bible* in *The Tempest*

As has been mentioned above, *The Holy Bible* is one source of western literature, many western writers make good use of the character, structure, plot, and imagery of *The Holy Bible*, and Shakespeare is one of them. According to statistics, Shakespeare quotes or uses the elements of *The Holy Bible* in more than 1000 places scattered throughout his plays [3]. Most of the characters in *The Tempest* can find their archetypes in *The Holy Bible*.

Prospero, the protagonist, is a "Godlike figure" [4] who is omniscient and omnipotent with supreme divine power and noble qualities. After being usurped by his brother Antonio and forced to take his young daughter Miranda into exile on an island, which Prospero conquers and recreates through his great magic, he

frees Ariel and other small spirits trapped and then assigns respective duties to them so that the creatures can live in a stable and orderly environment. Prospero's act of recreating the island is the same as the creation of God in *The Holy Bible*, for he is the God of the island who controls everything on it. Prospero punishes those who are evil as God does and tries to educate them to let them repent of what they have done. He is as merciful as God, forgiving Antonio and Alonso for their sins and teaching them to be good.

Miranda, daughter of Prospero, corresponds to the angel in *The Holy Bible*, for she is pure and innocent with compassion. When Prospero tells Miranda about the cause of their stranding on a deserted island, he says that it is Miranda whose smile gives him the power and raises him to bear up against what should ensue. In Prospero's eyes, Miranda is "a Cherubin" [5], pointing out her angelic archetype.

When Miranda sees her father use his magic to unleash a storm that causes the people on the ship to suffer, she prays to him to calm it down. Even though her father reassured her that no calamity would happen, Miranda, with her angelic heart, could not help but sigh that it was a sad day. Miranda's kindness is evident in the fact that she feels the same way about the safety of people who have nothing to do with her.

Antonio, brother of Prospero, usurps his brother's title and even tries to murder his brother. The mention of Antonio's evil deeds naturally brings to mind Cain [6], the first murderer of humanity in *The Holy Bible*. Cain and Abel are also brothers. Cain is jealous of Abel when God prefers his brother Abel's sacrifice to his own. Just as Antonio's plot to usurp the throne is carried out unknowingly, Cain springs up and kills Abel when Abel is not looking when he is talking to him.

The dispute between Antonio and Prospero is over the throne, while Cain and Abel are fighting over the favor of God. Both brothers had a conflict of interest. Antonio receives his punishment twelve years after his usurpation; he is attacked by a storm conjured by Prospero's magic and then lands on the island, where he is "exiled" by Prospero. After Cain kills Abel, God sentences him to be displaced, which is God's "exile" for Cain. Obviously, both Antonio and Cain are punished, but neither is sentenced to death, instead both are punished in essentially the same way by exile.

Caliban in *The Tempest* is as evil as the devil Satan in *The Holy Bible*. Caliban, offspring of a devil and a wicked witch, is portrayed as a monster covered with poisonous tumors. From the appearance alone, Caliban is already a devil, and his behavior and psychology are as evil as Satan. He disobeys Prospero, for he holds the belief that Prospero has taken over the island that belongs to him and that it is Prospero who stops him from doing what he wants to do and limits his freedom. Satan, the devil, also believes God has interfered with his rule and deprived him of his freedom.

Behaving like Satan, Caliban does evil things on the island to rebel against

Prospero, such as trying to rape Miranda. When he meets Trinculo and Stefano, he proposes a conspiracy of regicide to tempt them to sin. In the same way, the serpent, the embodiment of Satan in the Garden of Eden, tempts Eve and Adam to commit the original sin.

3. Structure Archetype of *The Bible* in *The Tempest*

Structurally, *The Holy Bible* has become a prototypical model for future generations to emulate. The U-shaped structure is a typical structural pattern of *The Holy Bible*, as summarized by Frye, who believes that “the coherence of the Bible’s narrative as a whole is created by a ‘U-shape plot’ typical of comedy” [7].

This U-shape structure in *The Holy Bible* begins with “the Genesis creation of a harmonious family and garden state, is followed by a fall into a long alternation of historical disasters and triumphs and concludes with a final ascent back to harmony in the eternal city of Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation, This U-shape pattern also governs many minor plots of fall and rise subsumed in the major one” [7].

From Frye’s point of view, the narrative structure of the entire Bible follows the pattern of paradise, sin, suffering, repentance, and salvation. The structure of most of Shakespeare’s comedies and romances is consistent with this structure, and *The Tempest* exemplifies this narrative pattern [8]. Being similar to *The Holy Bible*, *The Tempest* takes the U-shaped pattern not only in the whole novel but also in sections.

In terms of the whole story, Antonio lives in Milan with his brother Prospero, duke Milan. Because of jealousy, Antonio sins the usurpation of power with the help of Alonso, king of Naples. To punish Antonio and Alonso, Prospero raises a storm under which they cannot return home but falls into the water. Prospero even lies that prince Ferdinand is drowned to break the king’s heart. After a series of sufferings and under the instruction of Prospero, Antonio and Alonso recognize that what they have done is wrong and evil, so they repent for it and ask for the forgiveness of Prospero. Finally, they obtain salvation, the king and the prince reunite, and all people return to their homes.

The above is the U-shaped pattern for the whole story, and there are also several U-shaped patterns in sections.

The first one is that King Alonso has his son Ferdinand with him at the beginning. Because of the storm and the shipwreck, he separates from his son and thinks Ferdinand is dead. However, at the end of the play, he reunites with his son. Alonso’s “to have, to lose, to have again” is a U-shape pattern.

The second one is the love between Miranda and Ferdinand. They fall in love with each other at first sight. Nevertheless, Prospero feels that an easy acquisition would demean the objects of people’s pursuit. So, he imprisons Ferdinand for creating obstacles for the two youths. Likewise, at the end of the play, Ferdinand is released, and Prospero agrees to marry his daughter to the prince. The up and down of their love course is a kind of U-shape.

4. Plot Archetype of *The Bible* in *The Tempest*

The central plot conflict that runs through *The Holy Bible* is the conflict between good and evil. Ryken holds that the plot of *The Holy Bible* is centered on the tremendous divine conflict between good and evil [9]. Moreover, *The Tempest* follows this plot archetype for the whole play is about the conflict between good and evil and the final reconciliation.

The apparent conflict in the play is between Antonio and Prospero, with Antonio representing the evil side while Prospero represents the good. Antonio is Prospero's treacherous brother who overthrows Prospero from his position as Duke of Milan because Antonio saw Prospero was more interested in tinkering with magic than governing the city. Prospero and his daughter Miranda are exiled from Milan, and they would have died if not for the help of Gonzalo. The play even begins with the conflict of Prospero's using magic to conjure a storm and torment the shipwreck survivors, including Antonio.

Another conflict is between the good Gonzalo and evil Antonio. Antonio wants to murder the king and his loyal counselor, Gonzalo, while the king is asleep. Moreover, twelve years ago, it was Gonzalo who saved Prospero and his daughter's lives when Antonio tried to kill them. Fortunately, Gonzalo is saved by Ariel, sent by Prospero.

As what has been analyzed before, Caliban and Prospero represent Satan and God, respectively. Therefore, their conflict is also evil versus good. Caliban has always been cursing his master, Prospero. He meets two men from the shipwreck: Stefano, Alonso's drunken butler, and Trinculo, King Alonso's jester. Stefano gives Caliban some wine, prompting Caliban to view Stefano as God dropped from heaven. Caliban pledges his service to Stefano, who plans to murder Prospero and take Miranda for his wife so the two of them can rule over the island as King and Queen. Stefano is, of course, somewhat drunk. Caliban advises him to burn all of Prospero's books, for, without them, Prospero is bereft of his powers. However, Prospero defuses the conspiracy.

The plot in *The Tempest* resembles *The Holy Bible* because the good triumphs the evil. Other plots can find archetypes in *The Holy Bible* as well.

When Prospero suddenly interrupts the nuptial masque, he speaks the now-famous lines,

Our revels now are ended. Those our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherits, shall dissolve [5].

Prospero compares the end of the masque to that of the world. From his perspective, life is no more permanence. A possible analog of these lines can be

found in a passage in the Second Epistle of Peter [10]. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (2 Peter 3. 10). A closer analog to Prospero’s speech can be found in the third line of Psalm 75 [10]. “The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved” [10].

What is more, another plot in *The Tempest* echoes *The Holy Bible* as well. In the first scene of the second act of this play, Alonso and Gonzalo remain sound asleep while Antonio and Sebastian plot their devilish act of regicide. When Sebastian and Antonio are about to murder Alonso and Gonzalo, invisible Ariel, with music and song, swiftly intervenes to rouse the sleeping pair just in time to keep them living. Upon waking, Alonso and Gonzalo are startled at the sight of two drawn swords. Then, the two conspirators pretend to be merely trying to protect them, facing the question of the king and the counselor. Sebastian replies that while they stand securing their repose, they hear the sound of lions, and Antonio, too, claims “it was the roar of a whole herd of lions” [5].

According to Go, two biblical conceits of a roaring lion, one in Proverbs 19:12, 20:2 and the other in 1 Peter 5:8, may well be relevant to Antonio’s trope of the “roar” of “lions” above. “Both tie in perfectly well with the intense dramatic moment of the scene and, if recognized, could together enrich the significance of Antonio’s speech considerably with some remarkable twists of dramatic irony” [11].

5. Imagery Archetype of *The Bible* in *The Tempest*

The imagery in *The Tempest* can also find the archetypes in *The Holy Bible*. The title itself is an imagery adapted from the “water” in *The Holy Bible*. When Gonzalo has washed ashore after the tempest, he says surprisedly, “That our garments being, as they were, drenched in the sea, hold notwithstanding their freshness and gloss, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt water” [5]. The word of Gonzalo indicates that the storm’s water has a purifying effect, making their cloth look like they were freshly dyed instead of making them fade. After the tempest, Alonso and Antonio finally repent for what they have done and ask for Prospero’s forgiveness.

Therefore, the water in *The Tempest* is the same as the water in *The Holy Bible*, symbolizing renewal and hope. *The New Testament* records that John baptizes people with water from the Jordan River to signify the forgiveness of sins. The water itself is considered sacred because of its sin-purging properties. Alonso, Antonio, and other members who fall into the water under the tempest are purified. Their sins are washed away, as well as their evil thoughts. Eventually, they are transformed into “goody creature” [5] and “beauteous mankind” [5].

The second imagery of *The Tempest* that makes the reader feel close is the “island.”

Gonzalo thinks that there is “everything advantageous of life” [5] on the isl-

and. The grass is lush and green, the temperature is tender, and the island is fragrant and breezy. Even the ugly and evil Caliban is fascinated by the island and praises the island. He once introduces that,

The isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices
That if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming
The clouds methought would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again [5].

The island in *The Tempest* is a fantastic island, totally different from the secular world since the monster can have a sweet dream on the island. The archetype of the island is the Garden of Eden, where the tree is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the gold is good, there are pearls and onyx, and Adam and Eve live happily. The island is recreated by Prospero just as God creates the Garden of Eden. People on the island live a happy life; everything on the island is so harmonious and beautiful. This place is the envy of everyone, while the Garden of Eden is the ideal place that countless people seek.

Another imagery is the “lightning,” a biblical metaphor symbolizing God. Lightning signifies God’s mighty presence, in a literal or poetic sense, that causes all people to tremble in reverence. So, at the beginning of the play, there is a lightning which implies that Prospero, the Godlike figure in the play, will appear. On the other hand, lightning also means God’s wrathful judgment against His enemies. The lightning in *The Tempest* suggests that Prospero will punish his enemies, and he does.

The lightning in the play refers to the lighting in *The Holy Bible*, which is the incarnation of God to warn the evil people and demonstrate justice. The lightning that appears at the beginning of the play sets the tone of the play with its religious overtones.

6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the embodiment of archetypal biblical model in the play from the aspects of characters, structure, plot, and imagery. It is possible to identify that *The Tempest* is the double of *The Holy Bible* in some ways. There are good and evil men in the play, and there is a conflict between good and evil. The evil men are punished; they suffer, repent, are forgiven by the good men, and finally are saved. It can be concluded that Shakespeare wants to deliver the biblical value of *The Holy Bible* through incorporating almost all aspects of it in this farewell play: be a moral man, and love others. Moreover, this can be a guide for the later generations.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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