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ASSIGNMENT

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2. Write an essay on the master-slave relationship in the light of the play *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

Answer: William Shakespeare's play "The Tempest" is a complex and multi-layered work that explores a variety of themes and relationships. Among these themes, the master-slave relationship occupies a significant place. Throughout the play, we witness different dimensions of the master-slave dynamic, as manifested in the characters of Prospero and Caliban, as well as Prospero's treatment of Ariel. This essay will delve into the portrayal of the master-slave relationship in "The Tempest," examining the power dynamics, exploitation, freedom, and eventual reconciliation that define this intricate aspect of the play.

At the heart of "The Tempest" lies the intricate master-slave relationship between Prospero, the exiled Duke of Milan, and Caliban, the native islander. Prospero's arrival on the island and subsequent enslavement of Caliban epitomize the colonial and imperialistic themes prevalent in Shakespeare's time. Prospero, having been overthrown from his dukedom by his brother Antonio and left to die on the island with his infant daughter Miranda, seizes the opportunity to assert control over the island and its inhabitants, including Caliban. Caliban's character represents the colonized other, marginalized and oppressed by the European colonizers. He is portrayed as a wild and uncivilized creature, and his enslavement by Prospero reflects the Eurocentric view of superiority and domination over indigenous populations. From the very beginning, it is evident that Prospero wields significant power over Caliban. He claims to have taught Caliban language, thereby making him more "civilized." However, Prospero's control over Caliban extends far beyond mere language acquisition. He also physically dominates him, using threats and intimidation to keep him in line. Prospero reminds Caliban of the past punishments he has inflicted upon him. Caliban's initial subservience to Prospero is rooted in fear, as he recognizes Prospero's magical abilities and potential for harm. He acknowledges Prospero's control over the island's resources and is coerced into serving him. However, Caliban's relationship with Prospero is complex, as it also contains elements of resistance and defiance. Caliban resents Prospero's control and frequently curses him, expressing his desire for freedom. Prospero's power over Caliban extends beyond physical dominance. He also uses language and education as tools of control. Prospero teaches Caliban his own language and expects him to conform to European standards of civility. In this way, language becomes a symbol of cultural imperialism, as Prospero seeks to assimilate Caliban into his own culture and erase his native identity. Caliban's acquisition of language, however, is a double-edged sword. It enables him to communicate and articulate his grievances, but it also reinforces his dependency on Prospero. The ambivalence of the master-slave relationship between Prospero and Caliban is further accentuated by moments of vulnerability and empathy. Caliban's subservience is not absolute, as he sometimes assists Prospero willingly, such as when he helps him gather firewood. Additionally, Prospero acknowledges moments when he treated Caliban kindly and provided him with knowledge and understanding. This complex interplay of power dynamics, resentment, and moments of compassion adds depth to their relationship. Prospero's control over Caliban is further exemplified by his ownership of the island itself. In a colonial context, Prospero's occupation of the island symbolizes European colonization and the appropriation of land and resources. The island becomes a microcosm of the larger colonial enterprise, where the colonizer, Prospero, assumes the role of the master, and Caliban, the colonized native, is relegated to the status of the slave.

Caliban, as the oppressed slave, chafes under Prospero's rule and yearns for freedom. Throughout the play, Caliban expresses his deep resentment for Prospero's control, describing him as a "tyrant" who has taken his island from him. He also curses Prospero, calling him "a plague upon the tyrant that I serve!" Caliban's anger and bitterness are palpable, and they stem from his sense of injustice and desire to regain control over his homeland. Caliban's character is multifaceted. He is not merely a passive victim; rather, he embodies the complexities of a colonized subject. His attempts to resist Prospero's domination, even if they are often futile, demonstrate his agency and determination to be free. Caliban's alliance with Stephano and Trinculo, two shipwrecked drunkards who wash ashore, is a manifestation of his desire to overthrow Prospero and break free from his master-slave relationship. However, Caliban's efforts to gain freedom are complicated by his own flaws and weaknesses. His willingness to serve Stephano, who is no less oppressive than Prospero, exposes his vulnerability and his susceptibility to manipulation. This ambiguity in Caliban's character underscores the complexity of the master-slave relationship and the difficulty of achieving true liberation in a colonial context.

In addition to Caliban, another character caught in the master-slave dynamic is Ariel, a spirit bound to serve Prospero. While Ariel's servitude differs significantly from Caliban's, it still reflects the complexities of the master-slave relationship. Ariel is not native to the island but is a supernatural being enslaved by Prospero through his magical powers. Ariel's servitude is characterized by a sense of duty and gratitude. When Prospero first arrived on the island, he released Ariel from a tree in which he was trapped by the previous ruler of the island, the witch Sycorax. In return, Ariel becomes Prospero's loyal servant, performing various tasks and using his magical abilities to aid Prospero in his schemes. However, Ariel's servitude is not without limitations. Ariel longs for his freedom and consistently pleads with Prospero to release him from his bondage. His desire for liberty is expressed poetically in his songs and speeches, creating a sense of sympathy for his predicament. Ariel's servitude highlights the moral dilemma of enslaving a creature who is not inherently evil or malevolent but rather bound by circumstance. Prospero's treatment of Ariel is characterized by a mix of coercion and benevolence. While Prospero promises Ariel's freedom, he continuously delays it as he requires Ariel's assistance in achieving his goals. This manipulation of Ariel's hope for freedom raises questions about the ethics of using promises and rewards to maintain control over someone. Prospero's actions reveal the complex nature of power and authority in the master-slave relationship.

As the play progresses, the themes of freedom and reconciliation come to the forefront of the master-slave relationships in "The Tempest." Prospero's ultimate goal is to secure his and Miranda's return to Milan, which necessitates a resolution of the conflicts and power dynamics on the island. In the final act of the play, Prospero's attitude towards Caliban and Ariel undergoes significant transformation. Prospero's treatment of Caliban becomes less punitive, and he expresses a desire to forgive and reconcile with him. Prospero acknowledges his own role in Caliban's suffering, admitting that he was initially too harsh. He also recognizes that Caliban's desire for autonomy is valid. This moment of self-awareness and empathy marks a turning point in their relationship, as Prospero offers to teach Caliban once again and invites him to join in the forthcoming celebration. Ariel's liberation, too, becomes a pivotal moment in the play. Prospero promises to release Ariel, and Ariel expresses his gratitude. This moment underscores the idea that even in master-slave relationships, there is a moral obligation to grant

freedom when it is justly earned. Ariel's release is not only an act of benevolence but also a recognition of the intrinsic value of freedom and autonomy. The resolution of the master-slave relationships in "The Tempest" points towards a broader theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. Prospero forgives those who wronged him, including his brother Antonio, and relinquishes his magical powers, symbolizing his renunciation of control. The play ends with a celebration and the promise of harmony and unity among the characters.

"The Tempest" by William Shakespeare explores the master-slave relationship through the characters of Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel. This dynamic is central to the play's examination of power, exploitation, freedom, and reconciliation. The complex power struggle between Prospero and Caliban reflects colonial and imperialistic themes of the time, with elements of coercion, resistance, and moments of empathy. Ariel's servitude adds another layer to the discussion, highlighting the ethical dilemma of enslaving a being bound by circumstance. Ultimately, "The Tempest" concludes with a message of forgiveness and reconciliation, as Prospero forgives his enemies, releases Ariel, and seeks to mend his relationship with Caliban. This resolution underscores the play's broader themes of freedom and the moral responsibility of those in power. "The Tempest" invites us to reflect on the complexities of master-slave relationships and the transformative potential of forgiveness and empathy in human interactions.