

Witchcraft and Magic in the Tempest

During the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, magic, religion and science were seen as equally valid doctrines to explain how the world worked. Elizabethans believed in the power of magic and felt it was very real. Magic was accepted by the educated and elite: King James I wrote a book exploring the topic called *Daemonologie* in 1603, approximately eight years prior to the performance of the *Tempest*.



The purpose of *Daemonologie* was to prove the existence of magic and witchcraft and to assert what punishments should be put into place for those who practised these devilish crafts. In King James I, the only viable punishment was death.

Daemonologie puts the ratio of female to male witches at 20 to 1, and this figure went on to form the basis for the witch hunts that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries within Europe and the American colonies.

King James I explains why there's an abundance of *female witches* in the second book of his text:

'That sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of Eua at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine

1. In your own words, explain why King James I thinks there are more female with than men? Do you agree with his belief?
 - **Women were seen as the weaker sex, thus, easily entrapped by the devil's machinations.**
 - **This can be seen from the story of the Garden of Eden in the bible when Eva was deceived by the snake, and broke God's commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge.**
2. Which being allows witches to have their magical powers? What would have Christians thought about these women associated with this being?
 - **The devil gives witches their magical powers**
 - **Christian would have felt this association was abominable and went against their doctrine. They would have felt it was an evil act, leading to eternal damnation.**

In *Daemonologie*, James writes that witches can "rayse stormes and tempestes in the aire, either vpon Sea or land"

3. What skills does King James think witches have? Who has these skills in the Tempest?

- Can raise storms and tempest
- Prospero has this skill in the Tempest

4. Look at the descriptions below, decide which character they relate to Sycorax, Prospero or both in the Tempest.

	Sycorax/ Propsero/ Both
Uses toads, beetles and bats to perform magic	Sycorax
Exiled from Milan to the island	Prospero
Died on the island	Sycorax
Can control the moon and tides	Sycorax
Banished from Algiers to the island	Sycorax
Use books to perform magic	Prospero
Raises a Tempest	Sycorax
Enslaves people with their magic	Both
Returns to their homeland- Milan	Prospero
Imprisons Ariel in a pine tree	Sycorax
Charms Miranda to sleep	Prospero
Gives up their magic	Prospero
Releases those enslaved by magic and gives them their freedom	Prospero

5. a) How is the magic performed by Sycorax and Prospero similar and different?
b) Why do you think Sycorax is seen as a 'bad witch' and Prospero as a 'good magician'- Think about their actions.

- **Both enslave others to get their deed completed**
- **However, Prospero uses magic to right a wrong and then give it up when this has been done.**
- **Sycorax seems to use magic throughout her life until her death, thus, not renouncing this 'devilish' act.**

6. Prospero is described as a 'magician' whereas Sycorax is described as 'witch'.
a) Do these descriptions have the same connotations?
b) Which one is seen in a more positive light?
c) How might this fit in with the theme/characterisations Shakespeare is exploring/developing.

- **Magician is a more positive word than witch. Witch has connotations of evil whereas magician has more positive connotations.**
- **Women, largely, being witches and not men**

7. Why do you think Prospero gives up his magic at the end?
- Think about King James I view of magic

A good Christian would not practise magic and give it up if he had the abilities. The fact that Prospero gives up magic endorses King James I view that one should not practise it, it was irreligious and dangerous to society.

Extension Activities:

1. The Tempest was Shakespeare's last play, how could Prospero's magic be compared to that of a playwright and how would that change your view of the ending, when Prospero gives up magic.
2. Research the trial of the Pendle witches in 1612. Do you think they were committing witchcraft? What fate did they face?